

## INTRODUCTION

In the histories section of the First Folio, only *Richard III* is called a ‘tragedy’.<sup>1</sup> It unites the chronicle play, a form Shakespeare had developed in the three parts of *Henry VI*, with a tragic structure showing the rise and fall of a single protagonist. Like Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus*, written at about the same time, Shakespeare’s play concerns the damnation of an unrepentant soul, but Shakespeare also grapples with the problem of determinism. In his opening soliloquy, Richard says he is ‘determined to prove a villain’ (1.1.30), and the play develops this ambiguous statement into an exploration of determinism and choice appropriate to both history and tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

### History and meaning in *Richard III*

*Richard III* is the last in a series of four plays – following three about the reign of Henry VI – that dramatise the English Wars of the Roses. As he had in the *Henry VI* plays, Shakespeare used the chronicles of Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed as sources of historical material for *Richard III*.<sup>3</sup> Hall’s *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and York* (1548) incorporated a version of Sir Thomas More’s *History of Richard III* (written about 1513). Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England* (second edition, 1587) adapted More’s *History* from Hall, so that More should be regarded as the primary historiographic source for Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. More’s unfinished work, however, deals only with Richard’s rise to the throne. Shakespeare relied on Hall and Holinshed for Richard’s decline and final defeat at Bosworth, and those chroniclers had relied on the early Tudor historian Polydore Vergil. Nevertheless, it is More’s ironic attitude toward Richard that pervades both the chronicle sources and Shakespeare’s play.

Much has been made of the tendency of early Tudor historians to vilify Richard III in order to glorify Henry VII (Richmond) and his descendants.<sup>4</sup> It is true that the concept of history writing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries included the selective use of historical events to teach political and moral lessons, a practice most modern historians would reject. However, many of the stories of Richard’s villainy

<sup>1</sup> The play is called *The Tragedy of Richard III* on its first page in the Folio, but subsequent pages carry the running title ‘The Life and Death of Richard the Third’. The word ‘tragedy’ may have been taken from the printed quartos, all of which use it.

<sup>2</sup> On Richard’s pun as a play on providential determinism, see David S. Berkeley, “‘Determined’” in *Richard III*, 1.1.30’, *SQ* 14 (1963), 483–4.

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare may also have used the *Chronicle At Large* of Richard Grafton (1569), but this repeats Hall almost word for word, making it impossible to tell which one Shakespeare employed.

<sup>4</sup> See Tillyard, Campbell and Ribner.

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originate in accounts written in Richard's own time or soon after.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to tell whether these early narratives consciously promote propaganda or merely reflect the traditional literary and didactic aims of medieval historiography. The earliest known portrait of Richard as a usurper (first discovered in 1934) was recorded by the Italian priest Dominic Mancini. It cannot have been intended to advance an established Tudor dynasty, since Mancini wrote in 1483, when the victory of Henry Tudor over Richard III was still two years in the future. Neither can this early date guarantee Mancini's objectivity. Yet no matter how the reign of Richard III was perceived by those who lived through it, by Shakespeare's time, and probably much earlier, stories of Richard as a tyrant and a child-murderer were accepted as fact.

In addition to the chronicle sources, Shakespeare's *Richard III* draws upon a wide range of literary influences, especially the cycle plays and moralities of the native English drama. The influence of classical drama can be seen, not only in the women of *Richard III*, who have been compared to Seneca's Trojan women, but also in the play's formal rhetoric, its ghosts, its villain-hero, perhaps even in Richard's stoic end. Closer to home, Shakespeare drew inspiration from other sixteenth-century English dramatists writing in the Senecan tradition, especially Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe. *A Mirror for Magistrates*, a sixteenth-century collection of verse 'tragedies' about the fall of historical figures, was available to Shakespeare. He may have read it for passages spoken by Richard, Clarence, Hastings, Edward IV, the Duke of Buckingham, and even Jane Shore, although he does not dramatise her story. An unpublished Latin play, Thomas Legge's *Ricardus Tertius*, which was composed around 1579, does not seem to have been used by Shakespeare, though he may well have known it.<sup>2</sup>

*The True Tragedie of Richard The Third*, an anonymous English play, was published in 1594 but probably composed several years earlier.<sup>3</sup> There seem to be passages in which *The True Tragedie* anticipates Shakespeare, notably in Richard's call for a new horse (scene 18):

