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A READING OF RICHARD III'S DEBATE WITH ANNE

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When Shakespeare came to write his *Richard III* in the early 1590's, he was working against a long tradition of Richard as a man of wit, in the Renaissance meaning, of a shrewd, searching intelligence. This tradition went as far back as a contemporary Latin chronicle that spoke of Richard's "ingenium excellens," of his excellent wit or intelligence. The tradition was so strong that it was one of the things favorable to Richard which Tudor historians could not deny. Instead, they explained it away by saying, "Yes, but he used his intelligence for evil ends." In creating his Richard, Shakespeare seized upon this facet of the character of the historical Richard as the guiding principle of the personage in the play. Into this work Shakespeare poured all the riches of the rhetorical tradition, in which he was perhaps as well schooled as any writer of his time, in order to demonstrate Richard's acknowledged wit. Besides his use of the oration in a number of ways in the play and the flowers of eloquence, Shakespeare shows Richard overcoming two strongly motivated opponents in closely argued debates, the so-called wooing scenes, with Anne in Act I and Elizabeth in Act IV. In the following pages, I depend heavily on Thomas Wilson, a Renaissance rhetorician, for definitions of *Methodus*,¹ a term crucial to my thinking, and for other relevant terminology.

In the first of the two impressive wooing scenes, Richard is shown overcoming the objections of one who has suffered greatly at his hands. As chief mourner in the funeral train of her sovereign and father-in-law, Henry VI, whom Richard had killed (*III Hen. VI, V, vi*), Anne enters to speak a lament over the dead king. She cannot mourn, however, because of her hatred for Richard; and what begins as a lament turns into a vehement curse directed against Richard and ironically against herself. The speech, a dramatic necessity, prepares for the debate itself by enforcing Anne's hatred of Richard. As she concludes in a fury of anguished cursing, Richard enters. The debate begins after Richard forces the attendants to put down the coffin once more. An important element in their debate is logical and rhetorical contrasts. She uses the term "devil" as a weapon; Richard counters with soothing terms of divinity. She exorcizes him in the manner used against evil spirits. He answers calmly with "sweet saint" (49). She replies with "foul devil" (50) and launches into a speech of eighteen lines, in which she frantically calls down the wrath of God upon Richard's head. The speech marks the end of the preliminary matter and the opening into the

body of the debate. It does not perform the technical function of announcing the question for debate, however, and only in the general sense of its establishing the magnitude of Anne's hatred can it be called a formal introduction.

Nor does the debate that continues have the orderly give and take of the formal *thesis*, the posing of an explicit *solutio* against an explicit *contradictio*. Over all the debate there is a nervous energy and frenzied air in keeping with Anne's distraught frame of mind. Either deliberately or unknowingly, Shakespeare passed over the possibilities for using the exact disposition of the disputation in framing the scene. The result is an effective yet loosely formed debate, largely logical in reference.

Unmoved by her imprecations, Richard urges that she does not know the "rules of charity, / Which renders good for bad, blessings for curses" (68-69). She answers that he knows no "rules" either of God or man, and then supplies the major premise of a *syllogism* for which Richard supplies the minor and conclusion:

No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.

Glow. But I know none, and therefore am no beast.

(71-72)

Ignoring his fallacious conclusion (fallacy of the Consequent), she seizes upon his admission that he has no pity: "O wonderful, when devils tell the truth!" (73). But Richard undercuts her once more by pointing out that it is even "more wonderful, when angels are so angry" (74). This speech concludes the first step of the argument. The next four speeches are balanced in pairs by the devices of antithesis, repetition, and a logical contrast:

Glow. Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman,
Of these supposed crimes to give me leave
By circumstance but to acquit myself.

Anne. Vouchsafe, defus'd infection of [a] man,
[For] these known evils but to give me leave
By circumstance to curse thy cursed self.

(75-80)

The key word, "circumstance," is a logical term meaning the adjuncts of a fact which make it more or less criminal, or make an accusation more or less probable. Richard pleads for an improper use of evidence: he

Louis E. Dollarhide

3

would clear himself by circumstantial evidence. Anne counters with the correct use of circumstances, as the adjuncts of a fact which make it more or less criminal. One may be convicted, not acquitted, on circumstantial evidence. This plea for acquittal failing, Richard turns then, in the next pair of speeches, to pray for leave to "excuse" himself:

Fairer than tongue can name thee, let me have
Some patient leisure to excuse myself.

