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Richard the Third

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ETHEL BARNETT DE VITO

RICHARD THE THIRD

Was this the one they'd followed to the fray:
 Dead as a haddock, nothing more to say
 With all the stratagems he could devise
 Gone, locked somewhere behind the vacant eyes?

Was this the fearsome wearer of the crown,
 Come to the field triumphant, then gone down
 A naked, scarce identifiable corpse
 Slung without honor, sprawled across his horse?

Now he rode slack-mouthed, nothing to betoken
 Whether commands or promises he had spoken
 Were couched in Cornish, Gallic, Greek or Celt
 And even those who trailed behind him felt
 That Gloucester dead diminished Gloucester living
 And that historians cheated, unforgiving,
 Would lame him, maim him, coarsen, uglify.

Only a hero could afford to die
 And then, only at his time of conquering.

Who would not question now, was this a king,
 This carcass unprotected, unprotecting,
 Ambitionless, who had been so unresting,
 Without pride, purpose, clothes upon his back
 Who rode his last ride like an empty sack?