*King.* A horse, a horse, a fresh horse.  
*Page.* A flie my Lord, and saue your life.  
*King.* Flie villaine, looke I as tho I would flie

It is possible that the anonymous playwright borrowed from Shakespeare rather than the other way around. Even if *The True Tragedie* was written first, the printed version could have picked up this famous exchange from Shakespeare's later but more popular play, perhaps via a copyist. Yet the text of *The True Tragedie*, often disparaged as

<sup>1</sup> See Dominic Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard III* (c. 1483), ed. C. A. J. Armstrong, 2nd edn 1969; *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations, 1459–1486* (c. 1486), ed. Nicholas Pronay and John Cox, 1986; and John Rous, *Joannis Rossi Antiquarii Warmicensis Historia Regum Angliae* (c. 1487–91), ed. T. Hearne, 1745.

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's contemporary, Francis Meres, names Legge along with Shakespeare as among 'our best for Tragedie' (*Palladis Tamia*, 1598). See Jones, pp. 139–40.

<sup>3</sup> *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third*, 1594; reprinted by the Malone Society as *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third*, ed. W. W. Greg, 1929.

a ‘bad quarto’<sup>1</sup> or merely ‘contaminated’,<sup>2</sup> emerges in Laurie E. Maguire’s recent analysis as a coherent play with few of the traditional signs attributed to pirated scripts or ‘memorial reconstructions’.<sup>3</sup> It appears more likely, then, that Shakespeare echoed *The True Tragedie* rather than the other way around.

Another parallel, in George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* (1594), offers a triangle of possible influences for the ‘horse’ passage:

*Moore.* A horse, a horse, villain a horse  
 That I may take the river straight and flie.  
*Boy.* Here is a horse my Lord. (1413–15)<sup>4</sup>

As Antony Hammond has pointed out, this dialogue seems more remote from Shakespeare’s than that of *The True Tragedie*,<sup>5</sup> not so much because of the differences in the famous line itself, but because Peele’s Moor wishes to fly, while in *The True Tragedie*, as in *Richard III*, the protagonist has no intention of escaping. A possible line of descent for this passage, then, runs from Peele to Anonymous to Shakespeare. In addition to the verbal echo of ‘a horse, a horse’, George Bosworth Churchill, Geoffrey Bullough and John Dover Wilson all trace structural parallels between *The True Tragedie* and the last four acts of Shakespeare’s play. Emrys Jones and Hammond, on the other hand, stress how much *The True Tragedie* and *Richard III* differ in their emphases. As Jones puts it, ‘one is surprised to find out how undominating, by comparison, another playwright’s Richard could be’.<sup>6</sup> A reasonable supposition might be that Shakespeare used ‘a horse, a horse’ from *The True Tragedie* and borrowed whatever structural elements he thought would work, just as he did from many other literary sources.

Shakespeare’s own earlier plays also provided him with source material, especially *Henry VI, Part 3*, where Richard first emerges as an arch-villain. In *Henry VI, Part 2*, Richard appears as a warrior trying to take the crown away from Henry VI and give it to his own father, the Duke of York. Richard’s enemies mention his deformity, but his chief characteristics in this play are devotion to his father and warlike anger: ‘Sword, hold thy temper; heart, be wrathful still: / Priests pray for enemies, but princes kill’ (5.2.70–1). In *Henry VI, Part 3*, Richard adds to his loyalty and wrath a certain cunning. He persuades York to break a promise of peace because the oath was not sworn before a ‘true and lawful magistrate’ (1.2.23), then plunges eagerly into the next round of civil war. After York is killed by Queen Margaret, Richard begins to assume the character of a universal antagonist. Although he continues to fight fiercely to avenge his father and to put his brother Edward on the throne, he also mocks Edward’s love of women, Elizabeth Grey in particular (3.2), and begins the process of fashioning himself into the monster he will be: ‘Ay, Edward will use women honourably. / Would he were wasted, marrow, bones, and all, / That from his loins no hopeful branch may spring, / To cross me from the golden time I look

<sup>1</sup> See Wilson, p. xxix.    <sup>2</sup> Hammond, p. 83.    <sup>3</sup> Maguire, pp. 317–18.

<sup>4</sup> See W. W. Greg, *Two Elizabethan Stage Abridgements: ‘The Battle of Alcazar’ and ‘Orlando Furioso’*, 1922.

