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# Performing Historical and Political Skills. The Narrator and Characters in More's *History of King Richard III*

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## Abstract

More's *History of Richard III* constructed the malicious *persona* of the Yorkist King and passed it on to later generations. In this article, the narrator's techniques will be examined. In particular, the focus will be on the self-fashioning of a humanist historian, who accumulates testimonies, some discarded as unreliable, but still interwoven in his tale. In so doing, he gives a collective, sometimes contradictory interpretation of events. Moreover, mixing different modes of speech presentation, he ventriloquises the characters' voices, using similar dilemmatic constructs to investigate a making decision process, and historical hypotheses. The villain in the *History*, Richard, is characterised by a peculiar despotic use of this strategy.

**Keywords:** the narrator, humanist historians, dilemmatic construct, Thomas More, Richard III.

## The narrator: portraying the sceptical, lucid humanist historian

When he wrote the *History of Richard III*, Thomas More was already a mature, accomplished man. A humanist by education and vocation, the author of *Utopia* wrote Latin and English versions of this historical inquiry into the final years of the War of Roses, both versions pervaded by the same civic mission to question the past in order to enlighten the present. Both are incomplete, the Latin version ending with Richard's coronation, the English one with Buckingham's withdrawing his support of the King. Incompleteness gives the text an open-end-

edness, curbed by Shakespeare in his dramatic rewriting, in which Richmond appears on the stage to promise peaceful, prosperous times for England (V, v, ll. 1-41).<sup>1</sup> Unfinished, the work seems to expose the historiographer's indecisiveness, his tale cutting off Richard's punishment. However, this *lacuna*, whatever its reasons, matches the narrator's refusal to solve the enigma regarding the real nature of a man prey to changing times and unable to adjust to them. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding helping to fabricate Richard's *leyenda nigra* and morally connoting the main characters involved in the unravelling of events,<sup>2</sup> More's biography aspires to be neutral.

It partially achieves this goal by inventing a third party in the biographical pact, a narrator who does not necessarily coincide with the author and acts as a sceptical, lucid humanist historian, even when he says "I". The third-party narration helps the author distance himself from the controversial biographical *persona* and speak for an anonymous community of esteemed scholars who share the same investigative and writing methods models. In other words, the third-person narrator gives life to a collective social body, which asserts itself by simply unveiling its research method and claiming its objectivity.<sup>3</sup>

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1. The edition of *Richard III* consulted is in Bloom *et al.* 2016: 566-646.

2. As George Logan states: "Ultimately, though, perhaps the most interesting – and certainly the most frequent – lessons of More's *History* are found not in its major thematic pronouncements or more formal moralising but in the continual brief observations it offers on a wide variety of topics, but especially on routine power politics, with its constant calculations of self-interest, constant manipulation and deception of others, and constant probing for, and exploitation of, others' weaknesses of vanity, naivety, wishfulness or cowardice" (2011: 183-184).

3. Reference should be made to Pierre Bourdieu's pivotal essay "The



The *persona* which refers to himself as “I” uses basic speech-acts indicative of his motivations and attitudes towards the process of history-making. The commonest speech-act which he uses is “I say”, as in “So deceased (as I have said) this noble Kyng” ([1513-1520]<sup>4</sup> 1883:<sup>5</sup> 4). As Austin clarified, every sentence is introduced by “I state”, even when this has not been written or uttered (Austin 1962: 133). However, the overt rather than implied reference to “I” as the grammatical subject of such a positive speech-act is significant. The narrator shows himself stripped of any peculiar traits except his individuality, as an objectified character defined by his actions and place within the text.

This *persona* makes his way through the text and helps his readers orient themselves when digressions might blur the chronological order of events. We may cite as an example this passage:

I have rehersed this busines about this marriage somewhat the more at length, because it might therby the better appear how slipper a grounde the Protector builded his colour, by which he pretended King Edwardes children to be bastardes ([1513-1520] 1883: 63).

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Biographical Illusion”, first published in 1986, and now in *Identity: A Reader* (2000: 299-303).

4. It is difficult to date this work, as it was not published in More’s lifetime. On the basis of extra-textual data and Rastell’s note, Logan maintains that it might have been composed between 1513 and 1520 (Logan 2011: 171-172).

