

# KING RICHARD III

*Edited by*

JANIS LULL

*University of Alaska Fairbanks*



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## 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.

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 a 'bad quarto'<sup>4</sup> or merely 'contaminated',<sup>5</sup> emerges in Laurie E. Maguire's recent analy-

<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.

<sup>4</sup> See Wilson, p. xxix.

<sup>5</sup> Hammond, p. 83.

sis as a coherent play with few of the traditional signs attributed to pirated scripts or 'memorial reconstructions'.<sup>1</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>2</sup>

As Antony Hammond has pointed out, this dialogue seems more remote from Shakespeare's than that of *The True Tragedie*,<sup>3</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>4</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 for!' (3.2.124-7). As Philip Brockbank points out, when Richard 'takes the stage for his first exercise of the

<sup>1</sup> Maguire, pp. 317-18.

<sup>2</sup> See W. W. Greg, *Two Elizabethan Stage Abridgements: 'The Battle of Alcazar' and 'Orlando Furioso'*, 1922.

<sup>3</sup> Hammond, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, p. 196.

soliloquy-prerogative 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 Groats-worth 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 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.

<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.



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 (whose supporters wore a red rose) and the house of York (white rose) as divine

<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.

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

<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.

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).

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

<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.

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 plane, 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, 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,

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

<sup>2</sup> See James E. Ruoff, *Crowell'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.

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 of these conventions to direct the audience's sympathy away from Richard in the second part of the play.<sup>5</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

<sup>1</sup> Camille Wells Slight 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 Casuistical 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 Judgments*, 1976, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> See E. Koeppl, '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.

<sup>5</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*).

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>1</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>2</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 for Shakespeare's audience much more readily than it does today. In Elizabethan England, with its Calvinist emphasis on predestination, these associations must have suggested that the women in the play are not only on the side of right, but also on the side of destiny.

In the cycle plays, the three Marys – often almost indistinguishable as individual characters – act as stand-ins for the audience in their personal discovery of the Resurrection. So the Duchess, Elizabeth and Anne, by interrogating Richard's crimes and their own involvement with him, represent Shakespeare's spectators and help detach them from their earlier sympathy for the devil. Anne repents that she 'Grossly grew captive' to Richard's persuasions, and Elizabeth emphasises the innocence of

<sup>1</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>2</sup> Clemen, p. 164.

Richard's victims, while the Duchess acknowledges her own 'accursèd womb'. Recent critics have stressed the psychological effects on Richard of his mother's rejection, sometimes blaming her for his deformed character.<sup>1</sup> In the play, however, the emphasis falls not on Richard's suffering in his relationship with his mother, but on the Duchess's grief and shame at her own intimacy with evil. The Duchess's clear-eyed acknowledgement of her role in nurturing Richard and her rejection of what he has become match the audience's initial identification with and ultimate repudiation of the protagonist.

The most significant female triad in the play occurs in 4.4. In the preceding scenes, Richard has begun to lose his Vice-like confidence, sinking into himself rather than reaching out to the audience in his monologues: 'I must be married to my brother's daughter, / Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass' (4.2.61–2). And Tyrrel, himself a villain, has denounced the 'tyrannous and bloody' murder of the princes. In 4.4, three grieving women – Margaret, the Duchess and Elizabeth – again lament their losses at Richard's hands. Like Rivers, Grey and Hastings, Elizabeth comments on the accuracy of Margaret's earlier predictions:

Oh, thou didst prophesy the time would come  
That I should wish for thee to help me curse  
That bottled spider, that foul bunch-backed toad. (4.4.79–81)

As Margaret has predicted, her final function in the play is to teach the other women how to curse.<sup>2</sup> In her curses, Margaret speaks as the voice of destiny, but she stands outside the action of the play. Richard cannot hurt her, nor can she hurt him, at least not directly. When she transfers her cursing power to the other two women, however, that power comes as a kind of revelation. The Duchess and Elizabeth, who have feared and avoided Richard, now denounce him to his face for the first time in the play:

DUCHESS Thou toad, thou toad, where is thy brother Clarence,  
And little Ned Plantagenet, his son?  
ELIZABETH Where is the gentle Rivers, Vaughan, Grey?  
DUCHESS Where is kind Hastings? (145–8)

By confronting Richard (and the audience) with what he is and what he has done, the women relieve the tension and dread described by the Scrivener (3.6):

Who is so gross that cannot see this palpable device?  
Yet who so bold but says he sees it not?  
Bad is the world, and all will come to naught  
When such ill dealing must be seen in thought. (3.6.11–14)

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, C. L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler, *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare's Power of Development*, 1986, pp. 86–124; Bernard J. Paris, *Character as a Subversive Force in Shakespeare*, 1991, pp. 31–52; and Adelman, pp. 1–10.