(81-82)

The verb "excuse," in this sense, meant an attempt to clear a person wholly or partially from blame, without denying or justifying the imputed action. By changing slightly the meaning of the word, Anne answers that the only "current" or acceptable excuse Richard can make is to hang himself. She applies the word in the sense of expiation or justification. This shift of meaning comes out in her next speech. When Richard objects that by such despair (i.e., committing suicide) he would rather "accuse" himself, Anne replies that by "despairing" he can stand excused, or justified, for worthily executing vengeance upon himself, who did "unworthy slaughter" upon others. In other words, his justification can be an expiation, a redemptive act of vengeance.

Having reached a second impasse, Richard drops that line of argument for another. "Say [or let us suppose]," he suggests, "that I slew them not." Anne turns his statement into a logical *enthymeme* with, "Then say they were not slain" (89). But they were and Richard killed them. Richard offers another statement, only to have Anne build a second *enthymeme* upon it:

Glou. I did not kill your husband.

Anne. Why, then he is alive.

(91-92)

But Richard concedes him dead, then attempts to transfer this blame to Edward, his brother. Anne answers vehemently that he lies and then argues from the logical *topic* evidence to support her charge. Margaret saw him, bloody sword in hand. He would have killed Margaret herself if his brothers had not "beat aside the point." Passing over the greater charge of the guilt of Edward's death, Richard admits the lesser charge of attacking Margaret, once more insisting upon his being guiltless. Margaret "provoked" him to the attack by slanderously accusing him. Replying that his "bloody mind" was all that ever provoked him, Anne guides the argument this time.

Since Richard denies that he killed the prince and since she lacks immediate proof, she turns to a later and less doubtful crime. Did he not kill "this king"? With no equivocation Richard answers, "I grant ye." A logical term once more, the word "grant" carried the technical meaning of conceding to an actual or hypothetical opponent a proposition to be used as the basis of argument. Accepting the word in this sense, Anne plays upon it through the application of the figure *antanaclasis* and arguing from notation changes it to mean the bestowing of a petition or request:

Dost grant me, hedgehog? Then God grant me too
Thou mayst be damned for that wicked deed!

(103-104)

She declares the qualities of the king, a form of evidence, as her justification for this petition: he was "gentle, mild, and virtuous." Once more Richard concedes that he was, and therefore "the better for the King of heaven, that hath him" (105). To this reply Anne can only add that he is in heaven, where Richard can never hope to go. Ignoring her taunt, Richard maintains his line of reasoning, sophisticatedly arguing that if a man is fitter for heaven than for earth, the person sending him to heaven (his murderer) deserves thanks. The fallacy is that of false cause, called by Wilson *secundum non causam, ut causam* and listed as the third Aristotelian fallacy *extra dictione*. As if hemmed in by the argument Anne, picking the expression "any place," argues *ad hominem*, "And thou unfit for any place but hell" (109). Seizing the opening she has given him, Richard draws closer to his original intent, which he had announced in Scene i, 153-159. There is one place else, if she will hear him name it. "Some dungeon," she answers. "Your bed-chamber," Richard returns. Without argument, Anne can only curse him: "Ill rest betide the chamber where thou liest!" (112). It will, Richard concedes—until he lies with her. Secure in her immunity, Anne fervently answers, "I hope so." To this, Richard places an ominous period: "I know so." The argument so far has come full circle: it begins and ends with Anne's cursing Richard and railing *ad hominem*. And ironically she has placed herself a second time under the curse she lays to him.

Richard's positive "I know so" marks the end of one movement of the debate and the initiation of a second climactic one. He has announced, though obliquely, the question or *thesis*. From here on he carefully directs the line of thought. He is the master of the show. "But, gentle Lady Anne," he begins:

Louis E. Dollarhide

5

To leave this keen encounter of our wits
 And fall something into a slower method,
 Is not the causer of the timeless deaths
 Of these Plantagenets, Henry and Edward,
 As blameful as the executioner? (115-119)

The "slower method" in these lines is cited by the editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as an example of the general meaning of "the order and arrangement in framing a particular discourse in literary composition." How closely it is here related to the Latin word *Methodus* is very clearly shown in Richard's line of reasoning. *Methodus*, a branch of logic or rhetoric, taught how to arrange thoughts and *topics* for investigation, exposition, or literary composition. To Thomas Wilson it was the way or "method" of handling a single question; in a thorough analysis, he said, "every single question" was "eight ways examined." In the preceding part of the debate (43-114) the first three steps of *Methodus* have been satisfied. By experience (the king's body bleeding before Richard) and authority (Margaret's testimony) Richard's guilt has been established; and by definition it has been established that he is guilty of homicide. Then by division, Richard has narrowed his guilt to the unquestioned murder of the king. He denies Margaret's testimony. But all of this has been established in a somewhat chaotic manner, as Richard and Anne leap from first one then to another point of argument. Now, taking things completely in hand, Richard would turn to a "slower method," a more deliberate, calmer, better organized manner of reasoning.