5. The edition consulted is an anastatic reproduction of the 1883 edition published by Cambridge University Press. It is from the folio edition of *Sir Thomas More’s Works*, and also includes its continuation by Richard Grafton. The spelling, lexical choice and grammar are faithfully reproduced.

He represents the place where all data converge. Furthermore, he is the one who affirms that some data are reliable, some events improbable. When he is at pains trying to dissolve the uncertainty of received tradition, he adds a positive annotation to certify the veracity of various rumours:

But of all this point is there no certaintie; and whoso divineth uppon conjectures maye as wel shote too farre as to short. Howbeit, this have I by credible informacion learned, that the self night in which kynge Edwarde died, one Mystlebrooke, longe ere mornynge, came in greate haste to the house of one Pottyer, dwellyng in Reddcrosse strete without Crepulgate; and when he was with hastye rapping quickly letten in, hee shewed unto Pottyer that Kynge Edward was departed. By my trouthe, manne, quod Pottyer, then wyll my mayster the duke of Gloucester be kynge. What cause hee hadde so to thynke, harde it is to saye—whyther hee, being toward him, anye thyng knewe that he such thyng purposed, or otherwyse had anye inkelynge thereof: for hee was not likelye to speak it of noughte ([1513-1520] 1883: 7).

“This have I by credible information learned” is an authorial act, reminding us of the narrator’s search for trustworthy testimony. However, new unanswerable questions follow the established event. Doubts flourish, contributing to giving shape to the *persona* of a loyal biographer, who underlines instead of concealing the *lacunae* in his narrative. The reader feels reassured, particularly when the narrator reports different versions of the same story:

When the protector had both the children in his handes, he opened himself more boldly, both to certaine other men, and also chiefly to the Duke of Buckingham. Although I know that many thought that this duke was privy to all the protector’s counsel even from the beginning, and some of the protectour’s frendes said that the duke was the first mover of the protectoure to this matter, sending a privie

messenger unto him, streight after king Edwards death. But other again, which knewe better the subtle wit of the protectour, deny that he ever opened his enterprise to the duke, until he had brought to passe the thinges before rehersed. But when he had imprisoned the quenes kinsefolkes, and gotten bothe her sonnes into his owne handes, then hee opened the rest of his purpose with less fere to them whom he thought mete for the matter, and specially to the duke: who being wonne to his purpose, he thought his strength more than halfe increased ([1513-1520] 1883: 41).

The narrator is always in control of his subject-matter, as the arrangement and pace of his narration demonstrate. It is evident from this statement:

But so little wist tother what he ment, and so little mistrusted, that he was never merier nor never so full of good hope in his life; which self thing is often sene a sign of chaunge. But I shall rather let anye thinge pass me than the vain sureti of mans mind son ere his deth ([1513-1520] 1883: 50),

where he decides to pause to comment on Lord Hastings' confidence in his destiny when death impends. In the previous passage, however, he acts slightly differently. He narrates events, but then he inserts a different, rather significant version: Buckingham knew about Richard's plots from the beginning. The following sentences present each reader with varying hues of the same event. The narrator does not take sides with any of them.

These quotations testify to the narrator's shaping of his *persona* within the text. He is a rigorous humanist historian who perused his documents, interviewed oral witnesses, comparing different versions, and, when in doubt, did not purge his story of any competing account. In so doing, he partially passed down the collective memory of past events, always

corrected and in the process of making and unmaking itself. Moreover, he exposes the unstableness of the historical account, which could be purposely fabricated or unwillingly altered by memory gaps or lack of information. Although the narrator is fully aware of the difficult task a historian faces, he does not refrain from giving us beautifully arranged speeches, like Edward's dying speech, which he could not have personally heard. Driven by his model of inspiration, Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum*, he fabricates King Edward's speech to his courtiers, which Shakespeare maintained in an abridged version in his tragedy. In so doing, he was in line with a celebrated classical tradition dating back to Herodotus, which Philip Sidney points out in his *Apology for Poetry* ([1595] 2002: 83).