<sup>2</sup> As Madonne M. Miner points out, these women, united in cursing, display a concord achieved by no other major group of characters in the play. See "Neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen": the roles of women in *Richard III*, in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely, 1980, pp. 35–55.

The Duchess and Elizabeth carry the bad news of Richard's crimes, but the fact that they speak out is good news. They bear witness to an evil heretofore only 'seen in thought' by most of those at court (always excepting Margaret). The Duchess vows to pray for Richard's adversaries, and Elizabeth holds her own against him as he seeks her daughter's hand. Although the Duchess and Elizabeth cannot overthrow Richard, the tide has turned. To reinforce the sense of relief that the women's testimony brings, Shakespeare has constructed a pattern of association between the play's major female characters and an ancient and solemn dramatic structure of lamentation, discovery and affirmation. If such associations are lost today, actors and directors must find ways to suggest their dramatic tone as part of an artistic context for the women in *Richard III*. When the women's parts are shortened or eliminated, both the female characters and the providential resolution of the plot can seem inadequate as foils to Richard's vitality.

#### IDENTITY AND CHOICE

Richard must lose everything unless he repents, and like Marlowe's Dr Faustus he refuses to repent. All the ghosts of Richard's victims order him in his sleep to 'despair and die', the same words Faustus says to himself when he abandons hope (scene 12). In spite of the ghosts' repeated commands, however, Richard does not despair. Starting out of his dream, he momentarily shakes off the theological dilemma of repentance versus despair and veers instead into a state Harold Bloom calls 'self-overhearing'. Bloom suggests that some characters in Shakespeare overhear their own speeches 'and pondering those expressions, they change and go on to contemplate an otherness in the self, or the possibility of such otherness'.<sup>1</sup> In *Richard III*, Shakespeare portrays this self-contemplation for the first time:

Give me another horse! Bind up my wounds!  
 Have mercy, Jesu! Soft, I did but dream.  
 O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me?  
 The lights burn blue. It is not dead midnight.  
 Cold, fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.  
 What? Do I fear myself? There's none else by.  
 Richard loves Richard, that is, I am I.  
 Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.  
 Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why:  
 Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?  
 Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good  
 That I myself have done unto myself?  
 Oh, no. Alas, I rather hate myself  
 For hateful deeds committed by myself.  
 I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not.  
 Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter.  
 My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,  
 And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
 And every tale condemns me for a villain.

<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 1994, p. 70.





1 David Garrick, who made his London debut as Richard III in 1741, in an engraving by William Hogarth. Richard is surrounded by objects he has dishonoured, including 'my George, my Garter, and my crown' (4.4.370)

Perjury in the highest degree,  
 Murder, stern murder, in the direst degree,  
 All several sins, all used in each degree,  
 Throng all to th'bar, crying all 'Guilty, guilty!'  
 I shall despair. There is no creature loves me,  
 And if I die no soul shall pity me.  
 Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself  
 Find in myself no pity to myself?

(5.3.180–206)

Many critics have seen in this passage the beginnings of modern tragedy. As Robert Weimann says, in *Richard III* 'It is not *Schicksalsdrama*, not the inscrutable workings of the gods, that finally tips the scales of life and death but the *Charakterdrama* of an individual passion and a self-willed personality.'<sup>1</sup> '[D]etermined to prove a villain' from the first, Richard unexpectedly confronts the possibility of repentance ('Have mercy, Jesu!'), then reaffirms his earlier course. He makes this choice not from

<sup>1</sup> Weimann, p. 160. See also Normal Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding*, 1967, p. 251: 'At this moment, crucial both in the play and in Shakespeare's career, the play turns to tragedy.' Not all critical readers agree. Adelman, for example, says that in this passage 'the effect is less of a psyche than of diverse roles confronting themselves across the void where a self should be' (p. 9).

despair, but as an assertion of will. Finding no pity in himself, he will ask for none, not even from God.