<sup>5</sup> Hammond, p. 83.    <sup>6</sup> Jones, p. 196.

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for!' (3.2.124–7). As Philip Brockbank points out, when Richard 'takes the stage for his first exercise of the soliloquy-perogative he inherits from York', he immediately begins to speak of his ambitions in terms of birth, or rather of rebirth, since his first has proved unsatisfactory:<sup>1</sup>

Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb:  
 And for I should not deal in her soft laws,  
 She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe,  
 To shrink mine arm up like a wither'd shrub,  
 To make an envious mountain on my back,  
 Where sits deformity to mock my body. (3.2.153–8)

Just as he does in *Richard III*, Richard blames his inability to love on his abnormal birth – and, by extension, on his mother – and invents a new self-birthing process that will make him king:

And I – like one lost in a thorny wood,  
 That rents the thorns, and is rent with the thorns,  
 Seeking a way, and straying from the way,  
 Not knowing how to find the open air,  
 But toiling desperately to find it out –  
 Torment myself to catch the English crown. (3.2.174–9)

The personality Richard reveals or creates in this passage is much like the one he displays in the opening soliloquy of the present play, and actors from Colley Cibber in the eighteenth century to Laurence Olivier in the twentieth have freely borrowed lines from *Henry VI, Part 3* for productions of *Richard III*. From the middle of *Henry VI, Part 3* on, Richard appears as a full-blown villain, confiding his treacherous self-absorption to the audience even as he pretends to support the new Yorkist king, Edward IV. At the end of the play, Richard murders King Henry in the Tower, and the audience understands that he has killed not for his brother, but for himself: 'I have no brother, I am like no brother; / And this word "love", which greybeards call divine / Be resident in men like one another / And not in me: I am myself alone' (5.6.80–3).

*Richard III* is a sequel to *Henry VI, Part 3*, and was probably written soon after it. *Henry VI, Part 3* must have existed before September 1592, when the dying playwright Robert Greene parodied a line from the play in his pamphlet, *Greenes Groatsworth of Witte*, in which he criticised Shakespeare. Greene transformed York's bitter words to Margaret, 'O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!' (3 *Henry VI* 1.4.137), into an attack on the playwright, whom he called 'an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you' (sig. F1). Greene probably saw *Henry VI, Part 3* performed in London some time before June 1592, when the London theatres were closed because of plague. For Greene to suppose that his

<sup>1</sup> See Philip Brockbank, 'The frame of disorder – "Henry VI"', in *Early Shakespeare*, ed. J. R. Brown and B. A. Harris, 1961, reprinted in Brockbank, *On Shakespeare*, 1989, p. 102.

parody of Shakespeare would be effective, he must have believed that many in his audience had seen *Henry VI, Part 3* and that the line he chose to burlesque was a memorable one. Although a London acting company may have taken the play on tour in the provinces during the summer of 1592, Greene's confidence in a theatrical experience shared with his readers suggests a milieu of city theatre-goers and repeated performances rather than of plays glimpsed out of town. Whether *Henry VI, Part 3* was a finished play in the spring of 1592 or was written that summer, however, the continuity between the two plays implies that *Richard III* was developed immediately after *Henry VI, Part 3*, even if Shakespeare was also working on other projects at the same time.<sup>1</sup> *Richard III* was probably completed by 1593, although it may not have been performed in London until the next theatrical season in 1594.

There is very little evidence to help establish the earliest date at which *Richard III* could have been written. Shakespeare's career as a playwright was already well under way, and he had written *Henry VI, Part 3*, but whether these things happened in the early 1590s or before is a matter of conjecture.<sup>2</sup> Since both *Henry VI, Part 3* and *Richard III* use material from the 1587 edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, they cannot have been written earlier than that date. Sidney Shanker conjectured that Shakespeare used the character Sir James Blunt to flatter the Blunts of Stratford, even though a Blunt of that family was not actually knighted until 1588.<sup>3</sup> If this guess is right, 1588 would be the earliest date for *Richard III*. Harold F. Brooks argues that Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, probably Marlowe's penultimate play, echoes *Richard III*.<sup>4</sup> *Richard III*, by this argument, must have existed long enough for Marlowe to borrow from it and write both *Edward II* and *Dr Faustus* before his death in the spring of 1593. Hammond agrees with Brooks's speculation and suggests a date of 1591 for Shakespeare's play,<sup>5</sup> but as Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor point out, the verbal parallels Brooks finds between *Edward II* and *Richard III* are mostly commonplace and may derive from other sources.<sup>6</sup> Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* also seems to echo Shakespeare's ghosts ('despair and die'), and this borrowing, if it is one, can be reconciled with a composition date of 1592–3 for *Richard III*.

