Richard as Waking Nightmare: Barthesian Dream, Myth, and Memory in Shakespeare's Richard III

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This article applies French semiologist Roland Barthes’s conceptions of sign, symbol, metaphor, and myth to Shakespeare’s Richard III. The focus centers on the playwright’s use of dreams and dream worlds in an exploration of visuality and in the larger project to create a national memory. Of special interest is how in one of the principal forms of mass media of the late 16th century—live drama—Shakespeare used dreams as image, and image as a prism through which to ask questions about power, vision, artifice, and illusion, and therefore reality. The playwright was self-conscious of the theater as artifice, but in that artifice he was capable of telling truths untellable beyond the theater walls in the “real world,” so much so that Shakespeare, beginning with Richard III, seems to revel in visuality. This analysis is a reading of the images in Richard III, an approach that places the project into a mostly French tradition of reading and analyzing visuality in texts.

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In analyzing William Shakespeare’s Richard III, this article explores Shakespeare’s rich visuality, and in particular his use of dreams, memory, and mirrors. Of special interest is how in one of the principal forms of mass media of the late 16th century—live drama—Shakespeare used dreams as image, and image as a prism through which to ask questions about power, vision, artifice, and illusion, and therefore reality. In this period before newspapers, when mass media included church bells, pamphlets, and little else (Stephens, 2007, p. 35), playgoers looked to the theaters to understand contemporary politics. This largely illiterate play-going public could see and hear from the playwrights in narrative form as they connected the Elizabethan present with both the past, including the distant past, and the future—in dramatic time and in real time.

In exploring the relationship between word and image, Shakespeare in Richard III plays with ideas of time, memory, and meaning, and he does this with a remarkable impulse toward the visual, in particular dreamscapes. The playwright was conscious of the theater as artifice, but in that artifice he is capable of telling truths untellable beyond the theater walls in the “real world,” so much so that, beginning with Richard III, Shakespeare seems to revel in visuality. This analysis, then, is a reading of the images in Richard III, an approach that places the project into a mostly French tradition of reading and analyzing visuality in texts. As such, it is also informed by research that interrogates the tenuous relationship between vision and understanding, the principal forms of mass media of the late 16th century—live drama—Shakespeare’s use of dreams as image, and image as a prism through which to ask questions about power, vision, artifice, and illusion, and therefore reality. The playwright was self-conscious of the theater as artifice, but in that artifice he was capable of telling truths untellable beyond the theater walls in the “real world,” so much so that Shakespeare, beginning with Richard III, seems to revel in visuality. This analysis is a reading of the images in Richard III, an approach that places the project into a mostly French tradition of reading and analyzing visuality in texts.

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As Blatt (2012, p. 4) observed, images of all kinds have fascinated the French for decades. Thus it is little wonder that in Marker’s (1962) cinematic reflection on the rhetoric of photography, La Jetée, the writer/director proposes “memory not as something we have, but as something we are.” In the film, an anonymous narrator remembers his future, or perhaps he does not, and in his remembering becomes himself, or the man who is remembered. Shakespeare similarly accomplishes a remembering of England’s future in his tragic history Richard III, a play in which audiences are asked to recall a period more than a century prior and in so doing to construct or imagine a nation with an ordained or “written” future toward which its past clearly points—a future that for the audience is the present. With Richard III, as with Henry V and many of the playwright’s chronic plays, Shakespeare participates willingly or not, consciously or not—in the larger project to make or imagine a nation.

If nationhood is, to use Stephen Kemper’s (1991) phrase, “a conversation that the present holds with the past” (p. 7), it is worth noting that several of Shakespeare’s voices in Richard III are ghosts or “shadows,” as the playwright often refers to them (e.g., 5.2.217), who appear largely in the service of memory or, more accurately, memory’s image, as vehicles of British memory, as voices of and for a collective British identity. In their symbolism and mythic “truth,” Shakespeare’s ghosts are innovative dramatic devices. Tim O’Brien (2009), in his vivid, disturbing account of the Vietnam war, wrote, “In a story, which is a kind of dreaming, the dead sometimes smile and sit up and return to the world” (p. 225). In Richard III, the dead return in force, sometimes smiling but usually not, and their roles as dramatic and narrative devices are of particular interest here, including the options they open up for the playwright in manipulating or otherwise playing with notions of historical, narrative, and dramatic time.

This article’s analysis applies French semiologist Roland Barthes’s conceptions of sign, symbol, metaphor, and myth. The fascination with dreams and dream worlds by Elizabethans, a more than passing interest reflected in the era’s drama, is well documented and extensively researched, and by or by many different disciplinary...
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Shakespeare deploys dreams and dreamworlds as theme and evokes visual representattion in the minds of playgoers to generate the story and motivate and even explain his characters. In doing this, he exploits the world of the visual for the play’s structure and as a structuring metaphor. He mobilizes images as prisms through which to view his characters and by which his characters perceive or make meaning. Richard III can be seen, then, as a text that is very explicitly engaged with the visual. By interrogating the tenuous relationship between vision and understanding, Shakespeare is suggesting that to see is not necessarily to know, and he’s doing it centuries before this sort of rhetorical exploration became prominent in analyses of French fiction and French film—centuries before even the endemic traffic of images that marked the latter half of the 20th century (Blatt, 2012, p. 5).

As Blatt (2012, p. 4) observed, images of all kinds have fascinated the French for decades. Thus it is little wonder that in Marker’s (1962) cinematic reflection on the rhetoric of photography, La Jetée, the writer/director proposes “memory not as something we have, but as something we are.” In this film, an anonymous narrator remembers his future, or perhaps he does not, and in his remembering becomes himself, or the man who is remembered. As Marker similarly accomplishes a remembering of England’s future in his tragic history Richard III, a play in which audiences are asked to recall a period more than a century prior and in so doing to construct or imagine a nation with an ordained or “written” future toward which its past clearly points—a future that for the audience is the present. With Richard III, as with Henry V and many of the playwright’s chronic plays, Shakespeare participates willingly or not, consciously or not—in the larger project to make or imagine a nation.

If nationhood is, to use Stephen Kemper’s (1991) phrase, “a conversation that the present holds with the past” (p. 7), it is worth noting that several of Shakespeare’s voices in Richard III are ghosts. Some, such as King Henry V’s ghost, serve to usher Britain into being, and they do so as vehicles of British memory, as voices of and for a collective British identity. In their symbolism and mythic “truth,” Shakespeare’s ghosts are innovative dramatic devices. Tim O’Brien (2009), in his vivid, disturbing account of the Vietnam war, wrote, “In a story, which is a kind of dreaming, the dead sometimes smile and sit up and return to the world” (p. 225). In Richard III, the dead return in force, sometimes smiling but usually not, and their roles as dramatic and narrative devices are of particular interest here, including the options they open up for the playwright in manipulating or otherwise playing with notions of historical, narrative, and dramatic time.