As if Shakespeare had the steps of *Methodus* in mind as he wrote the scene, he has Richard proceed in his question to the important fourth "way," the examination of the efficient cause and the final cause. As an illustration of the distinction between efficient and final causes Wilson had stated that God is the efficient cause of all good laws while the final cause, or end, is that one live uprightly in observation of His holy will. Since he cannot hope to prove himself innocent of crime, Richard's purpose is to implicate Anne by subtle means in the very crime of which he stands accused and thereby mitigate in her own mind the guilt he bears and the hatred she gives him. His immediate purpose in his question is to make Anne grant him the undeniable proposition that the efficient cause is as "blameful" as the final cause. Is not the causer as guilty as the executioner? Anne parries the thrust by ignoring the specific question and naming Richard himself both cause and effect, and in so doing she passes over his distinction between efficient and final cause and introduces the fifth step of *Methodus*, effect: "Thou was the cause, and most accurs'd effect" (120). Richard, however, maintains his distinction over her objection and in reply states the efficient cause

(Anne's beauty), final cause (Richard's machinations), the effect (Murder), and, the sixth step, that which follows the effect (his gaining her love):

Your beauty was the cause of that effect;
 Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep
 To undertake the death of all the world
 So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom. (121-124)

And on the basis of this arrangement of argument Richard carries the debate through to completion and victory. To Anne's unsettled "If I thought that, I tell thee, homicide, / These nails should rend that beauty from my cheeks" (125-126), Richard answers that she should not if he stood by; as the sun is to the earth her beauty is his day, his life. Anne curses his day and life. Richard warns her not to curse herself for she is both. This leads, through another interchange, into a repetition of the idea of cause and effect. The interchange consists of parallel, though antithetical, definitions, of the term "quarrel." Confessing finally to the murder of Anne's husband, he maintains that he did it to help her to a "better husband." "His better doth not breathe upon the earth" (140), Anne answers. In his reply, arguing from notation with the figure *syllipsis*, Richard is guilty of the simplest form of logical fallacy, equivocation (called *homonymia* by Wilson), where a single word is used in several senses. He shifts the meaning from an absolute ("better husband") to an accidental attribute: "He lives that loves thee better than he could" (141). "Name him," Anne challenges. Once more Richard agrees. "The self-same name," Richard returns, calling attention to the ambiguity; "but one of better nature." Once more the play on the word "better." To her question, "Where is he?" Richard answers, "Here." Out-argued, amazed, momentarily beyond words, Anne spits at him. "Would it were mortal poison for thy sake!" she exclaims. Richard remarks on the paradox: "Never came poison from so sweet a place" (147). But Anne will not be won by this flattery. "Out of my sight!" she cries; "thou dost infect mine eyes" (149). Once more Richard, taking her own words, turns them back upon her. Her eyes have infected his. And with that, he returns to and restates his original argument based on efficient cause. But first it was the genus "beauty"; now he particularizes. It is her eyes, a species of that beauty. When Anne cries, "Would they were basilisks, to strike thee dead!" (151), he agrees: "I would they were, that I might die at once, / For now they kill me with a living death" (152-153). Anne has given him the entrance into his climaxing speech, in which he rounds out the argument he had first set in motion with his initial question.

Her eyes have drawn tears from his "manly eyes," even when he has not wept to hear of Rutland's and his father's deaths. He has never sued to anyone, yet from her he begs forgiveness or death. Dramatically he lays his unsheathed sword in her hand, and kneeling, bares his breast to her. Then in the conclusion he brings his argument to its destined point. He frankly confesses his guilt not only in the death of Henry but in the death of Edward as well; but in confessing this guilt, he drives home the still more important point, that Anne herself shares in his guilt:

Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry,
 But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.
 Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabb'd young
 Edward,
 But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.

(180-183)

When she lets the sword fall, he knows her defeat is complete, that she has accepted his premise. He ends the speech by confronting her with a dilemma: "Take up the sword again, or take up me" (184). She has accepted the fallacy of his argument; she now accepts the alternatives of the dilemma as the only solutions. "Arise, dissembler!" she tells him.

Once Anne is led to believe that Richard is actually stricken with her beauty, he has made her the efficient cause of the deaths of Edward and Henry VI and has implicated her in his crimes. This fact is shown clearly in the dialogue immediately following the speech. Anne has refused to stab him, though his breast is bared and the naked sword rests in her hand. Though she wishes him dead, she states, she cannot be his executioner. Richard dares even more. Then bid him kill himself, he offers, and he will do it. "I have already," Anne replies wearily. "But that was in thy rage," Richard reminds her—and then the speech which rounds out and completes the "slower method" he had begun with the question: Is not the causer as guilty as the executioner?

