

‘I do mistake my person all this while’: Blindness and Illusion in *Richard III*

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Abstract

The article addresses issues of ‘beyond text’ through a ‘poststructuralist’ reading of Shakespeare’s *Richard III* and *Richard III*. Richard III, the eponymous protagonist of the play, worms his way to the top through violence, murder, and dexterity, but, most of all, through what seems to be a skilful and cunning manipulation of event, character as textual construct, circumstance, language, and audience. He has often been noted as possessing certain features in common with the Vice figure in medieval drama, including the privilege of meta-theatrical awareness. I question the notion of Richard’s ‘meta-awareness’ of medium, and posit the meta’s re-circumscription by the text. The article will discuss ‘movements’ in the play and the extent of Richard’s control of events. The textualisation of the character Richard III and the elusiveness of Richard-as-playwright, lead to a consideration of the simultaneously groundless and overdetermined situation of the ‘historical’ Richard, the jostling of the ghostly and the corporeal, and the possibility of the ‘original’.