It is difficult to reconcile the prudent, verifiable historical method, which More's narrator shows himself to support, with his open ventriloquising of the dying King's voice. In the 1883 edition of the *History*, the transcription of a folio edition, there are no quotation marks to open and close direct speech uttered by the characters, hampering understanding of who the speaker is, especially if a "quod he" does not show itself here and there. As Donald Lateiner writes, referring to Herodotus, "[o]ratio recta, so unlike the canonical modern use of quotation marks, was intended as a sign of the author's intervention, not meant to be read as a sign of the author's gullibility" (1989: 20) or as a deceiving strategy. In this light, we can consider the interspersed speeches in the first person as the narrator's attempt to understand the character's line of reasoning and also to express his interpretation of past events. Edward's dying speech is the attempt of a good

king to pass his legacy on to his children and his citizens. He knows that his sons' tender ages will give pretenders to the throne excellent opportunities to seize power. By feigning omniscience, the narrator explores the political mind, which makes hypotheses and discards some of them to predict, influence or create events. This practice is very similar to the narrator's telling of his tale. The narratorial *persona*, then, is Edward and becomes Richard, but in order to be a better biographer. He acts as an interpreter of their actions, which must have been the result of a decision-making process. He is interested in that process, which is mirrored in his biography, dubitative and engaging when reliable sources are lacking.

### **Dilemmatic constructs: the narrator and his search**

Elizabeth McCutcheon defines Thomas More "a rhetorical man", which is true of so many of his fellow humanists (2011: 46). The *History of Richard III* provides numerous examples of More's skilful use of the art of rhetoric. Here I will concentrate on the recurrence of dilemmatic constructs in this biography. Marchand identified the same feature in Machiavelli's works. The homology of forms comes as no surprise. The two scholars shared the same dialectic training, which enabled European diplomats, secretaries and counselors to the King to be flexible and insightful, to devise alternative ways to solve problems, or to predict enemies' or potential allies' reactions in a given context.

In his essay on Machiavelli's "Discorso sopra Pisa" (1499), Marchand identified the repeated use of a dilemmatic structure (1975: 19-23). This structure was marked by the double presence of disjunctive conjunctions, each offering a solu-

tion to a political dilemma. In the *History of Richard III*, the narrator makes extensive use of this rhetorical device, but, as I will attempt to demonstrate, with different purposes and effects. Some examples are sufficient to clarify this point:

George Duke of Clarence was a goodly noble Prince, and at all pointes fortunate, if either his owne ambicion had not set him against his brother, or the envie of his enemies, his brother agaynste hym. For were it by the Queene and the Lordes of her bloode whiche highlye maligned the kynges kinred (as women commonly not of malice but of nature hate them whome their housebandes love) or were it a prowde appetite of the duke himself entendinge to be King: at the lest wise heinous Treason was there layde to his charge, and finallye,wer hee faultye, were he faultlesse, attainted was hee by parliament, and judged to the death, and thereupon hastily drowned in a Butte of Malmesey, whose death kyng Edwarde (albeit he commaunded it) when he wist it was done, pitiously bewailed and sorrowfully repented ([1513-1520] 1883: 5).

The narrator is a master of narratorial portrayals, especially when describing Edward and his brother Richard, the emblems of the monarch who responds positively to changing situations and of the ever-plotting, villainous tyrant. They were examples of *enargia*, or vivid descriptions (McCutcheon 2011: 52), whose aim was to persuade readers of two alternative ways of being King: exerting power for the common good or for self-empowerment. The narrative portrayal of the Duke of Clarence is shorter, telling us only his status and moral disposition. It is, however, remarkable due to the repetition of the same patterns in consecutive clauses. The “either ... or” structure, slightly varied with the omission of the former, examines two possible causes of Clarence’s fate. Characteristically, the narrator refers twice to the same hy-

potheses but does not indicate whether the Duke's actions originated from his ambition or from envy of his enemies, who considered the man an obstacle to their ascent to glory. He gives a list of epistemic possibilities, but without investigating whether or not they are true. Both alternatives are open options for him: Clarence might have dared to seize his brother's crown or envious people might have attributed this desire to him. What matters for him are the heinous consequences of the two hypothesised causes: the Duke was sentenced to death.

He could not test the truth of testimonies and rumours, nor precisely reconstruct the historical world that he aims to reproduce, but he sees the results of both of them. He presents his readers with possible alternatives, and they can choose one of them or remain doubtful like he is. History is a never-ending process. Historians cannot fully reconstruct it, so it is bound to always be incomplete.