Richard does not really love Richard, in the sense that he harbours no tender feelings for himself, but neither will he hate himself. His remarkable self-overhearing on the day of battle results in the same outcome as if he had despaired, fallen into self-hatred, and so taken revenge on himself, as Anne once predicted (1.2.86–7). He will die and be damned. Yet psychologically, there is a difference. By electing to remain himself, Richard insists on free will in the face of determinism. As Coriolanus banishes Rome rather than passively suffer banishment, so Richard assumes his predestined identity as his own choice. This interior moment is the play's final gloss on the paradoxical pun of the opening soliloquy. Richard is – he always has been – 'determined to prove a villain', and he refuses to surrender his own part of the pun, his human determination, to cosmic determinism. He has no choice, but he chooses anyway, and in this gesture against fate he partakes of tragic heroism.

Following Richard's monologue on Bosworth morning, he regains his ruthless courage and dies bravely. Meanwhile, the female characters, whose ritualised formality and association with providence helped distance the audience from Richard, have disappeared from the play. The result is a curiously flat triumph by Richmond, who says all the right things – pardons Richard's soldiers, promises peace and does not forget to ask after young George Stanley – but somehow evokes no joy. It is not Richard we mourn for, exactly, but his tragic defiance, and *Richard III* makes space for such mourning at the end. As Jones points out, the play supports determinism from the outset, not only by dealing with historical events of known outcome, but also by repeatedly reminding us of what we know (*Origins*, pp. 222–3). Throughout the wooing of Elizabeth, for example (4.4), 'the terms in which the dialogue is couched are such as to induce us to contemplate the future – the real future – of the Queen's daughter, "young Elizabeth", who we know will marry Richmond'.<sup>1</sup> Yet Richard's heroic end, like the sketchiness of Richmond's part and the withdrawal of the women from the end of the play, allows playgoers to leave the theatre a little defiant themselves, still a little on the side of choice, although mainly reconciled to determinism. Perhaps, as Jones says, a play in which the appearance of free will yields to a sense of higher determinism 'can achieve its fullest effect only in a society officially committed to a belief in God'.<sup>2</sup> Some such opinion about the changing faith of the audience may inform the many productions of *Richard III* that reduce the play's emphasis on providential destiny and overplay Richard's delicious wickedness. But perhaps in an era committed to a belief in science and natural law, the conflict between determinism and human will can be as relevant to audiences as it must have been in a climate of official Protestantism. Questions that arise in *Richard III* trouble philosophers still: do people create themselves, or are they created by chains of causation reaching back to a first cause?<sup>3</sup> If determinism is true, is anyone really free?<sup>3</sup> Like Richard, we want to

<sup>1</sup> Jones, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>3</sup> For a non-technical treatment of such issues by a contemporary philosopher, see Ted Honderich, *How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem*, 1993.



2 *The Ghosts vanish. King Richard starts out of his Dream*: an eighteenth-century engraving of the dream scene (5.3) by Henry Fuseli, showing triads of ghosts

believe that we are ourselves alone, but like the play Richard inhabits, the universe we live in seems to hint that we are no such things.

### *Richard III and Macbeth*

Shakespeareans have long recognised the similarities between *Macbeth* and *Richard III*. In 1817, for example, the actor-manager John Philip Kemble published *Macbeth and King Richard III*, in which he defended Macbeth's personal courage against a charge by Thomas Whately that, by contrast with the intrepid Richard, Macbeth was constitutionally timid. Although Whately and Kemble differed in their opinions of the leading characters, the fact that they compared the protagonists at all implies that they saw fundamental likenesses in the two plays. The many parallels suggest that Shakespeare saw such likenesses, too.<sup>1</sup>

*Macbeth* revisits the issue of the villain-hero that Shakespeare first addressed in *Richard III*. As Rossiter says, 'Richard Plantagenet is alone with Macbeth as the Shakespearian version of the thoroughly bad man in the role of monarch and hero.'<sup>2</sup> Both protagonists are warriors, at their best when they 'bustle', and both maintain their warrior defiance to the end. Yet their own energies transform these soldiers into schemers who end up wallowing in rivers of blood. Richard, after ordering the young princes killed, muses that 'I am in / So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin' (4.2.64–5). Macbeth, contemplating the murders of Banquo and Fleance, repeats and expands Richard's figure: 'I am in blood / Stepped in so far, that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er' (3.4.135–7). The relationship of Macbeth's line to Richard's may serve as an emblem for the relationship of the two plays. *Macbeth* echoes, revises and deepens *Richard III*, exploring again the tragic contradiction between a universe ordered by causation and a heroic conception of human free choice.