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drama as memory and their power as a medium for mythic truth are at the center of this project, which is not critical or “impertinent” in the way that Barthes interrogated myth. Raising the stakes, however, is recognition of the theater as an important, perhaps essential, mass medium. The first newspapers in Europe would not appear until 1609, in Germany; Elizabethans got their news from the playhouses, pamphlets, “news-ballads,” and infrequent “newbooks” (Stephens, 2007, p. xiv); only the playhouse accommodated the illiterate, or preliterate.8

In exploring Shakespeare’s use of metaphor, it is important not to underestimate the value and power of metaphor not only as a rhetorical device but as a way of seeing and relating to the world. As Lakoff and Johnson (1993, p. 25) argued, understanding experience in terms of objects allows people to pick out parts of their experience and treat them as “discrete entities or substances a uniform” and therefore translatable and referent kind. Once a person has thus made his or her experiences concrete in some way, they can be referred to, compared, classified, quantified, and reasoned about. Metaphors are not merely language, therefore, but ways of understanding. Once expressed, typically in language, metaphors begin to structure thoughts, attitudes, and even actions, a causality on bold display in Richard III.

The play largely is the “memory” most modern have of England’s vilest king, their primary and perhaps only apprehension of the historical figure. According to Antony Hammond, sources contemporary to Richard III give the impression that at the time Richard was regarded as a dangerously unscrupulous usurper, who had almost certainly had Prince Edward and his brother privately murdered after executing Rivers, Hastings and the others with only the poorest colour of legality; that he probably poisoned his wife [Anne], and that he had intended to marry his niece had public opinion and the advice of his closest counselors Catesby and Ratcliffe not dissuaded him. (Hammond, 1981, p. 72)

Though grounded in the historical accounts primarily in the late 16th century, Thomas More’s The History of King Richard III, Shakespeare’s play is a product of a mythic embellishment designed to nurture the Tudors’ own legitimacy and, as such, a rather intricate layering of signification.9 It is also important to note that for Elizabethans, the “history” or “chronicle” play, one based on a chronic account, fulfilled much of what they considered to be the “legitimate purposes” of history. The chronic play, says Ribner (2005, p. 25), “is, in fact, an imaginative recreation of a vanished past, a reconstruction of a historical event or period, an attempt to partially comprehend what ultimately cannot be fully understood. In the case of Richard III, in which the action unspools from a power-mad, corkscrew mind, Shakespeare’s use of metaphor helps audiences comprehend that mind’s evil and amorality, even if the causes remain a mystery.10 In fact, Richard might be meant to portray or serve as metaphor for a purely moral concept, such as justice. Richard has to pay, after all, just as Clarence and Edward did. The pursuit of a sort of immanent justice fuels the revenge drama and, because abstractions such as justice or evil cannot be completely grasped, the playwright and his audience must have imagination, a necessary capacity to create and appreciate metaphor and myth. Shakespeare furnishes one such imagination, which is not to say his imagining lacks rationality. Richard III is, in fact, an imaginative rationality, one that uses metaphor to rationalize the titles character’s actions. In so doing, Shakespeare draws on the histories of his day to ground Richard as a historical figure in observed experience but also to explain his marrying his niece and murdering his brother, actions that are, perhaps most importantly, dissuaded him. (Hammond, 1981, p. 72)

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For Marshall McLuhan, the medium is the message, or at least an intrinsic, inseparable part of the message. Like audiences, Lady Anne is repulsed by Richard, and her wooing of her in the presence of Anne's husband's bleeding, dead body confirms this repulsion as appropriate. His grotesqueness and perversity, signified by his physical deformity, make him a monster. In other words, audiences know just by seeing him what to expect from him as character, combatant, and king. Shown here, Sara J. Griffin as Lady Anne, and Elijah Alexander as Richard in the Utah Shakespeare Festival's 2011 production of Richard III. (Photograph by Karl Hugh. Copyright Utah Shakespeare Festival 2011.)

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perspectives. This article seeks to build on this scholarship by exploring Shakespeare’s use of dreams to shift time, to cast history, to prophesy, and to communicate memory in ways he develops further in subsequent plays such as Macbeth and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. In explaining his hunt for “the decorative display of what goes without saying,” the ideological abuse that is hidden in dreams, and the way in which Shakespeare uses dreams to shift time, to cast history, to prophesy, and to communicate memory, we can refer to, compared, classified, quantified, and reasoned about. Metaphors are not merely language, therefore, but ways of understanding. Once expressed, typically in language, metaphors begin to structure thoughts, attitudes, and even actions, a causality on bold display in Richard III. The play largely is the “memory” most modern have of England’s vile king, their primary and perhaps only apprehension of the historical figure. According to Antony Hammond, sources contemporary to Richard III give the impression that at the time Richard was regarded as a dangerously unscrupulous usurper, who had almost certainly had Prince Edward and his brother privately murdered after executing Rivers, Hastings and the others with only the poorest colour of legality; that he probably poisoned his wife [Anne], and that he had intended to marry his niece had public opinion and the advice of his closest councilors Catesby and Ratcliffe not dissuaded him. (Hammond, 1981, p. 72)

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Metaphor is perhaps most valuable when attempting to partially comprehend what ultimately cannot be fully understood. In the case of Richard III, in which the action unspools from a power-mad, corkscrew mind, Shakespeare’s use of metaphor helps audiences comprehend that mind’s evil and amorality, even if the causes remain a mystery. In fact, Richard might be meant to portray or serve as metaphor for a purely moral concept, such as justice. Richard has to pay, after all, just as Clarence and Edward did. The pursuit of a sort of imminent justice fuels the revenge drama and, because abstractions such as justice or evil cannot be completely grasped, the playwright and his audience must have imagination, a necessary capacity to create and appreciate metaphor and myth. Shakespeare furnishes one such imagination, which is not to say his imagining lacks rationality. Richard III is, in fact, an imaginative rationality, one that uses metaphor to rationalize the title character’s actions. In so doing, Shakespeare draws on the histories of his day to ground Richard as a historical figure in observed experience but also to explain, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, “combining the external and the internal to enable contemporary Elizabethans to begin to comprehend the tragic historical figure who was the duke of Gloucester.”

On another level, Richard is a symbol of acting, and the play a metaphor for life. In portraying, among other roles, a romantic lover, loyal brother, injured friend, loving uncle, and, perhaps most preposterously of all, pious Christian, Richard is the centerpiece of Shakespeare’s play metaphor for the world as stage, perhaps Shakespeare’s “most original and efficient use of the play metaphor up to that time,” according to Anne Righer (1962, p. 100). In this metaphor, Shakespeare through Richard demonstrates the power that illusion could exert on reality, a belief or recognition that redefined the relationship of the players with their audiences. In fact, Puritan critiques of the theater often centered on the confusion between art and life that these new assertions or insinuations generated, at least from the Puritan perspective, testifying to the real and perceived power of the image (Righer, 1962, p. 82).
The playwright's ideas for Richard are contained in purely linguistic expressions or that most basic ingredient of national identity—language. These ideas are communicated through the powerful medium of theater. As such, Shakespeare's play allowed those ideas as presented in a narrative to become the shared experience and, therefore, the "memory" of the play's audiences, much as cinema does today.13 Metaphor proves a powerful conduit for the ideas, underlined by the fact that even the description of how metaphor works itself relies on metaphor (objects as the containers of ideas; theater as the conduit for these containers).14 If we say metaphor "structures" thoughts and actions, we are using metaphor for the description of metaphor, a construct that borrows from the very concrete worlds of architecture and engineering. As an agent of structuring, then, metaphor can now be compared to other structuring agents and devices.