#### DETERMINISM AND HISTORY

The civil conflicts portrayed in Shakespeare's first tetralogy extended from the death of the Lancastrian Henry V in 1422 through the chaotic reign of his son, Henry VI, Henry's overthrow by the house of York, the rule of the Yorkist kings Edward IV and Richard III, and finally to Richard's defeat in 1485 by the Earl of Richmond, who then became Henry VII, the first Tudor king. Scholars once believed that Shakespeare and most of his contemporaries saw the calamitous wars between the house of Lancaster

<sup>1</sup> Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor argue, using rare word analysis, that *1H6* was written after *3H6* (*William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, p. 217). They also agree with Marco Mincoff, who says in *Shakespeare: The First Steps*, 1976, that Shakespeare wrote *Titus* between *3H6* and *Richard III* (p. 115).

<sup>2</sup> See Honigmann, *Shakespeare, the 'Lost Years'*, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney Shanker, 'Shakespeare pays some compliments', *Modern Language Notes* 63 (1948), 540–1.

<sup>4</sup> Harold F. Brooks, 'Marlowe and early Shakespeare', in *Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Brian Morris, 1968, pp. 65–94.

<sup>5</sup> Hammond, p. 61. <sup>6</sup> See Wells and Taylor, p. 116

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(whose supporters wore a red rose) and the house of York (white rose) as divine punishment for the unlawful deposition of Richard II in 1399. According to this view, Shakespeare's *Richard III* reflects the 'Tudor Myth', which held that the Wars of the Roses resulted from a divine curse that was finally purged by Henry Tudor. Later critics, however, have generally rejected the idea that Shakespeare wrote his plays simply as Tudor propaganda, and most have also rejected the notion that there was any widespread Tudor consensus about God's will and the Wars of the Roses.<sup>1</sup> Disagreement continues over whether Shakespeare's plays generally tended to support or undermine the Tudor–Stuart political order.<sup>2</sup>

As a descendant of the man who overthrew Richard III, Queen Elizabeth I certainly benefited from the impression that Richard had been a wicked king. Yet this villainous portrait of Richard was not a Tudor invention. It had been developing since Richard's own time, gradually taking on the characteristics that critics would later associate with the Tudor Myth.<sup>3</sup> For Shakespeare, the most influential disseminator of Richard's bad reputation was Sir Thomas More – not an Elizabethan but a contemporary of Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII. More's account, which he took from fifteenth-century chroniclers and probably from the personal reminiscences of people still living who remembered Richard, was borrowed by the sixteenth-century chroniclers Hall and Holinshed, and thus became an important source for Shakespeare's play. It was More who first made Richard a character suitable for drama by concentrating on vivid events in his reign and further enhancing his reputation as a criminal tyrant.

Whether More saw Richard's rule as divine punishment is open to question, but there is no question that this interpretation is available in Shakespeare's play.<sup>4</sup> It is articulated by Queen Margaret, who proclaims the justice of Richard's turning on his own family: 'O upright, just, and true-disposing God, / How do I thank thee, that this carnal cur / Preys on the issue of his mother's body' (4.4.55–7). According to Margaret, however, the crimes avenged by Richard's murders are specific acts taken against her family by the house of York, not ancestral political crimes. Margaret gives voice to the belief, encouraged by the growing Calvinism of the Elizabethan era, that individual historical events are determined by God, who often punishes evil with (apparent) evil. Yet her vision of Richard as providential agent or 'scourge of God'

<sup>1</sup> For a strong argument against reducing Shakespeare's histories to the 'Tudor Myth', see Ornstein.