Richard ambiguously asserts that he is 'determinèd to prove a villain', but the cosmic joke is on him. The play he inhabits suggests that his half of the pun, his determination, is illusory. Since Richard cannot be other than he is, cannot do other than he does, how can he be either a hero or a villain? Yet dramatically, he is both. The play makes him so, not by examining his inner life, but structurally, by provoking first identification and then distance in its audience. *Macbeth* treats the same paradoxes, but in another style. As A. R. Braunmuller puts the questions for *Macbeth*, 'If the prophecies are true before the play begins, or before Macbeth and Banquo hear them, or before Macbeth and Banquo have acted, where is the willed action that allows the audience to discover responsibility and hence to experience guilt? If Macbeth could

<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, many differences between Richard III and Macbeth. Most critics would probably agree to some extent with James L. Calderwood's summary: 'Richard embraces the bestial difference that sets him apart from and beneath humankind. Macbeth unwillingly falls into bestiality in an effort to attain the regal difference that will raise him above beasts and other men.' See Calderwood, *If It Were Done: Macbeth and Tragic Action*, 1986. One might add that Macbeth is not a misogynist, at least not to the degree that Richard is.

<sup>2</sup> Rossiter, 'Angel with horns', p. 76.

never act otherwise, could never *not* choose to murder Duncan, and if, putatively, Banquo could never resist thoughts of usurpation, “the cursèd thoughts that nature / Gives way to in repose” (2.1.8–9), where is the tragedy, the dire consequence of an ignorant or misunderstood act, of these events? If, alternatively, the prophecies only become true when they are enacted by responsible and hence arguably tragic and guilty human agents, how may they be called “prophecies” at all?<sup>1</sup>

Where *Richard III* uses dramatic technique and cultural memory to involve the audience in the clash between Richard’s individualism and his fate, *Macbeth* uses psychology. Only following the dream scene in *Richard III*, and then only once, does Richard talk *to* himself rather than *about* himself. Macbeth does it from the first:

This supernatural soliciting  
 Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,  
 Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
 Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.  
 If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,  
 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
 And make my seated heart knock at my ribs  
 Against the use of nature?

(1.3.130–7)

Between the two plays, Shakespeare has shifted from a medieval to a modern conception of character. Yet structural and verbal memories of *Richard III* pervade *Macbeth*. The recurring female-triad scenes of *Richard III* are echoed in *Macbeth* by the highly dramatic appearances of the three witches. In both plays, groups of three women are associated with fate. When the female characters in *Richard III* appear together in triads, they align themselves not just with destiny but with a distinctly Christian providence. *Macbeth* makes the symbolic association between female triads and fate even clearer by linking the women overtly to prophecy and the supernatural. At the same time, by transforming the three women into witches, *Macbeth* renders their connection to the liturgical–theatrical tradition of the Three Marys almost untraceable, allowing the audience to regard them as suspicious and alien. Like many of the other common elements shared by *Richard III* and *Macbeth*, the motif of the three women becomes more equivocal in the latter.

The association between female triads and witchcraft may have been suggested in part by Margaret’s first scene in *Richard III* (1.3). She assumes the same kind of prophetic role as the witches in *Macbeth*, and Richard calls her a ‘Foul wrinkled witch’ (162). Margaret also seems to be magically immune from retaliation, either for cursing the queen and courtiers or for violating her banishment. Although she only later (4.4) becomes part of a threesome of women, perhaps the idea of the three fates as witches arose from these two different aspects of Margaret in *Richard III*. Certainly some modern students of Shakespeare have made the connection between the witches of *Macbeth* and the women of *Richard III*. In a recent regional production of *Richard III*, Margaret had the power to freeze the other actors in their tracks while she spoke her asides to the audience, and in 4.4 she executed a trancelike circle dance with Elizabeth

<sup>1</sup> See Braunnüller, p. 42.

and the Duchess of York, the three of them chanting Margaret's lines: 'Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray, / To have him suddenly conveyed from hence' (4.4.75-6).<sup>1</sup>