Richard's metaphorical utility is primarily in his physicality; thirty-two-year-old Richard's most legible signs are his physical deformities—a hunched back, a withered hand, and a hobbled gait—the basic signs or seeds within which his whole life is contained. This grab bag of deformities elicits from audiences a blend of repulsion and disgust. In being repugnant, Richard is the archetypal bastard on the model of Barthes's (1972) professional French wrestler, Thaouvin, a fifty-year-old grappler with "an obese and sagging body" (p. 17). Barthes described such grab bags of signification as collective signs that foreshadow and cast to or for an audience a "discontented" temperament, physical manifestations of an inner turmoil that motivates and in some ways explains that character's or person's behavior (p. 18). The content of Richard's character is signaled, in other words, and perhaps to some degree determined by his physical form—a seemingly natural causality, which is precisely how metaphor works. Richard acknowledges as much when describing himself in Act 1:

Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature, Deform'd, unfinished, sent before my time (1.1.19–24)

And that so lamely and unfinish'd That dogs bark at me, as I halt by them— (1.1.151–159)

Though Richard III marks a significant move by Shakespeare toward interiority, ironically Richard's physicality can be seen as a sort of emptying out of interiority or bringing to the surface and manifesting as outward sign the evil resident inside Richard, and as such predicting the evil he can and will do. As Barthes (1972) described it, such manifestations need "no anecdote, no transference, no elaboration in order to appear true" (p. 18). Once the audience sees Richard, the rest of the play reveals or points to this relationship between cause and represented effect, between his deformity and troubled birth and the killing spree that marks and fuels his bloodthirsty rise and rule. In movies and theatrical productions based on Shakespeare's play, Richard is depicted this way: an evil, scheming hunchback.

As if to encourage if not ratify the audience's reaction to and reading of Richard, Anne in her encounter with Richard is repulsed: the medium is the message. Her passionate condemnation of Richard's physical baseness and nature gone terribly wrong, are then justified by Richard's unconscionable wooing of her so soon after authoring her husband's murder and in the presence of his bleeding dead body. But Richard is even worse; he is like the street magician who shows all his cards before performing the trick, as in the seconds before his wooing of Anne when he addresses the audience:

God take King Edward to his mercy, And leave the world for me to bustle in. For then I'll marry Warwick's youngest daughter— (1.1.151–159)

God is a kind of Justice which is at least intelligible” (p. 25).15

In Barthes's typology, Richard is an empty signifier, and for a play this is significant. Because he is an empty signifier, the audience fills in the form of the myth of the character, without nuance or ambiguity, coauthoring with the playwright the history the play ascribes (Barthes, 1992, p. 128). In this transaction with the playwright, the signification (Richard's physical deformity) becomes literal. His deformity becomes an example of repugnance and of being somehow lesser, not just a sign of these attributes. A full signifier, by contrast, would be one in which the audience could distinguish the meaning and the form and, consequently, the distinction that the one imposes on the other. The audience could then dismantle the signification and interpret the representation as imitation.

As an example, Clarence's dream of drowning is a full signifier, and in at least two ways. In addition to signifying Clarence's doom and the betrayal that will damn him, the scene is a metaphor for dreams and dream work. By holding up a mirror to nature, intruding in or on
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God take King Edward to his mercy, And leave the world for me to bustle in. For then I’ll marry Warwick’s youngest daughter— Who though I kill’d her husband and her father? The readiest way to make the wench amends Is to conciliate her husband, and her father: The which will I, not all so much for love As for another secret close intent, By marrying her which I must reach unto. (1.1.151–159)

Richard’s grotesqueness and perversity make him a monster, but, as Stephen Greenblatt (2001, p. 167) observed, one with an allure nonetheless, a charm that is “almost pornographic” in its conjoining of eros and disgust: “He is a kind of waking nightmare.” That we know even from Richard’s physical appearance what to expect from him as character, combatant, and King—his treacheries and cruelties—is to mark Shakespeare’s metaphor as effective and efficient. It is perhaps even true that the audience gets some pleasure in seeing Richard, in Barthes’s (1972, p. 18) terms, as a smoothly and predictably functioning “moral mechanism,” like the villain in professional wrestling. Richard’s calm (at least in the eve of the battle at Bosworth), his direct address to the audience (the only character in the play to do this), and his apparent control over even people’s dreams (or illusions) seem to communicate “Trust me” and “Run for your life” at the same time.

While self-possessed and in control for most of the play, Richard, like Barthes’s prototypical wrestling bastard, also seems at some level unstable. He accepts the rules only when they are useful to him. He takes refuge in the law when he considers it in his favor, and he breaks or otherwise ignores the law when it serves his interests. Sometimes he rejects the formal boundaries of law and custom; sometimes he reestimates them to claim their protection. And like the professional wrestler, Richard is scripted to know how to direct the spontaneous episodes of life, beginning with his ignoble birth, to make them conform to his wishes in the production of an image of treachery and cruelty that, from the first moments of the play, the audience expects Richard offends, irritates, disgusts, and repels, but he does not disappoint. Richard’s signs—and he himself as sign—correspond to causes. Even in the depths of his own depravity and ignominy he remains, in Barthes’s (1992) terms, “a pure gesture that separates God from Evil, and unveils the form of a Justice which is at least intelligible” (p. 25). In Barthes’s typology, Richard is an empty signifier, and for a play this is significant. Because he is an empty signifier, the audience fills in the form of the myth of the character, without nuance or ambiguity, coauthoring with the playwright the history the play ascribes (Barthes, 1992, p. 128). In this transaction with the playwright, the signification (Richard’s physical deformity) becomes literal. His deformity becomes an example of repugnance and of being somehow lesser, not just a sign of these attributes. A full signifier, by contrast, would be one in which the audience could distinguish the meaning and the form and, consequently, the distinction that the one imposes on the other. The audience could then dismantle the signification and interpret the representation as imitation.

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the illusory real to deliver truth, the dream signifies the role of the play in Elizabethan life or the reality of the play world. As a point of comparison, if Shakespeare used Richard’s blood as a signifier, it would become the "alibi of baseness, not merely or even primarily its manifestation. What Shakespeare renders instead is an inextricable whole made of meaning and form, which is a different sort of myth altogether. In fusing the two, Richard becomes the very presence of baseness, which makes him a consuming character rather than merely a signifier. Richard seems to be consuming the myth by making its purpose obvious or by revealing it, Richard consumes the myth according to the purpose of the metaphorical structure, which, as many scholars have argued, is an attempt at some level but also "remember" English history in such a way that the Tudor reign seems obvious, even ordained by God. In this fusion, in the celebration of Henry VIII and the beginning of the Tudor dynasty, Richard is a true sign, at least for Saussure, whose position it was that a sign exists in or by the union of a signifier and that which is signified, a sort of "sided, Janus-like entity" (Barthes, 1992, p. 39).