<sup>2</sup> Linda Charnes, for example, has recently argued that Shakespeare used the received portrait of Richard III as one of the themes of his play: '[N]o matter how engaged the play may be with the ideological uses to which Richard's legend can be put, it is even more engaged with what it would feel like to be subjected by and to that legend, with what it would be like to have to be Richard III, surrounded by the language and signification of a hundred years of writings about oneself.' According to Charnes, Shakespeare's Richard is a character trying to escape the determinism not of natural causation but of historiography – the works of 'Rous, Morton, More, Holinshed, and other "historians" whose authority cannot and must not, in the reign of Elizabeth, be denied because the playwright himself is subject to the immediate political constraints of his material'. See Charnes, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*, 1993, pp. 68–9. For a portrait of Shakespeare as an underminer of political orthodoxies, see Thayer.

<sup>3</sup> See Kelly for an account of the gradual development of Richard's reputation.

<sup>4</sup> If More intended his *History of King Richard III* to promote the interests of the Tudor dynasty, he made no use of it, for he left it unfinished and never published it. See Richard S. Sylvester's introduction to More.

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is both limited and biased, representing only part of what it means for Richard to be ‘determinèd to prove a villain’.

While Margaret regards Richard as the instrument of God’s vengeance for crimes against the Lancasters, Richard attributes Margaret’s suffering to her own crimes against the Yorks, and others agree with him:

RICHARD The curse my noble father laid on thee  
 When thou didst crown his warlike brows with paper  
 And with thy scorns drew’st rivers from his eyes,  
 And then to dry them gav’st the duke a clout  
 Steeped in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland –  
 His curses then, from bitterness of soul  
 Denounced against thee, are all fall’n upon thee,  
 And God, not we, hath plagued thy bloody deed.

ELIZABETH So just is God, to right the innocent.

HASTINGS Oh, ’twas the foulest deed to slay that babe,  
 And the most merciless, that e’er was heard of.

RIVERS Tyrants themselves wept when it was reported.

DORSET No man but prophesied revenge for it. (1.3.172–84)

Shakespeare uses such curses and prophecies as dramatic devices to represent both the long conflict between Lancaster and York and the particular conflict – Richard against everybody – embodied in *Richard III*. Repeated invocations of providence also raise the general question of historical causation, reminding the audience that human events may be viewed as the thoughts of God made visible, manifestations in time of the timeless divine will. The play presents the issue of historical determinism – inseparable in Shakespeare’s time from issues of religion – not as an assertion, but as one side of an argument.

On the other side stands Richard himself, representing a secular theory of history that finds the causes of human events in individual actions rather than in providential will. Richard is both a stage ‘Machiavel’ and a personification of the Machiavellian view of history as power politics.<sup>1</sup> Richard delights in confiding his intentions to the audience and then demonstrating how he can accomplish even the most outrageous of them:

For then I’ll marry Warwick’s youngest daughter.  
 What though I killed her husband and her father?  
 The readiest way to make the wench amends  
 Is to become her husband and her father. (1.1.154–7)

At the end of the ‘wooing of Anne’ scene (1.2), Richard again turns to the audience to crow over his victory: ‘Was ever woman in this humour wooed? / Was ever woman in this humour won?’ (1.2.231–2).

<sup>1</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli appeared in the Elizabethan popular imagination as an advocate of tyranny and on the stage as a type of the villain. Christopher Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, for example, written in 1589, uses Machiavelli as a character. He speaks the prologue to the play and introduces his disciple, the villain Barabas.

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Excerpt

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From the first word of the play, Richard woos the audience as he woos Anne, with the strength of his personality: his wit, his confidence, his 'bustle'. His evil-yet-appealing character has ancestors in both classical and native English drama. In addition to the Machiavel, he is related to the Senecan criminal-hero, the Herod-tyrant from the medieval 'mystery' or religious cycle plays, and the Vice from the morality plays. Scholars have disagreed about the direct influence of Seneca on Elizabethan drama, but as Jones says, 'Whenever tyrants are in question in Shakespeare, there is likely to be a Senecan feel somewhere in the diction', as there certainly is in the patterned rhetoric of *Richard III*.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Elizabethan revenge tragedy shares many conventions with the plays of Seneca, including, as James E. Ruoff lists them, 'the revenge theme, the ghost, the play-within-the-play, the dumb show, the soliloquy, the declamation and bombast, the emphasis on macabre brutalities, insanity and suicide'.<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's Richard, however, displays what A. P. Rossiter calls 'a most un-Senecan sense of humour'.<sup>3</sup> The idea of the tyrant who is both evil and funny probably came to Shakespeare through the native English drama. Herod, familiar from the Bible as an angry tyrant (see Matt. 2), had achieved popularity in medieval religious plays as a figure almost comic in his ranting violence.<sup>4</sup> But it was the secular moral drama of the same period, and especially its leading character, the Vice, that brought to the English stage a full-blown conception of comic evil. According to Robert Weimann, the Vice, an allegorical figure with a name such as Iniquity or Mischief, combined 'magician, doctor, and fool all in one'. Like Richard, this character manipulated others in the play while interacting, as though on another place, with the audience. To the delight of spectators, the Vice would introduce himself and his schemes directly, sometimes moving among the audience asking for money.<sup>5</sup> Vice characters were noted for puns, audience rapport and a subversive energy that the morality plays quashed in the end, often by banishing the Vice to Hell.<sup>6</sup>