Indeed, the epistemic list of possibilities offers readers more than one unverifiable version of the story, and verifying the truth of each is a difficult task. They thus face the ambiguity of interpretation, especially when inner thoughts or motivations are concerned. People involved in these events kept their secrets or spread false news and reports. History is filled with mystery and layers of events. The narrator does not want to substitute a mystery with his version of the story. He prefers to maintain all people's presuppositions in the text. We can thus perceive the anxious effort of people who know that their life depends on the correct clarification of other characters' actions and words. The disjunctive construct means conveying the sense of active investigation into some-

one's behaviour. All the characters, the crowd, are conscious of public inspection and will play their parts, trying to avoid dangerous words or acts and often retreating into silence:

And somme Lords, Knightes, and Gentlemenne either for favoure of the Quene, or for feare of themselfe, assembled in sundry companies, and went flockmele in harneis; and many also, for that they reckened this demeanoure attempted, not so specially againste the other Lordes, as agaynste the kinge hymselfe in the disturbaunce of hys coronation. But then by and by the Lordes assembled together at - ([1513-1520] 1883: 20).

And with that divers of the clergy that wer present, whither thei said it for his pleasure, or as thei thought, agreed plainly ([1513-1520] 1883: 31).

These passages present the reader with two possible interpretations of a single action, the expedition to the Sanctuary of the Archbishop, accompanied by numerous men. We do not know whether the narrator voices the Protector and the Queen's concerns. However, the use of the disjunctive structure dramatically conveys the epistemic efforts of both the narrator and his characters.

The intangibility of the inner human self, its secret motivations, can be hinted at, imagined, but not clearly stated. The historian's task is a study of hypotheses. The truth might be hidden within them, but the humanist historian cannot choose between two versions of the story if they are not verifiable.

### **Impersonation: the speech and thoughts of a political mind**

Machiavelli's political thoughts were always proairetic, in the sense that action must complete them, but the narrator's dilemmatic structure leads to paralysis. It only affirms



the narrator's indecisiveness, unless shared values lead him to take sides and to suggest a morally-oriented interpretation of the past.<sup>6</sup> The reader then understands that only actions are visible and perceived in their impact on characters and communities, and thus able to be related. On the contrary, people's thoughts and intentions are unknown and unattainable. However, characters' thoughts are conveyed using an assertive tone when their speeches are inserted in the biography. As anticipated above, the narrator reports the speeches given by the dying King Edward IV, by his Queen, Richard and Buckingham, without quoting his sources. The narrator and characters' voices blend in these speeches. Impersonation might solve the mystery of speech which the narrator could not have overheard. The narrator thus relives characters' thoughts, precisely as Collingwood wrote was typical of historians, their task being to answer questions about heroes' motivations in undertaking a particular action (Trachtenberg 2006: 4-5). Sallust's Micipsa and his last words offered a model for Edward's dying speech, but it is evident that the narrator wanted to use it to demonstrate his thesis. The narrator wants Edward's speech and his courtiers' reaction to mark the first climax in the *History*, and to affirm that if people had achieved what the dying King had prayed for, England would have enjoyed a period of prosperity. He places himself at the initial crossroads in his story by impersonating Edward

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6. The reader as well as the narrator are in the position of identifying known models of action or enigmas which in the *History* are sometimes irresolvable, unless the reader and narrator can draw on their shared values and political experience. Reference should be made to the codes examined by Barthes ([1973] 2002).

and envisaging what History might have been and was not. The King's offspring were threatened with harm due to their tender age, a risk that could be attenuated by political wisdom and insight into the future. Putting on the politician's clothes, the narrator shapes this speech into a sequence of hypotheses, originating from the weak position of the boy king. After Edward's death, war or peace will impend on the kingdom as a result of the Lords' reconciliation or their enmity. Throughout the long speech, the "whether ... or" construct is repeated, showing a binary series of alternatives, which if carried out, cannot fail to produce the expected results. Edward does not feel uncertain; he explains the laws of History and human politics ([1513-1520] 1883: 9-11).