Perhaps no signifier is so variably used in rite, ritual, and drama as blood. Deployed at different times as empty signifier, full signifier, and "metaphorical system," blood and its ritual substitute—red wine—are unparalleled in their associations with power, guilt, and blood's common substitute, red wine, to consuming love in the vampire myths that have been so abundant in American pop culture since the mid-2000s. There could be a connotation of communion or transformation, or galvanization. The wine will be transformed into the life of the party; the weak can become strong; wine is a converting substance, believed at least in its red form to have dense and vital fluid (blood). Richard tells Ratclife: "I, that I was bid to death with false wine, Poor Clarence, by thy guile betray'd to death— Tomorrow in the battle think on me, And fall thy deadly sword; despair and die" (5.3.133–136)

Some deciphering or interpretation, the playwright is collaborating with his audiences, who learn in their deciphering to know a character or a mood or atmosphere. To woo Anne is natural, even possible for Richard in proximity to her bleeding, dead husband's body so soon after commanding his death is to index moral depravity, callousness of heart, and deficiency of character. It cannot end well for Anne. As a symbolic notation, therefore, it is not merely or purely functional but indicative of something else. When Elizabeth tells Richard that Margaret gave him a merely a signifier, blood, the giving is more than symbolic, indexing as it does the power of Margaret to curse (4.4.271–278).

In collaborating with the playwright, the audience reads and experiences Shakespeare's myth as a story that is at once unreal and yet true or, more important, natural, which is how myth works: the transformation of story into nature. For Barthes, it is this "drawing up" of reality with "naturalness" that is defined by history (1972, p. 11). Richard seems to be aware of himself, or Shakespeare's Richard III, as a "two-sided, Janus-like entity" (Barthes, 1992, p. 57) noted with "an agent shaping events and as the shaper of historical narrative." Richard (and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shape the future, indistinguishable from the ability to shape the events of history. Richard's and therefore perhaps Shakespeare's intentions do not have to be factually true to be meaningful. The events of history, when heard in a theater, this speech becomes a ritualized, shared experience—the stuff of memory. The intentions, therefore, are natural, or at least appear that way, fueling the mythic "truth" of what was said. It is important to note that to describe or label something as myth is not to say it is untrue or fictive. Myth resists such binaries, as do history and its close cousin legend; there is a fine and important distinction between history and myth. Myth resists such binaries, as do history and its close cousin legend; there is a fine and important distinction between history and myth. The accepted truth of the factual and doxa quickly became the doxa, the accepted truth (Colley, 1999, p. 78). As citation, Richard, the "bloody dog" (Colley, 1999, p. 168). As citation, Richard, the "bloody dog," "bottld's spider," "rooting hog," and "son of Hell," to mention just a few of his appellations in the play, signifies the traditional dramatic figure of the horrifying, unlovable character, the character those audiences “most wanted to see” (Brooke, 1965, p. 130). Robert Weismann (1996, pp. 74–75) describes the Vice character figure as a纺织理论的现实性和实际应用。
the illusory real to deliver truth, the dream signifies the role of the play in Elizabethan life or the reality of the play world. As a point of comparison, if Shakespeare used Richard's blood as a signifier, it would become the alibi of baseness, not merely or even primarily its manifestation. What Shakespeare renders instead is an inextricable whole made of meaning and form, which is a different sort of myth altogether. In fusing the two, Richard becomes the very presence of baseness, which makes him a consuming character rather than merely a vehicle for destroying the myth by making its purpose obvious or by revealing it. Richard consumes the myth according to the purpose of the metaphorical structure, which, as many scholars have argued, is at some level before or beyond the "remember" English history in such a way that the Tudor reign seems obvious, even ordained by God. In this fusion, in the celebration of Henry VII and the beginning of the Tudor dynasty, Richard is a true sign, at least for Saussure, whose position it was that a sign exists in or by the union of a signifier and that which is signified, a sort of "sign-said, Janus-like entity" (Barthes, 1992, p. 39).

Perhaps no signifier is so variably used in rite, and death. Depicted at different times as empty signifier, full signifier, and "metaphorical system," blood and its ritual substitute—red wine—are unparalleled in their political, social, and cultural power in linking the ghosts or shadows of the dead with the living through rite and ritual, primarily those associated with the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, audiences of Richard III and the houses of York and Lancaster to Richmond, and from Richmond to Elizabeth, and the king's communion with the dead, albeit one that was wash'd to death with fulsome wine, I, that was wont to have. (5.3.73–75)

The king's communion with the dead, albeit one he would rather avoid, is perhaps incited by the wine which, politically quite the contrary, could be found in his dreams with his brother Clarence, whom he has murdered, and with the many other royals who died by his manipulations. Clarence's ghost reminds Richard that his death came by drowning in a cask of red wine, or butt of malmsey:

Richard tells Ratcliff:

So, I am satisfied. Give me a bowl of wine. I have not that alacrity of spirit Nor cheer of mind that I was wont to have. (5.3.133–136)

Shakespeare also uses blood, in Barthes's terms, as an indiscernible signifier. By connotation, such a signifier can evoke or refer to a feeling, atmosphere, or philosophy, as when Henry's bleeding corpse is juxtaposed with Richard's wooing of Henry's widow. His blood isles violent, recent death and present decay, a deduction that in turn forms "an index of atmosphere with reference to the heavy, anguish-laden climate of an action as yet unknown. (Barthes, 1977, p. 96). Because indices require some deciphering or interpretation, the playwright is collaborating with his audiences, who learn in their deciphering to know a character or a mood or atmosphere. To woo Anne is natural, even politically persuasive power. To labour in proximity to her bleeding, dead husband's body so soon after commanding his death is to index moral depravity, callousness of heart, and deficiency of character. It cannot end well for Anne. As symbolic notation, therefore, it is not merely or purely functional but indiscernible of something else. When Elizabeth tells Richard that Margaret gave his mother a handkerchief steeped in blood, the giving is more symbolic, indexing as it does the power of Margaret to curse (4.4.271–288).