The hybrid tradition of the morality-play Vice prefigures the audacious combination of tragic and comic that marks Shakespeare's *Richard III*. When Richard tells the audience that he is 'determinèd to prove a villain', he summarises the tragic conception of the play in a joke. His primary meaning is that he controls his own destiny. His pun also has a second, contradictory meaning – that his villainy is predestined – and the strong providentialism of the play ultimately endorses this meaning. Yet in spite of characters like Margaret who insist that God is on their side, the divine determinism at work in *Richard III* does not seem to be the 'special providence' that minutely arranges each event in human history; God does not necessarily contrive or even notice the fall of every sparrow. Queen Elizabeth, for example, rails against divine indifference to the deaths of her sons: 'Wilt thou,

<sup>1</sup> Jones, p. 270.

<sup>2</sup> See James E. Ruoff, *Cromwell's Handbook of Elizabethan and Stuart Literature*, 1975, p. 404.

<sup>3</sup> A. P. Rossiter, 'Angel with horns: the unity of *Richard III*', from *Angel with Horns* (1961), reprinted in *Shakespeare: The Histories: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Eugene M. Waith, 1965, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Weimann, p. 67. <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> For the Vice in relation to Shakespeare see Spivack and Weimann. On the mystery plays, see Rossiter.



O God, fly from such gentle lambs / And throw them in the entrails of the wolf? / When didst thou sleep when such a deed was done?’ (4.4.22–4). Margaret immediately answers that injustices have happened before: ‘When holy Harry died, and my sweet son’ (25). The providence of *Richard III* is rather the grand design of human salvation and damnation. God’s will is shown not by the victory of one faction or another, but by the fate of the human soul – in this case, Richard’s.<sup>1</sup> He is in this sense a tragic hero, opposing the will of the universe with his own, ‘all the world to nothing’.<sup>2</sup>

#### WOMEN AND DETERMINISM

In the first three acts of *Richard III*, Shakespeare almost seems to be on Richard’s side, showing us the world of the play from Richard’s point of view. Eventually, however, the play and presumably the audience withdraw their sympathy from Richard, turning instead to his victims, especially the relatively ‘flat’ female characters. Like Richard himself, the prophesying women in the play have links to characters in both classical and English drama. The scene of the ‘wailing queens’ (4.4), for example, has been compared to the lamentations of Helena, Andromache and Hecuba in Seneca’s *Troades*.<sup>3</sup> In addition, patterns of audience identification grounded in the English religious plays probably helped shift the attention of Shakespeare’s spectators away from Richard and toward the women. In their scenes together, the female characters in *Richard III* suggest responses conditioned by the Resurrection plays, specifically by the motif of the three Marys – Mary Magdalene, Mary Salome and Mary the mother of James – at the tomb of Jesus. Like the raging tyrant Herod and the crowd-pleasing Vice, the three Marys formed part of the native theatrical heritage for playwrights and playgoers of Shakespeare’s generation.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to these male figures, however, the three Marys were associated with solemnity and the central mystery of Christianity, the Resurrection of Jesus. Shakespeare makes use

<sup>1</sup> Camille Wells Slights points out that Margaret, too, is an unrepentant soul, and that she seems already to be suffering a kind of purgatory in this play. See ‘Cases of conscience in Shakespeare’s tragedies’, in *The Causistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton*, 1981, pp. 67–132.