Another device that works similarly in both plays is child murder. Both protagonists recognise that they have crossed a moral line when they first decide to move against the young: Richard against the princes, Macbeth against Fleance. Both killers defend the step by recalling that they are deep in blood already, but this self-justification can only alienate further an audience previously conditioned to regard the murder of innocents with horror. When he fails to kill Fleance, Macbeth turns savagely on the family of Macduff. Reflecting the greater psychological immediacy of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare stages the later child killings, which he clearly avoided doing in *Richard III*. *Macbeth's* mother-and-child murder scene, 4.1, focuses on little Macduff, a direct descendant of sharp-witted little York. After the children are killed, both plays raise doubts about divine concern for innocents. Macduff's anguished question at the deaths of his family, 'did heaven look on, / And would not take their part?' (4.3.223-4), recalls Elizabeth's protests to God over her own slaughtered children, 'When didst thou sleep when such a deed was done?' (4.4.24). A reply of a sort seems to come in the mental experiences of the protagonists. God's wakefulness shows in the wakefulness of Richard and Macbeth; they have murdered their own sleep. The first hint of Richard's disturbed rest comes from Anne, who complains that 'never yet one hour in his bed / Did I enjoy the golden dew of sleep, / But with his timorous dreams was still awaked' (4.1.83-5). Macbeth speaks of 'these terrible dreams / That shake us nightly' (3.3.18-19). After their climactic child killings, both tyrants are also haunted by the ghosts of their victims. In the double dream of Richard and Richmond, the ghosts of the slain princes predict that Richmond will survive the battle 'and beget a happy race of kings', the Tudor dynasty (5.3.160). In a mirror moment in *Macbeth*, the witches show Macbeth a line of future kings (including James I) who will spring from Banquo (4.1.111-23).

In the end, both tyrant-heroes are alone. Just as Blunt observes that Richard 'hath no friends but what are friends for fear, / Which in his dearest need will fly from him' (5.2.20-1), Macbeth tells the doctor that 'the thanes fly from me' (5.3.49), and Malcolm describes Macbeth as deserted: 'none serve with him but constrained things / Whose hearts are absent too' (5.4.13-14). Richard has his moment of conscience on Bosworth morning, but reverts quickly to his usual ruthless behaviour. (Colley Cibber's adaptation of 1700 underscores the reversion by having Richard announce, '*Richard's* himself again' (p. 52). Cibber's line, making explicit what Shakespeare only implies, endured in the performance tradition for more than two centuries.) Macbeth also has a last moment of doubt near the end: "I pull in resolution, and begin / To doubt th'equivocation of the fiend / That lies like truth' (5.5.41-3). Then he, too, becomes 'himself again', warlike and doomed: 'Blow wind, come wrack; / At least we'll die with harness on our back' (*Macbeth* 5.5.50-1). Both villains go out fighting, speaking memorably brave exit lines; Richard's 'A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a

<sup>1</sup> Lord Leebrick Theatre Co., Eugene, Oregon, directed by Chris Pinto, 1998.

horse!’ (5.4.7, 13) parallels Macbeth’s ‘Lay on, Macduff, / And damned be him that first cries, “Hold, enough!”’ (5.8.33–4).

The list of correspondences large and small between the two plays might be lengthened, but these are enough to show that Shakespeare, like Whately and Kemble, regarded the two dramas as closely related. *Macbeth* reworks themes and issues from *Richard III* in light of all the ways the author’s writing had changed in the decade or more that separated the plays. Returning to the problem of the villain as tragic protagonist, *Macbeth* again raises issues of fate and personal responsibility. It poses similar questions about audience identification with a strong, smart ‘hero’ who is also evil. To modern spectators, *Macbeth* probably leaves the answers even less clear than *Richard III* does. With its steady stream of introspective soliloquies, *Macbeth* places the audience *inside* the central character, which is a harder place for contemporary playgoers to retreat from than the moral theatre of *Richard III*.