In collaborating with the playwright, the audience reads and experiences Shakespeare's myth as a story that is at once unreal and yet true or, more important, natural, which is how myth works: the transformation of story into nature. For Barthes, it is this "dressing up" of reality with "naturalness" that is determined by history (1972, p. 11). Richard seems to be aware of himself, as Shakespeare (2003, pp. 37–57) noted, and with "an agent shaping events and as the shaper of historical narrative." Richard (and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shroud the future, for generations to come, indistinguishable from the ability to shape the events of history. Richard's and therefore perhaps Shakespeare's intentions do not have to be true can be factually untrue, as Tim O'Brien's (1999, p. 71) noted, and with "a collective memory of and historical narrative." (Richard and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shroud the future, for generations to come, indistinguishable from the ability to shape the events of history. Richard's and therefore perhaps Shakespeare's intentions do not have to be true can be factually untrue, as Tim O'Brien's (1999, p. 71) noted, and with "an agent shaping events and as the shaper of historical narrative." Richard (and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shroud the future, for generations to come, indistinguishable from the ability to shape the events of history. Richard's and therefore perhaps Shakespeare's intentions do not have to be true can be factually untrue, as Tim O'Brien's (1999, p. 71) noted, and with "an agent shaping events and as the shaper of historical narrative." Richard (and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shroud the future, for generations to come, indistinguishable from the ability to shape the events of history. Richard's and therefore perhaps Shakespeare's intentions do not have to be true can be factually untrue, as Tim O'Brien's (1999, p. 71) noted, and with "an agent shaping events and as the shaper of historical narrative." Richard (and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shroud the future, for generations to come, indistinguishable from the ability to shape the events of history. Richard's and therefore perhaps Shakespeare's intentions do not have to be true can be factually untrue, as Tim O'Brien's (1999, p. 71) noted, and with "an agent shaping events and as the shaper of historical narrative." Richard (and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shroud the future, for generations to come, indistinguishable from the ability to shape the events of history. Richard's and therefore perhaps Shakespeare's intentions do not have to be true can be factually untrue, as Tim O'Brien's (1999, p. 71) noted, and with "an agent shaping events and as the shaper of historical narrative." Richard (and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shroud the future, for generations to come, indistinguishable from the ability to shape the events of history. Richard's and therefore perhaps Shakespeare's intentions do not have to be true can be factually untrue, as Tim O'Brien's (1999, p. 71) noted, and with "an agent shaping events and as the shaper of historical narrative." Richard (and therefore Shakespeare) seems to understand that the ability to shroud the future, for generations to come, indistinct.
highly transgressive master of ceremonies, an agent of theatricality, easily crossing the boundary between plot and compot, emplotment and manipulation. . . .

Constantly drawing and crossing the line between representation and showmanship, this entertainer must have stood for the arts of performance as a great game, a mixture (even in the symbolism of his role) of appropriation and dispossession, of evil greed and good fellowship turning sour.

This description fits Richard, who refers to himself as such in an aside in the third act: “Thus like the formal Vice, Iniquity, I moralize two meanings in one word” (3.1.82–83). In the play’s last act, when the ghosts at Bosworth Field oppose Richard, the play’s otherwise economical staging calls for two tents, one for Richard and one for Richmond. This highly formalized and geometric symbolism is also borrowed from the morality plays so familiar to audiences of the day (Brooke, 1965, p. 131), and it presages in that same symbolism the Vice archetypes deemed necessary in any contemporary reality television show (Brown, 2005, p. 72).

Richard is Vice; he is also Machiavel. Shakespeare had already conceived of him in the sense for the Henry VI trilogy. In fact, Richard’s opening soliloquy in Richard III is not a revelation of character as much as it is a continuation of his development as presented in that trilogy, and in particular 3 Henry VI. The soliloquy picks up where Shakespeare leaves off in 3 Henry VI, at least in terms of Richard’s character, as these excerpts from the third act of 3 Henry VI show:

Why, love forewore me in my mother’s womb, And, for I should not deal in her soft laws, She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub, To make an envious mountain on my back— Where sits deformity to mock my body— To shape my legs of an unequal size, To disproportion me in every part. . . . Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile, And cry “Content!” to that which grieves my heart, And wet my cheeks with artificial tears, And frame my face to all occasions. . . . I can add colours to the chameleon, Change shapes with Proteus for advantages, And set the murderous Machiavel to school.

The linkage of Richard III to 3 Henry VI occurs in what Barthes called narrative time, a completely symbolic system. For the play’s Elizabethan audiences, Richard’s future is the present; his past is the long ago; his present yet more than a century past. Narrative time, then, is but a referential illusion created in language and, as French philosopher Paul Valery conceived of it, a notion of time as being endowed with agency, even a will.20 Dreams and the ghosts that inhabit them rely on the fluid nature of narrative time to serve any number of dramatic functions. The ghosts of the past can haunt the present, predict the future, and, as in Richard III’s last scene, simultaneously appear in the dreams of two different characters. The audience equivalently observes the two dreamers, who are unaware of each other, but the simultaneity is of course contrived. Audiences can only experience the otherwise simultaneous dreams sequentially, one after the other, in clocked, calendrical, linear time. The simultaneity appears or is experienced as being natural.

As imaginative creations, the play’s dreams furnish a rich interiority by showing the audience the subjective reality of the dreamers even as they are convenient devices for structuring the drama. The characters’ lengthy soliloquies and the play’s simultaneous appearances in the dreams and ghosts of the past can haunt the present, predict the future, and, as in 3 Henry VI, also foretell of doom, of course, as does Clarence’s own dream of drowning—the longest narrated dream in any Shakespeare play, a dream that is equal parts memory and prophecy. The truths of the otherwise imagined or fictive dreams, in other words, are truer than the observed or objective actions on the stage, than the objective “truth” of the play, while the play as a whole shows the conflict between what elements of illusion can insinuate themselves into life and be mistaken for reality. In allowing the audience to “see” the characters’ thoughts, playwrights get to apprehend the mythic truth, or the truth beyond the action. As the scrivener says in Act 3:

Yet who’s so bold but says he sees it not? Bad is the world, and all will come to naught

When such ill-dealing must be seen in thought. (3.6.12–14)

In its poetic power and echoes of mythology, the dream generates sympathy for Clarence, just as Richard warned his murderers Clarence by his words could do; the same dream also indict Clarence for contributing to the very political calculus of which he is about to become a victim. As Kathleen McLucie (1999, p. 165) noted, the dream’s narrative coherence and poetic eloquence have more of the constructed inconsequence or seeming randomness of “real” dreams.

However poetic Clarence’s dream might be, it is not merely a decorative touch, as a Barthesian reading shows. Though Clarence’s imagined fantasy, the dream contains the seeds of reality, a telescope into his psychology. Through metaphor, in eerily foreshadowing his death, the dream raises questions for the audience and, presumably
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As imaginative creations, the play’s dreams furnish a rich interiority by showing the audience the subjective reality of the dreamers even as they are convenient devices for structuring the drama. The characters’ lengthy soliloquies and the play’s many shadows also create and communicate this subjective reality. The play’s ghosts (and ghost-like characters, such as Queen Margaret) signify and even personify the past, recalling and reviewing history necessary to an audience straining to apprehend the mythic truth, or the truth beyond the objective “truth” of the otherwise imagined or fictive dreams, in other words, are truer than the observed or objective actions on the stage, than the objective “truth” of the play, while the play as a whole serves to personify the past, to employ the appurtenances of illusion can insinuate themselves into life and be mistaken for reality. In allowing the audience to “see” the characters’ thoughts, playwrights get to apprehend the mythic truth, or the truth beyond the act. As the speaker says in Act 3:

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She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe
To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub,
To make an envious mountain on my back—
Where sits deformity to mock my body—
To shape my legs of an unequal size,
To disproportionate me in every part . . .

To make a body of my malice fit
And frame my face to all occasions.

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I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.

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To change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And frame my face to all occasions . . .
for his jailer, Brakenbury. Is the death just? In providing an interpretive mirror of what is to come, a looking back in order to look forward, Shakespeare connects Clarence’s fate with his deeds as presented in 3 Henry VI and so justifies the impending execution by drowning. In the dream, Richard accidentally pushes his brother into the ocean during a sea crossing to Burgundy, and in stumbling on the decks tries to “stay himself.” In the drama’s action, Richard does in fact have Clarence killed, his motive is self-preservation, and his method is the seeming or apparent result of chance, through a delay in the delivery of Clarence’s reprieve. And Clarence is drowned in a butt of malmsey.