<sup>2</sup> As Robert G. Hunter explains it, ‘Chance does not exist in the providentially controlled world which is suggested as a possibility in *Richard III*. Richard begins his last speech with the lines: “Slave, I have set my life upon a cast, / And I will stand the hazard of the dye” (5.4.9–10). The play answers Richard with Einstein’s reply to Bohr: “Der Herr Gott würfelt nicht.” The Lord God does not throw dice.’ See Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God’s Judgements*, 1976, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> See E. Koepfel, ‘Shakespeares *Richard III*. Und Senecas *Troades*’, *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 47 (1911), 188–90. For other perspectives on Seneca and the women’s scenes, see Harold F. Brooks, ‘*Richard III*: unhistorical amplifications: the women’s scenes and Seneca’, *Modern Language Review* 75 (1980), 721–37.

<sup>4</sup> The cycle plays, which were associated with Roman Catholicism, were discouraged by the Protestant authorities under Elizabeth, but they were still being performed in Shakespeare’s youth. Alan C. Dessen compares Shakespeare’s borrowings from the morality plays to contemporary filmmakers’ use of conventions from the classic cinematic Western. See *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays*, 1986, p. 8. As Dessen says, the conventions of earlier English drama – the religious cycle plays as well as the secular ‘moralls’ – continued to form part of the heritage of the Elizabethan theatre long after these plays had subsided as popular forms.

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of these conventions to direct the audience's sympathy away from Richard in the second part of the play.<sup>1</sup>

Each of the surviving Resurrection plays portrays three fundamental actions: the lamentation of the three Marys, the women's approach to the tomb – where they learn of the Resurrection from an angel or angels – and finally their testimony about what they have learned. The three female-group scenes in *Richard III* – all composed of triads or quasi-triads of women – echo these three traditional elements of the Resurrection plays. In 2.2, three women (and a boy) lament for Richard's victims, in 4.1, three women approach the tomb – here the ominous Tower of London – and in 4.4, after another great lamentation, three women bear witness to Richard's evil.<sup>2</sup> The most important of these scenes is 4.4, but the female characters' contributions in that scene depend on associations developed in the earlier female-group scenes that link them to the Marys and to the revelation of divine will. As the tradition of the Vice helped influence the Elizabethan audience's reaction to Richard, so the tradition of the three Marys helped turn them away from Richard's individualism toward acceptance of the final act's stately determinism.

The first of the play's two parts – 1.1 through 4.1 – focuses on Richard and his evil energy. In 4.2, however, the protagonist begins to decline. As Wolfgang Clemen puts it, 'There is a restless urgency about IV, ii, a quickening of tempo; one is conscious of the approaching catastrophe. The rise must now be followed by the fall.'<sup>3</sup> The interest of the audience is directed away from Richard's perversely appealing personality toward the enormity of his crimes and ultimately to the opposing virtues embodied in Richmond. Several earlier scenes prepare the audience for this turning. In 1.4, both Clarence and the Second Murderer speak movingly of repentance, a double contrast to Richard's incorrigible joy-in-wickedness. In 2.2, the Duchess, Clarence's children and Queen Elizabeth lament their losses – which the audience knows to be Richard's work. In 3.3, Rivers, Vaughan and Grey endorse Margaret's prophecies just before they are put to death.

The strongest preparation for the play's major turn occurs in 4.1. The entire scene presents an inverse analogue of the approach to Jesus's tomb in the Resurrection plays. The Duchess, Elizabeth and Anne salute each other as 'daughter' and 'sister', approach the Tower, and bewail rather than celebrate what they learn there – that Richard holds the princes captive and will soon be king. This scene, with its formal rhetoric and its links to the motif of the Marys, probably evoked religious contexts

<sup>1</sup> Dessen discusses the two-phased structure of *Richard III* against the background of a similar two-part action in the late morality plays. He argues that the second phase of *Richard III*, as it draws away from Richard and toward Richmond, would have been familiar and acceptable to Shakespeare's audience because of the still-remembered conventions of the moral drama (*Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays*).

<sup>2</sup> J. F. Royster, while also recognising Senecan parallels, pointed out similarities between *Richard III* 4.4 and the *Planctus* of the three Marys in Resurrection plays from several of the mystery cycles. See 'Richard III, IV.4 and the Three Marys of mediaeval drama', *Modern Language Notes* 25 (1910), 173–4. E. Koepfel ('Shakespeares *Richard III*. Und Senecas *Troades*') disagreed, arguing that the discord between Elizabeth, Margaret and the Duchess made them too unlike the three Marys for the medieval motif to have been a source.

<sup>3</sup> Clemen, p. 164.