His aim is to maintain control of his family and kingdom when he will no longer be living. Knowing that he cannot lead armies and punish his enemies when lying cold on his deathbed, he tries to convince his courtiers and family of the benefits all of them, above all his children, will derive from harmony. To achieve this goal, he assumes the stance of the good father who gives sound advice to his children, wife and brothers, drawing on his long experience in human and state affairs. At the same time, he puts his own frailty in public view ("My Lords, my dear kinsmen and allies, in what plight I lie you see, and I feel"). Moreover, he presents himself as a wise and caring person, associating himself with speech-acts like "I feel", "I am moved". His children are passive objects, who can be helped or ruined by the Lords, the real actors in future events. They can choose to love or hate each other, precipitating bloody struggles in the country. Empowering them, he charges them with heavy responsibility:

When these lordes with divers other of bothe the parties were come in presence, the kynge liftinge uppe himselfe and undersette with pillowes, as it is reported on this wyse sayd unto them. My Lordes, my dear kinsmenne and alies, in what plighte I lye you see, and I feele. By whiche the lesse whyle I look to lyve with you, the more depely am I moved to care in what case I leave you, for such as I leave you, suche bee my children lyke to fynd you. Whiche if they shoulde (that Godde forbydde) fynde you at varyaunce, might happe to fall themselfe at warre ere their discretion woulde serve to sette you at peace. Ye se their youth, of whiche I reckon the onelysuretie to rest in your concord. For it suffiseth not that al you love them, yf eche of you hate other. If they wer menne, your faithfulnessse happelye would suffice ([1513-1520] 1883: 9).

The use of parallelism and dilemmatic constructs reinforces the idea that Edward is the narrator's mouthpiece. They share the same moral values and the same analysis of those challenging times. Through this speech, the narrator's voice can be heard, filtering the king's presumable worries and anticipating his children's fate. Roles blur as the historian and the politician become a single entity, united as they are, along with the reader, in an impossible present. Narrative devices, like the monologue or the description of a dramatic scene, help the reader to identify with Edward.

All of them are eager to understand how it would have been possible to prevent evil from happening. The narrator ventriloquises his character to vent his own interpretation of the precarious balance of forces in pre-war times. Edward shows himself to be a wise politician and reinforces the narrator's portrayal. The reader feels the power of the king's words and can quickly agree with him. The blending of speech-acts, binary reasoning and appeal

to emotions succeed in involving them all in a complex investigation. They simultaneously reconstruct the decision-making process characteristic of leaders, and which the historian and reader should re-enact if they want to write or appreciate History.

The conflation of the narrator and Edward is easily understandable. For the narrator, Edward is the manifest model of a good monarch. He dedicated the opening and last pages of his unfinished biography to this king, purposely contrasting him with Richard, the wicked tyrant. The ending of the English version of the *History* is in the words of Morton, the man who More served as a young page. The archbishop compares Richard unfavourably to his brother. The usurper lacks “other excellent virtues met for the rule of a realm” ([1513-1520] 1883: 91). These words echo a few lines in Richard’s portrayal (“Richarde [...] was in witte and courage egall with either of them [...] malicious, wrathfull, envious” ([1513-1520] 1883: 5)). At the beginning of the biography, its end is foreseen. The praise of Edward IV’s peaceful, ideal government contains the rational man’s moral victory over the tyrant and his followers. Richard will fall because he cannot rule a country in peaceful times, not only because he is a dissembler and a murderer:

But for the weale of this realm wherof his grace hath now the governaunce, and wherof I am myself one poore member, I was about to wish, that to those good habilities wherof he hath already right many, little nedyng my prayse, it might yet have pleased Godde, for the better store, to have geven him some of suche other excellent virtues mete for the rule of a realm, as our Lorde hath planted in the person of youre grace ([1513-1520] 1883: 91).

**False dilemmas: the speeches of a secret, manipulative man**

One of the most recurrent words in *History of Richard III* is “secret”. It refers to Richard’s dissembling attitude, to his prudence, but also to the general atmosphere of a community in which no one seems trustworthy. Initially, the narratorial strategy is once again to dissolve the boundaries between different temporal settings, to intrude into Richard’s secrecy, becoming intimately aware of his thoughts.