The dream’s fluidity of time introduces “two different ways of understanding time,” according to Jerry Lopez (2005, p. 303): stage time and historical time, and it blurs the two. As Purgatory-like dream, with agency in the present, these spectral shadows allow Shakespeare to slide the action backward and forward and, as we see in the play’s final scene, as Richard and Richmond simultaneously hear from the dead, sideways as well. As Garber (1974) puts it, and this truth asserts itself on Stanley’s passive consciousness when the dream is reported by messenger to Hastings. Lord Stanley’s soul divines” (3.2.11, 18). He “razed [Stanley’s] helm,” an imminent “danger into the ocean during a sea crossing to Burgundy, and so justifies his death just? In providing an interpretive mirror of what is to come, a looking back in order to look forward, Shakespeare connects Clarence’s fate with his deeds as presented in 3 Henry VI and so justifies the impending execution by drowning. In the dream, Richard accidentally pushes his brother into the ocean during a sea crossing to Burgundy, and in stumbling on the decks tries to “stay himself.” In the drama’s action, Richard does in fact have Clarence killed, his motive is self-preservation, and his method is the seeming or apparent result of chance, through a delay in the delivery of Clarence’s reprieve. And Clarence is drowned in a butt of malmsey.

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movements that taunt and torment those who have wronged his soul.

Shakespeare’s dreams operate as and contain signifiers on many different levels, each carrying the heavy freight of mythic truth. The content of the dream, for example, reveals character, as Clarence’s and Richard’s terror-filled nightscapes attest; these are disturbed and conflicted men. The responses to the dreams, too, signify character and state of mind. In crying out, “Give me another horse; bind up my wounds. Have mercy, Jesu!” (5.3.177–178), a terrified Richard exhibits suspicion and self-loathing because the “shadows” of the night before “struck more terror to the soul of Richard than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers” (5.3.217–218). The audience is seeing Richard being undone. The terrifying world of dream, of which Richard previously had been creator and puppet master “overwhelms him,” as Garber (1974, p. 19) put it, and at the critical moment.

This terror is the active ingredient of a metaphor Shakespeare creatively used in several plays, a metaphor that centers on the visits of apparitional figures during times of sleep, in the cloak of night, to signify the condition of the dreamer’s soul. Examples are prominent in 2 Henry VI, Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Hamlet. As part of this structure, Richard’s Bosworth dream is used by Shakespeare to personify ideas and therefore give them voice. Seeming to fulfill Margaret’s curse as “the worm of conscience,” as the “ugly devils” of hell, these vivid and active characters, without nuance or ambiguity, becomes literal. His deformity becomes an example of repugnance and of being somehow lesser, not just a sign of these attributes. Shown here, Elijah Alexander as Richard in the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2011 production of Richard III. (Photograph by Karl Hugh. © Utah Shakespeare Festival 2011.)
for his jailer, Brakenbury. Is the death just? In providing an interpretive mirror of what is to come, a looking back in order to look forward, Shakespeare connects Clarence’s fate with his deeds as presented in 3 Henry VI and so justifies the impending execution by drowning. In the dream, Richard accidentally pushes his brother into the ocean during a sea crossing to Burgundy, and in stumbling on the decks tries to “stay himself.” In the drama’s action, Richard does in fact have Clarence killed, his motive is self-preservation, and his method is the seeming or apparent result of chance, through a delay in the delivery of Clarence’s reprieve. And Clarence is drowned in a butt of malmsey.

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The significator in Lord Stanley’s dream is much simpler than that in Clarence’s, at least as the dream is reported by messenger to Hastings. Lord Stanley sees in his dream “the bear” that has “razed [Stanley’s] helm,” an imminent “danger of [Stanley’s] soul divines” (3.2.11, 18). He receives through his dream the oracular truth that Stanley will rise or otherwise lose the perception of the way. The rational Hastings brushes the omen off, viewing Stanley’s fears as “shallow, without instance,” even foolish (a “mock’ry”) (3.2.25–27). As is so often the case, causes of a valid dream could occur because the imagination becomes relatively balanced in bodily humors (blood, phlegm, choleric, and melancholy) could be caused either by a person’s “humours” or by the supernatural. An unbalance in bodily humors (blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy) could cause vain dreams, which were not regarded as true or prophetic. These vain dreams could be caused by too much drink or food, poor digestion, emotional trauma or duress, or by evil spirit or fairies stirring up the memory’s stores. The divine dream, on the other hand, could offer valuable perspectives on waking life. Such a “true” or valid dream could occur because the imagination at rest is not troubled by sensory data or by the hundreds of decisions necessary to get through the day. As Thomas Hill (1576), whose The Moste Pleasante Arte of the Intepretacion of Dreames was in Shakespeare’s day the authoritative text on dream interpretation, wrote: “A man also then more comprehend in his dream then wakinge in the daye tyme, because in a dreame [is] more resolued that in the daye which . . . is troubled with the doings of the outwarde senses.”

The trick or riddle, of course, is in determining which images are from God and which come from the supernatural. Examples are prominent in Shakespeare’s dreams operate as and contain signifiers on many different levels, each carrying the heavy freight of mythic truth. The content of the dream, for example, reveals character, as Clarence’s and Richard’s terror-filled nightscapes attest; these are disturbed and conflicted men. The responses to the dreams, too, signify metaphor of dream for reality, then, can be seen as a tribute to or celebration of imaginative invention and, as such an invention, of the play world Shakespeare created. Stanley’s dreamed “reality,” in the context of the metaphorical play world, would have reminded the audience that elements of illusion populate ordinary life and that a complicated interplay of resemblance makes the stage a sometimes profound, often valid carrier of meaning.

Of course Hastings’s rejection would make perfect sense to an Elizabethan audience for whom dreams were regarded as “natural, diabolical, or divine” in origin (Mandel, 1973, p. 61). Dreams could originate either within or outside consciousness, in other words, and could be caused either by a person’s “humours” or by the supernatural. An unbalance in bodily humors (blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy) could cause vain dreams, which were not regarded as true or prophetic. These vain dreams could be caused by too much drink or food, poor digestion, emotional trauma or duress, or by evil spirit or fairies stirring up the memory’s stores. The divine dream, on the other hand, could offer valuable perspectives on waking life. Such a “true” or valid dream could occur because the imagination at rest is not troubled by sensory data or by the hundreds of decisions necessary to get through the day. As Thomas Hill (1576), whose The Moste Pleasante Arte of the Interpretation of Dreams was in Shakespeare’s day the authoritative text on dream interpretation, wrote: “A man also then more comprehend in his dream then wakinge in the daye tyme, because in a dreame [is] more resolued that in the daye which . . . is troubled through the doings of the outwarde senses.”