Speak it again, and even with the word
 This hand, for which thy love did kill thy love,
 Shall for thy love kill a far truer love;
 To both their deaths shalt thou be accessory.

(189-192)

The whole argument has led up to that last line—"To both their deaths shalt thou be accessory." Anne is caught: to the death of Edward,

8 RICHARD III'S DEBATE WITH ANNE

according to Richard's sophistry, she is already accessory. She has spoken the word herself: "I would not be thy executioner" (186).

The argument is over, the debate ended. Now she can only sigh, "I would I knew thy heart"; and Richard replies with what is, in a way, one of the most terrible lines in the play, terrible in its heavy irony, in its merciless disregard for petty humanity, in its brief glimpse into Richard's true character. "I would I knew thy heart," Anne says. And he answers, "'Tis figur'd in my tongue" (194). Anne "fears" but does not recognize that both heart and tongue are false. If she had but followed his reasoning she would have known. The irony lies in the fact that Richard tells her the truth. The editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* cite this use of the verb "figure" as meaning generally to portray or represent by speech or oration; but in doing so they overlook a fine logical subtlety which there is reason to believe Shakespeare had in mind. In describing the processes of the perfect argument or *syllogismus* Wilson uses the term "figure" to mean the three ways of placing the *medius terminus* ("double reapeate"). A "figure" he defines as a "lawfull placying of the double reapeate, in the .ii. propositions." It is not by mere chance that the basic fallacy of Richard's whole argument beginning with the question he puts to Anne is dependent upon the placing of the middle term, the efficient cause:

The "causer" is as guilty as the "executioner."
Anne's beauty is the causer.
Anne is guilty of Richard's crimes.

Technically the term is "placed" correctly according to the "first figure" in Wilson; i.e., it appears first in the major and last in the minor; but the fallacy lies in Richard's proposing that Anne's beauty is the efficient cause and then in his subtly passing from an adjunct to the subject (Anne herself) as if no breach of logic had been made. Richard's strength lies in his ability to lead Anne to accept the proposition and the conclusion. Throughout this part of the debate Richard argues that Anne's beauty drove him on and then in his conclusion he turns the guilt on Anne herself. The whole argument rests, then, in the questionable middle term, and thus Richard is only too accurate in saying to Anne, "'Tis figur'd in my tongue." In a less circumscribed and technical sense the word "figure" applies to the whole web of sophistry which Richard, the "bottl'd spider," has woven for his victim; but it applies clearly enough in the primary and limited sense as a startling reference to the inherent weakness of Richard's argument.

NOTES

¹The eight "wayes" under *Methodus*, according to Wilson, were: 1) Whether a thing is or no. This question was often proved by experience or authority (the topic testimony). 2) What a thing is. This comes from the topic definition. 3) The parts and several kinds considered. This would include division and partition (the topics genus and species). 4) Examination of the causes, especially the efficient cause and final cause, or end of anything. 5) Examination of the effect, the office or "proper working." 6) Examination of what happens after the effect, or which have great affinity, or likelihood to be. 7) Examination of what things are disagreeing. 8) Examination of whose authority on which the law is based. "And this ordre both Tullie hath followed in his booke de Officies, and also Aristotle in his Ethickes hath done the like, to the great admiration of al those that be-learned." *Rule*, F 33-F 35. (In the edition used, the pagination is out of order, though the content appears in correct order. F 36 follows V 33.) Since the examination of "causes" figures so prominently in the debate, it might be well to examine them briefly. Aristotle learned four: the *efficient cause*, the force, instrument, or agency by which a thing is produced; the *formal cause*, the form or essence of the thing caused; the *material cause*, the elements or matter for which a thing is produced; and the *final cause*, the purpose or end for which it is produced, viewed as final cause, the purpose or end for which it is produced, viewed as cause of the act. *OED*. Wilson centers upon the two most significant causes as the customary procedure—the efficient cause and the final cause or end. Thomas Wilson, *The Rule of Reason* (London, 1552).

The following terms are also central in my analysis:

Antanaclasis—a figure which in repeating a word shifts from one of its meanings to another.

Enthymeme—an abridged syllogism, with one of the premises implicit.

Invention—the finding of matter for composition, a branch of rhetoric.

Syllepsis—the use of a word having simultaneously two different meanings.

Syllogism—a perfect argument consisting of a major, minor, and conclusion, a pattern of deductive reasoning.

Thesis—the thirteenth exercise for composition in the Aphthonian Progymnasmata, the handbook for composition in Elizabethan grammar schools. *Thesis* was the first exercise to allow students to write and speak on both sides of a question.

Topics—the places of invention, such as definition, comparison.

A somewhat different version of this study was read at the annual meeting of the Mississippi Philological Association, 28 January 1984.