King Edward’s speech had vast perlocutionary power. The Lords set aside their quarrels and prepared for the new king’s coronation. Nevertheless, Richard creates a web of verbal and written messages to upset the renewed harmony. The external narration focuses on actions, enabling the reader to see Richard while enacting dissension. Thus, he can test the general laws of History as he has learned them in Edward’s monologue. A new perspective is thus marked by the sudden pronoun shift, from the third person to the first person plural pronoun. It indicates the narrator’s impersonation of Richard:

For whom soever he perceived, either at variance with them, or bearing himself their favour, hee brake unto them, some by mouth, some by writing and secret messengers, that it neyther was reason nor in any wise to be suffered, that the yong King their master and kinsmanne, shoold be in the handes and custodye of his mother’s kinred, sequestred in maner from theyr compani and attendance, of which everi one ought him as faithful service as they, and manye of them far more honorable part of kin than his mothers side: whose blood (quod he) saving the kinges pleasure, was full unmetly to be matched with his: whiche nowe to be as who say removed from the King, and the less noble to be left aboute him, is (quod he) neither honourable to hys majesty, nor unto us, and also to his grace no surety, to have the mightiest of his frendes from him, and unto us no litle jeopardy,

to suffer our wel proved evil willers, to grow in over great authority with the prince in youth, namely which is lighte of believe and some perswaded ([1513-1520] 1883: 12-13).

Richard faces the Queen's attempt to maintain control of, and shield, the boy king. He makes use of the dilemmatic construct, but here this pattern is in the negative form, providing no alternatives to the logic of his speech. It is not an invitation to join him in a rational discourse on the future, but a positive evaluation of the new context, whose soundness is unquestionable. Richard's words are self-referential, authorized by the hidden "I say" speech-act, which admits no counter-argument. However, Richard is careful not to use the pronoun "I", because he must involve as many people as possible in his plot, the ones who might feel disgusted by the other faction's intimacy with the new king. Moreover, he wants to deconstruct Edward's speech by proving the deceased king's vision of a peaceful kingdom false. To achieve this goal, he once again uses the negative form of the dilemmatic construct:

Nor none of us, I beleve, is so unwyse, oversone to truste a newe frende made of an olde foe, or to think that an hoverly kindnes, sodainely contract in one houre, continued yet scant a fortnight, shold be deper settled in their stomaches than a long accustomed malice many yeres rooted ([1513-1520] 1883: 13-14).

Only the unwise addressee of Edward's speech must have agreed with a possible reconciliation with the Lords, long divided by conflicting interests and enmity. Edward's discarded hypothesis, the ruin of his children and the start of a new war, is much more realistic. The speech-act "I believe" indicates the nucleus of a new interpretation of the dying

speech. Richard gives his audience no alternative on which to ponder. Disagreeing with him, they will self-define themselves foolish. His speech does not construct dilemmas to be worked out but constructs a narrow path on which he and his fellows should tread. Indeed, Richard does not want to test the reliability of Edward's dilemma but his powers of persuasion, successfully proved by Buckingham and Hastings becoming his partners in this plot.

The narrator rarely impersonates Richard. His speeches filter other people's words, used as mediators to maliciously influence his targets. In doing so, he demonstrates his political mind, able to perceive the reaction of the crowd and single individuals to the exhibition of the symbols of his power. All of the characters being equally conscious of public scrutiny, he uses readings of hypothetical situations to favourably influence events. One example is when he sends messengers to convince Queen Elizabeth that the boy king should go to London unguarded, lest the Lords be made suspicious of bellicose intentions towards them ([1513-1520] 1883: 14-15). He almost vanishes as a speaker. His absence is consistent with his strategy of using atonement to rebuke the efforts of the Queen's party to contrast his plan, while secretly acting to make Edward's nightmare come true.

When the narrator reports Richard's thoughts, he uses the conditional of probability ("well wittinge that yf hee deposed the one brother, all the Realme would falle tother, yf he either remayned in Sainctuarye or shoulde happelye bee shortelye conveyde to hys farther liberty" ([1513-1520] 1883: 23)). When the narrator mimics Richard's voice, the character states his wishes as general truths, which cannot

be denied by his audience (“Wherefore, with whom rather than with his owne brother? And yf anye manne thinke this consideracion light (which I thynke no man thynketh that loveth the Kynge)” ([1513-1520] 1883: 24)).