As an empty significer, Shakespeare’s Richard III invites theater audiences to fill in the form of the myth of the character, without nuance or ambiguity, creating a visual signification that is or becomes literal. His deformity becomes an example of repugnance and of being somehow lesser, not just a sign of these attributes. Shown here, Elijah Alexander as Richard in the Utah Shakespeare Festival’s 2011 production of Richard III. (Photograph by Karl Hugh. © Utah Shakespeare Festival 2011.)

character and state of mind. In crying out, “Give me another horse; bind up my wounds. Have mercy, Jesu!” (5.3.177–178), a terrified Richard exhibits suspicion and self-loathing because the “shadows” of the night before “struck more terror to the soul of Richard than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers” (5.3.217–218). The audience is seeing Richard being undone. “The terrifying world of dream,” of which Richard previously had been creator and puppet master “overwhelms him,” as Garber (1974, p. 19) put it, and at the critical moment.

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Richard’s sins are of course plenteous, justifying the procession of victims that taunt and torment
him. For a rationalist such as Richard, these shadows turn his world upside down or, more appropriately for this discussion, inside out. For a person’s “world” to do either, of course, is to metaphorically reject or distrust his reality. After the voices of his dream world leave, Richard laments:

O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me! . . .

Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh. . . .

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues (5.3.180, 182, 194)

His conscience has been objectified and personified—given voice. In seeing Richard question and debate with himself, the audience sees him being undone, the Vice figure and Machiavel shrunk back down to human proportions by fear:

O no, alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain—yet I lie, I am not!
Fool, of thyself speak well! Fool, do not flatter (5.3.190–193).

In fearing the shadows of the night more than the might of “ten thousand soldiers,” he fears the person of his conscience more than the shadow of his dream world, more than the very substantial martial threat of Richmond’s armies. This is mythic truth, because the audience can agree with Shakespeare’s Richard that he should be “enraptured” by his own sins and their apportional residues than by sword, arrow, or poleax (the weapon witnesses said killed the king), for it is his soul that is at stake, not simply his “deformed, unfiendish’d” body (1.1.20). Of course, Richard does rally: “Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls,” he tells his soldiers before the battle. “Conscience is the guiding star of flesh. . . .” The conscience Richard devises at first to keep the strong in awe (5.6.38–40).

Is this rational Richard encouraging his dreams, or what Greenblatt (1974, p. 21) pointed out: “O the heath in Macbeth, where ‘the ghostly figures will become part of the king’s private and terrible mythology of symbols.’ The playwright did much more than draw on contemporary dream theory; in innovating how dreams, dream states, and dream worlds can be used in drama, Shakespeare made important points about the relationship between theater and the imagination, and about both in relationship to ‘reality’ or truth.”

Shakespeare seems to reject the metaphor of concretized, measured, diced-up time because, after all, he can (and does) freeze time, creating a pivot on which the action and the characters’ actions can turn, like the dream before the battle at Bosworth. And he can annihilate time in order to suspending the “heavenly bodies” and ramp up the space for his dramatic purposes. This disavowal or suspension of “big hand, little hand” time explains how Hamlet can be 19 and 30 years old at the same “time,” and how Richard is haunted by his own sins and their apportional residues more than by sword, arrow, or poleax (the weapon witnesses said killed the king), for it is his soul that is at stake, not simply his “deformed, unfiendish’d” body (1.1.20). Of course, Richard does rally: “Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls,” he tells his soldiers before the battle. “Conscience is the guiding star of flesh. . . .” How, according to Shakespeare, is Richard’s dreams world, in other words, and to great effect. Only once more will the playwright use such a formal array of apparitions, as Garber (1974, p. 21) pointed out: “O the heath in Macbeth, where ‘the ghostly figures will become part of the king’s private and terrible mythology of symbols.’ The playwright did much more than draw on contemporary dream theory; in innovating how dreams, dream states, and dream worlds can be used in drama, Shakespeare made important points about the relationship between theater and the imagination, and about both in relationship to ‘reality’ or truth.”

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In his concluding speech, as Emrys Jones (1977, p. 232) suggested: “Shakespeare’s Richard, like Marker’s Marker character realizes that if it is not in fact his own past he is remembering, subject as he is to torture and experimentation at the time, he cannot know who he is, as is evident that anxieties novel Richard Ludum’s Bourne books and associated films (The Bourne Identity, The Bourne Supremacy, The Bourne Ultimatum).”

In using the word imagine, the work owes a debt to Anderson (1991), recognizing of course that Anderson argued for a beginning of nationalism or nationhood in the mid-18th century, or more than a century and a half later than the past serves the audience’s present as they experience it in the theater. And in appearing natural, this past serves to predict, explain, and even ordain the future—a future of conquest and empire. As the theater goes dark, Richard disappears into the murky murk of mystery. The Elizabethan audience emerges into the sunlit present, for though Queen Elizabeth was not mentioned in Richard III’s concluding speech, as Emrys Jones (1977, p. 232) suggested: “Shakespeare’s Richard, like Marker’s marker character realizes that if it is not in fact his own past he is remembering, subject as he is to torture and experimentation at the time, he cannot know who he is, as is evident that anxieties novel Richard Ludum’s Bourne books and associated films (The Bourne Identity, The Bourne Supremacy, The Bourne Ultimatum).”

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him. For a rationalist such as Richard, these shadows turn his world upside down or, more appropriately for this discussion, inside out. For a person’s “world” to do either, of course, is to metaphorically objectify that person’s reality. After the voices of his dream world leave, Richard laments:

O coward conscience, how dost thou affright me! . . . Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh. . . . My conscience hath a thousand several tongues (5.3.180, 182, 194).

His conscience has been objectified and personified—given voice. In seeing Richard debate with conscience, one seems him being undone, the Vice figure and Machiavel shrunk back down to human proportions by fear:

O no, alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain—yet I lie, I am not!
Fool, of myself speak well! Fool, do not flatter (5.1.190–193).

In fearing the shadows of the night more than the might of “ten thousand soldiers,” he fears the stage and the stage and the stage and, off his dream world, more than the very substantial martial threat of Richard’s armies. This is mythic truth, because the audience can agree with Richard and can own how he “is affrighted” by his own sins and their apportional residues than by sword, arrow, or poleax (the weapon witnesses said killed the king), for it is his soul that is at stake, not simply his “deformed, unfinished” body (1.1.20). Of course, Richard does rally: “Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls,” he tells his soldiers before the battle. “Conscience, that ever cowards and that use the “vasty fields of France” in the Globe’s small cockpit, to use their “imaginary forces” to create within the wooden O’s walls “two mighty monstrosities,” to create the horses and the dirt that their “proar’hoods” are churning, and to carry them here and there, jumping o’er times, turning accomplishment of many years into an hour-glass. . . . (Prologue, 13–34)”

The request invites the audience to collaborate with the playwright, a compelling metaphor for the imagination that recognizes the audience is viewing the action simultaneously on various levels of time: real, linear time; fluid, manipulable time; and even the narrative time of the play, to imagine a nation centered on England or on the larger geography, history, and destiny. Schwyzer evidences in Shakespeare’s history plays, the Reformation, and the defeat of the Spanish Armada with the “summing up” of Englishness (p. 4). See also Brian Carroll (2010).