### Plot and language in *Richard III*

*Richard III* focuses on the rise and fall of Richard. For all its huge cast, the play has no subplots. Opposing groups of characters – Margaret, Richard’s brothers, Elizabeth’s family, the York women, the York children, courtiers such as Hastings, Stanley, Buckingham, Ratcliffe and Catesby, and the Earl of Richmond – all are juxtaposed in various combinations to advance Richard’s story. This single focus gives the play a classic pyramid structure: ‘rising’ action to the peak of the pyramid, climax and crisis, then ‘falling’ action to the end.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with the exposition in Richard’s opening soliloquy, the rising action – Richard’s ascent to the throne – continues until 4.2, often called the ‘coronation’ scene, although in Shakespeare’s script the crowning takes place offstage.<sup>2</sup> Richard has achieved the kingship, and this is the peak of his fortunes. Immediately, the crisis or turn occurs. The new king begins to falter, expressing an uncharacteristic lack of confidence to the evidently puzzled Buckingham:

Thus high, by thy advice and thy assistance,  
Is King Richard seated.

But shall we wear these glories for a day?  
Or shall they last, and we rejoice in them?

BUCKINGHAM Still live they, and forever let them last.

RICHARD Ah, Buckingham, now do I play the touch  
To try if thou be current gold indeed.

Young Edward lives; think now what I would speak.

BUCKINGHAM Say on, my loving lord.

RICHARD Why, Buckingham, I say I would be king.

BUCKINGHAM Why, so you are, my thrice-renowned lord.

(4.2.4–14)

The falling action begins immediately, as Richard begins to lose his earlier skill at controlling his environment. He continues his murders, killing the princes and

<sup>1</sup> This triangular structure is sometimes called Freytag’s Pyramid, after Gustav Freytag, who described it in his *Technique of the Drama*, 1863.

<sup>2</sup> Many productions add a silent coronation ceremony here, often quite elaborate.

possibly Anne, but Richmond gathers strength at a distance, and Margaret scents catastrophe:

So now prosperity begins to mellow  
 And drop into the rotten mouth of death.  
 Here in these confines slyly have I lurked  
 To watch the waning of mine enemies.  
 A dire induction am I witness to,  
 And will to France, hoping the consequence  
 Will prove as bitter, black, and tragical.

(4.4.1–7)

Historically, Margaret left England in 1476 and died in 1482, three years before Richard's defeat at Bosworth. Her anachronistic appearance in Shakespeare's play serves several dramatic purposes. In her first scene, 1.3, Margaret foreshadows the main action with her curses and prophecies. She returns at the beginning of 4.4 to underscore the prophecies' fulfilment, which the audience has already seen in the deaths of King Edward, Rivers, Hastings and the Prince of Wales, and in the declines of Buckingham and Elizabeth. The evident association of Margaret with destiny marks her as Richard's antagonist, as does her relationship to the audience. Alone among the characters, Margaret and Richard say things that only the spectators can hear, even while other characters occupy the stage. This makes them both more and less 'real' than the other figures in the play: more real because they are closer to the audience, less real because they break the dramatic illusion with their soliloquies and asides. Their equivocal status, both in and out of the action, sets these two apart. Richard and Margaret oppose each other as if across a crowded room, speaking over the heads of characters who inhabit only the stage-play world.

The theatrical vocabulary of Margaret's opening soliloquy in 4.4 – words such as 'induction' and 'tragical' – calls attention to the rhetorical neatness of the play's shape. This neatness lies not only in the pyramidal structure of the action and in Margaret's prophetic antagonism, but also in paired or 'mirror' scenes that enhance the atmosphere of prophecy and confirmation. The wooing of Anne is matched and to some degree inverted by the wooing of Elizabeth (1.2 and 4.4). Clarence's dream and the murderers' debate about conscience (1.4) are matched by Richard's dream and his debate about conscience with himself (5.3). Similarly, Margaret's speech at the start of 4.4 matches and transforms Richard's famous self-introduction at the beginning of the play and carries on the imagery of seasonal change. In Richard's soliloquy, the winter of discontent, his home season, gives way to a 'glorious summer' that he does not want. Now it is autumn, the season most congenial to Margaret, and she watches greedily while Richard's overripe prosperity starts to 'drop into the rotten mouth of death'. As she tells the Duchess, 'I am hungry for revenge, / And now I cloy me with beholding it' (4.4.61–2). The wheel has turned, and once again a lurking, isolated speaker observes the change both with triumph and with bitterness. The drama begins again, only this time it is Margaret's play instead of Richard's.

In addition to the structure of its scenes, the play's design also includes its highly patterned language. Critics have often noted, for example, the contrast between the