Discursively, Richard puts forward only one possibility, which he imposes upon others. His speech-acts are orders. Richard will violently counteract the hypothetical refusal of the Queen to fetch his younger son to see his brother:

And yf shee bee percase so obstynate and so preciselye sette uppon her own wyl, that neyther his wise and faithful advertysemente canne move her, nor any mannes reason content her; then shall wee, by myne advyce, by the Kynges authoritye fetche hym out of that prisone and bring hym to his noble presence ([1513-1520] 1883: 25).

His request to the Lords for better advice is rhetorical ([1513-1520] 1883: 25). The perlocutionary force of his speech-acts is intimidating.

In the dramatic scenes leading to the seizure of the young Duke of York, the voices of Buckingham, the Queen and the cardinal resound, while Richard is notably absent; their eloquence is not comparable to Richard’s silence. Queen Elizabeth puts her son in the cardinal’s hands, knowing that Richard threatens her and other characters. All her words are to no avail.

In the last part of the biography, Richard is an actor playing a silent part, but also the director of the main play. He exposes himself to the crowd’s scrutiny, assuming the stance of the devoted, caring uncle, and servant of the common good, giving others the task of correctly interpreting his performance.

But the Duke of Gloucester bare him in open sighte so reverent-lye to the prince, with all semblaunce of lowlinesse, that, from the



great obloquy in which hee was soo late before, hee was sodainelye fallen in so greate truste that at the counsayle next assembled, hee was made the onely manne chose and thoughte moste mete, to bee protectoure of the king and hys realme: so that (were it destenye or were it foly) the lamb was betaken to the wolfe to kepe ([1513-1520] 1883: 22-23).

He thinks he can force people to believe or feign belief, wary of their destiny and not trusting others. However, alert men do perceive, as the narrator states so often, and interpret Richard's actions and words. His new performances will be successful (the Lords will trust him, or pretend to, when he accuses Lord Hastings of treason; a few in the crowd ask him to be king). However, his failure to evaluate probability endangers him as well as his citizens. His cry: "What! quod the protectour. Thou servest me, I wene, with iffes and with andes! I tel the they have so done, and that I will make good on thy body, traitour" ([1513-1520] 1883: 47) marks the end of rational persuasion, which is the death of free discussion. Mute crowds, refusing to repeat the motto dictated by Buckingham and salute Richard as King, are the only dissent remaining.

### **The drama of the narrator, the political actors and the audience has come to an end**

Upon close reading, *History of Richard III* by Thomas More reveals the intertwining of multiple strategies. It has been worthwhile to consider the text as the site of the negotiation of verifiable historical truth. Its unattainable quality is sometimes manifest when the narrator cannot provide reliable sources and *lacunae* interrupt the flux of events and their

interpretation. This inability to decipher the real motivations of the main characters powerfully influences the historian, who accepts the enigma as part of the game of investigating history, and gives his readers a set of binary possibilities deriving from his knowledge of the world in which he and they live. History becomes a realm of hypotheses as much as facts. This stance contrasts with his mimicking the characters' voices, or reproducing their thoughts, like an omniscient narrator. He portrays Edward on his deathbed, trying to relive the king's worries and the political analysis which led to the frail alliance between conflicting factions at Court. He does it by using the rhetorical strategy of the repetition of dilemmas and a set of two probable solutions. In so doing, he shows the process of historical reconstruction, but also political decision-making activity.

Edward wants to convince his audience and maintain control of the situation, but his speech is not manipulative. He examines the two possibilities offered to his heirs and allies and the consequences of their actions. Richard uses different strategies. He also uses binary constructs, but to indicate the possibility of only one action and only one interpretation of it. His purpose is not to help people to choose the most decent choice for the common good, but to make them believe no choice exists. His manipulative power is such that he can dupe the Queen into acting contrary to her children's safety. Notwithstanding his powerful hold on oral and visual language, allowing him to predict other characters' interpretations, Richard has eliminated communication. Indeed, zero communication is the only weapon left to the crowds in the streets, gathered to proclaim him king but unwilling to do

so, baffled by his actions and words. Like the narrator, knowing so little, but alerted by their memory of similar events in the past, they remain silent.

However, “ifs and ands” are the stuff of which free and infinite interpretations are made. No historical practice, no political activity is possible without questioning, without constructing hypotheses.

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