For much more on the exclusion of ghosts from traditional social life after the 1547 outlawed Purgatory and its related rites and rituals, see Schwyzer (2004). The “old ghosts” of Catholic England were banished by order of Parliament, which abolished a wide range of practices “designed to alleviate the sufferings of the dead in Purgatory,” practices that returned, as Schwyzer evidenced, in Tudor literature. Where the project to build and imagine a nation centered on England or on the larger British conception is, of course, the subject of much debate, Schuyver and David Baker argue for Britishness; Richard Helgerson, Andrew Hadfield, Claire McEchern, Willy Malby, among others, have argued instead for the invention or construction of England, though of course it is a bit more complicated than this strict categorization. See Baker (1997); Helgerson (1992); Hadfield (1994); McEchern (1996); and Malby (2003).

1 For analysis, see Blatt (2012), for example. Examples of visibility in French literature, or a pictorial way of seeing in a work of prose, are too abundant to list here, but heading the list would be works by authors such as Marcel Proust, Victor Segalen, Louis Aragon, Julien Gracq, Jean-Paul-Sartre, Victor Hugo, and Emile Zola.

2 Those typically associated with elaborating the cinematic text would include Christian Metz, Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, Raymond Bellour, Michel Marie, and Thierry Kuntzel.

3 Marker’s character realizes that if it is not in fact his own past he is remembering, subject as he is to torture and experimentation at the time, he cannot know who he is, as ideally the narrative jingle Robert Ludum’s Bourne books and associated films (The Bourne Identity, The Bourne Supremacy, The Bourne Ultimatum).

4 In using the word “imagination,” the word owes a debt to Anderson (1991), recognizing of course that Anderson argued for a beginning of nationalistic or nationhood in the mid-18th century, or more than a century and a half later than what is here meant.31

5 Choosing the terms “writing a future” are works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae (c. 1136), in which the Tudor reign is cast as the restoration of rightful and prophesied British rule, a “written” destiny Shakespeare echoes and, therefore, helps to bring about.

6 The Tudor era has long been associated with the “discovery of England,” as Philip Schwyzer (2004, p. 3) puts it, or with the process by which the English people “became proudly conscious of their national language, geography, history, and their special character.” The Shakespeare’s history plays, the Reformation, and the defeat of the Spanish Armada with the “summing up” of Englishness (p. 4). See also Brian Carroll (2010).

Notes
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9 In telling the “history” of Scottish warrior-king Macbeth, even Walter Scott fell into the historical untruths unknowingly seen by Shakespeare. Scott’s Tale of a Grumbler repeats the plot of Shakespeare’s play, repeating the English myth that Macbeth’s demise helped usher the “civilizing” of Scotland by the Normans. Later, in his History of Scotland, in which he partially corrects the record, Scott wrote that “the general reader will only recollect Macbeth as a sacrilegious usurper, and Richard as a deformed murderer” (in Magnussen, 2000, pp. 58–59).

10 Hammond cites Thomas More as Shakespeare’s likely principal source, both for the facts of Richard’s life and “a tone of bitter reproach for the English,” as quoted by Thomas More (p. 75). For More’s history of Richard, see Sylvester (1963).

11 As Scott Colley (1999, p. 80) put it, “Shakespeare’s Richard is resolutely silent at moments when we most would like him to explain himself.”

12 Shakespeare certainly uses language to identify and perhaps to nationalize, and he could do so because English was the authorized, reified language. Language is an important tool in the construction of nationhood, as Anderson (1991) conceived of it: “Language is to the patriot as the eye is to the lover. Through the mother tongue, the past is reconstituted, fellowships are imagined, futures dreamed” (p. 133).

13 For more on images (as objects), linguistic expressions as containers, and communication, see Lakoff and Johnson (1997).


15 All references to the play are to the Arden Shakespeare edition edited by Antony Hammond.

16 To further unpack Shakespeare’s layering of significance, consider Edward III’s bleeding dead body. Bleeding by or in a corpse was in the late 15th century merely the residue of the waking hours, “nothing else but a symbol of death, a sign that the sleeper’s soul had left the body” (Harold Brooks, 1980, p. 732) describes as being “akin to Marlowe’s...”. Yet the range of [Richard III]’s eclecticism is not the most remarkable from More; more remarkable still is the harmonization of elements so variously derived.” Brooks is referring to Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy and Christopher Marlowe’s The Jew of Malta.

17 For more on the history and prophecy of Cadwallader, see Schwizer (2004, Chapter 1, “Speenser’s Spark: British Blood and British Nationalism in the Tudor Era.”)

18 See, for example, Colley Cibber’s 1699 version of Richard III, which, as George Steevens determined, was remarkably successful for a surprisingly long time.

19 Perhaps the best known of the Hitler-esque portrayals is Ian McKellen’s Richard III in the 1995 film and television series, directed by4 Peter Hall, in which he describes Richard as seeing in his sleep “diverse images like terrible devils which pulled and held him, not suffering him to take any quiet or rest. The which strange vision so not suddenly strake his heart, made him not to breathe without a sudden fear; but it stilled his head and troubled his mind with many dreadful and busy Imaginations...” (quoted in “The Histories” in Gulian C. Verplanck, 1847, p. 72).

20 Holinshed, Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

21 For more on narrative time, stage time, and “real” time, see Jeremy Lopez (2005, pp. 299–314).

22 Text of Henry V accessed from the Open Source Shakespeare at Mason University (http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org).

23 For more on Shakespeare’s manipulations of time, see S. C. Sen Gupta (1961). In this volume, Gupta discusses the debate over the validity of the notion of “dramatic time,” or chronological or historic time and dramatic time.

24 Shakespeare’s dream and dream figures are rather unique for the time in their capacity to bless, as they do so for Richard on his way to becoming Henry VII.

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24 “The belief in time as agent and guiding thread is based on the mechanism of memory and on that of combinatoric discourse,” Valéry wrote (1957, p. 348).

25 Hill’s writing was accessed through the Folger Shakespeare Library, according to Peter Holland (1999) hill’s work was “the most substantial attempt in English Renaissance writing to produce an account of dream theory” (p. 142). Nid Hill’s favorable view about the value of dreams and their interpretation. Thomas Nashe believed they were merely the residue of the previous hour, nothing else but a bubbling scum or froth of the fancy, which the day had left undigested; or an after-feast of the fragments of the idle imagination,” as quoted in Holland (1999, p. 133).

26 In cursing Richard with “ugly devils,” Margaret’s lines are not Shakespeare’s. Hall’s Chronicles, in which he describes Richard as seeing in his sleep “diverse images like terrible devils which pulled and held him, not suffering him to take any quiet or rest. The which strange vision so not so suddenly strike his heart as a sudden fear, but it stuft his head and troubled his mind with many dreadful and busy Imaginations. . . . [He] prognosticated before the doubtful chance of the battle to film, not using the alacrity and mirth of mind and of countenance as he was accustomed to before he came toward the battle . . . ." Declared and exclaimed to his familiar in the morning his wonderful vision and terrible dream” (quoted in “The Histories” in Gulian C. Verplanck, 1847, p. 72, Holinshed, Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

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