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Title: Is Evil Real?

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1/21/2014—Walter Kaiser has reviewed *Twelfth Night* at the Belasco Theatre in the most recent edition of the *New York Review of Books*. *Twelfth Night* is alternating with *Richard III*. I was privileged to see *Richard III* there a few weeks ago. Kaiser calls Mark Rylance “one of the greatest Olivias of all time.” I am sorry to have missed that. But, for me, Rylance’s performance as the evil Richard was much more important. Rylance plays *Richard III* for laughs. He shows just how funny Richard’s very real evil is. The production is not at all light hearted about the evil itself—not ironic in any way. It is Richard himself whose grasping, unlimited ambition causes the audience many real laughs. This interpretation works so well that it seems the only way to understand the play. And that raises a metaphysical question—is evil funny inherently? Of course evil is not funny to its victims at the time. But is there inevitably something funny about it? This question can be restated—how real is evil? In the Christian view of reality, evil has already been defeated ultimately. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ show and guarantee this. Thus, for all the pain it can cause, evil is fighting a losing fight. Already a spent buffoon so to speak. That is Richard in this production. No one imagines for a moment that Richard can represent any kind of future. Now, what about our secular view of evil? If the universe has no ultimate structure—no purpose, or goal or hierarchy—if it is just one thing after another, an endless series of contingent accidents, why should evil carry any less weight than good? On this view, evil is plenty real. Is this true? Shakespeare, for one, may not have agreed.