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Richard III

The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare

VOLUME 29

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
EDITED BY JOHN DOVER WILSON



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge New York Melbourne Madrid Cape Town Singapore São Paulo Delhi

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108006019

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2009

This edition first published 1954, 1961

This digitally printed version 2009

ISBN 978-1-108-00601-9

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

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BY

JOHN DOVER WILSON

RICHARD III

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RICHARD III



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by
Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521094962

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First published 1954
Pocket edition giving the New Shakespeare
text and glossary with corrections 1959
Second impression, with further corrections 1961
Third impression 1965
First paperback edition 1968
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-07553-4 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-09496-2 paperback

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INTRODUCTION

A. TEXT AND DATE

For a present-day editor the outstanding problem of *Richard III* is its text, the origins and nature of which were first satisfactorily explained, and the superiority of the folio to the quarto version finally vindicated, in a book published by Professor Patrick of Arizona as recently as 1936.¹ Since then only one edition as far as I know has appeared, Professor Peter Alexander's in *The Tudor Shakespeare*, 1951; and the fact that his text differs from Aldis Wright's in the classical *Cambridge Shakespeare*² in well over a thousand readings reveals at once the corrupt state of most current texts and the magnitude of the issues involved. For a discussion of these issues the reader is referred to Sir Walter Greg's *Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, 1942 (2nd ed. 1951),³ or to the Note on the Copy below. Considering it was but a single item in a thorough-going recension of the whole canon, Alexander's *Richard III* is an astonishing *tour de force*; and the present edition is deeply indebted to it.⁴ First drafting my own text in the light of Patrick's theory and Greg's comment upon it, I was reassured to find on turning to Alexander's that our differences as regards readings, where the choice lay between the folio and the quarto, were remarkably few. In some of these he won me over; in others, as my notes record, he did not. Speaking generally, however, I convinced myself that drastic as his purge had been,

¹ *The Textual History of 'Richard III'*, by D. L. Patrick, Stanford University Press.

² *The Cambridge Shakespeare* (2nd ed. 1891).

³ Pp. 77–88.

⁴ His punctuation I have found particularly helpful.

it had not been drastic enough; in other words, that he had not sufficiently allowed for the corrupting influence of the quarto text upon the folio. For the folio *Richard III*, or at least some five-sixths of it, was printed, as P. A. Daniel showed seventy years ago, not from a theatre manuscript, but from a copy of the sixth quarto (1622), imperfectly collated with such a manuscript. Thus it is contaminated not only by misprints originating in the sixth or earlier quartos but also by perversions and vulgarisms going back to the First Quarto (1597), which as Patrick has now shown is a 'reported text', i.e. one reconstructed by actors from memory. Alexander has overlooked some of the folio readings traceable to quarto misprints,¹ and has hardly at all availed himself of the liberty implied in Greg's important statement that readings in which the folio and the quartos agree are those 'most vulnerable to criticism and open to emendation'.² Accepting this challenge I have not hesitated to print some sixty readings³ in my text which depart both from folio and quartos (i.e. they are emendations in the fullest sense of the word), and from most editions, including Alexander's, published during the last hundred years, though a large proportion may be found in those of the eighteenth century. For over half of them, whether original or revived, I stand indebted to Miss Alice Walker and Mr J. C. Maxwell. To the latter, indeed, this edition owes a good deal more besides, inasmuch as he read through the whole in draft, enriched the notes with valuable suggestions drawn from the stores of his reading, and rid them of not a few errors.

Our earliest dated reference to the play is its entry in the Stationers' Register on 20 October 1597 by the

¹ See pp. 151-2 below.

² Greg, *op. cit.* p. 88.

³ See pp. 156-8, for a list of these.

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London publisher, Andrew Wise, which was succeeded in the same year by the issue of the First Quarto edition under the following compendious, if somewhat ostentatious, title, derived perhaps from a play-bill:

The Tragedy of | King Richard the third. | Containing, | His treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence: | the pittiefull murder of his innocent nephewes: | his tyrannicall vsurpation: with the whole course | of his detested life, and most deserued death. |

As it hath beene lately Acted by the | Right honourable the Lord Chamber- | laine his seruants.

The performances here alluded to were, however, assuredly not those of the play's original production. Wise's text, which we now label Q 1, was as Professor Patrick has shown, in fact printed neither from the author's manuscript nor from a prompt-book derived from it, but in all likelihood from a version vamped up by a troupe of the Chamberlain's company touring the provinces in the summer of 1597, when, as we know, owing to a government restraint of plays in London from 28 July till early in October¹ they undertook their only prolonged tour between 1594 and the end of Elizabeth's reign.² It follows that London performances from the authentic 'book' must have been of earlier date; and, since the play is a sequel to *3 Henry VI*, and closely connected with it,³ while its style and psychology are generally regarded as belonging to the first period of Shakespeare's dramatic career, it was probably composed soon, if not immediately, after that play, which would date it as Chambers suggests⁴

¹ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, i. 298–9.

² Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, i. 64.

³ Shakespeare had obviously begun *Richard III* in mind, if not on paper, when writing the soliloquy at *3 Henry VI*, 3. 2. 124 ff.

⁴ Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, i. 61, 270.

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towards the end of 1592 or some time during 1593. Now Shakespeare may have had a good deal of time upon his hands at this period, since from 28 June 1592 and, except for a brief season at the Christmas and Twelfth Night festivities, right down to near the end of 1593, all the London theatres were closed owing to a severe attack of the plague.¹ And, though the two Poems he then wrote and dedicated to Southampton will account for some of the time, we may guess that the rest was occupied in the composition of plays against the day when the number of deaths by plague per week would fall low enough in London to permit of public performances once again. If so *Richard III* was probably one of the plays written at this period, while we may plausibly suppose that it was first produced by the Chamberlain's company shortly after its formation in the spring of 1594.

That it was instantly successful, whenever produced, allows of little doubt. And Crookback, which is known to have been one of Burbage's parts,² is likely to have been that for which he was most famous in the middle nineties. The play's immense popularity is also attested by the fact that no fewer than six editions of it were published in quarto before a better text was included in the Folio of 1623, a record only equalled by the Quarto of *1 Henry IV* 'with the humorous conceits of Sir Iohn Falstaffe'; while the number of contemporary allusions to it, or imitations of it, which have survived seems to be larger than that of any other Shakespeare play except perhaps *Hamlet*.³ It was in fact the best shocker of the age, with a villain who embodied some of the Elizabethans' pet detestations. As a monster,

¹ See *2 Henry VI*, Introduction, p. x.

² *Elizabethan Stage*, ii. 308. See *Stage-History*, p. xlvi.

³ See Herford, *Eversley Shakespeare*, vi. 395-6, and our *Stage-History loc. cit.*

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physically and morally, he ministered to the pleasurable abhorrence which men of all periods and classes experience in the contemplation of a hideous and inhuman criminal type; and as a godless and blood-thirsty tyrant he was admirably fitted to be the protagonist of a Senecan tragedy, at that date the only form of tragedy approved by the literary dictators.

B. THE SOURCES¹(a) *The chronicles*

What may be called the ultimate sources of the play, though Shakespeare is unlikely to have made direct use of either of them, are (i) the *Anglica Historia* of Polydore Vergil, an Italian humanist who, coming to England in 1502 as a collector of Peter's Pence, was later engaged by Henry VII to write the first Tudor history of England, which he completed about 1516 and began to publish in 1534; and (ii) *The History of King Richard the Third*, by Sir Thomas More, which, left unfinished about 1513, was not published until after his death. Though very different in scope and differing also in detail when treating the same period, the two books were written by friends, inspired by loyalty to the house of Tudor, and revealing much the same outlook and political prejudices. These More himself imbibed, together with much of his facts, from Richard's contemporaries including More's father, his

¹ This section, though an independent survey, owes much to C. L. Kingsford, *English Historical Literature in the Fifteenth Century*, 1913, and G. B. Churchill, *Richard the Third up to Shakespeare*, 1900. For Polydore and the relation between the chronicles readers may also be referred to *The 'Anglica Historia' of Polydore Vergil*, ed. by Denys Hay, 1950, and *Polydore Vergil* by the same author, 1952.

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grandfather, and his patron Cardinal Morton, the Bishop of Ely who fetches strawberries for Richard in Act 3, scene 5, and who was actually one of the principal agents of Richard's downfall, as More is evidently about to make clear when his book breaks off short in the middle of a lengthy discussion between Morton and Buckingham on the subject of Richard's claim to the throne. Thus More's *History* covers the play down to Act 4, scene 4, the eve of Buckingham's rebellion, and is to that point its main, almost its sole, source. Yet, as we shall see, the play owes something to Polydore both in atmosphere and structure, together with a few 'facts' and incidents here and there, which will be indicated in the Notes. Both More and Polydore, however, reached the dramatist through the medium of Hall and Holinshed, the chroniclers upon whom the play is immediately based, and it is necessary therefore to give some account of the versions or perversions which they offered.

First, then, More left behind him two texts of his *History*, both now accepted as authentic;¹ one in Latin, which takes us down to the coronation of Richard; and the other in English, which as just noted stops short a little later on. The Latin manuscript was printed with More's *Latina Opera* in 1566; the English one nine years earlier with the English *Works* collected and published by More's son-in-law Rastell in 1557. But Rastell had the Latin before him also and so was able to insert here and there into his English text brief additional passages translated from it, carefully indicating at the same time their presence and extent. Very different was the treatment accorded to a copy of the English manuscript which at a still earlier date fell into the hands of the hack-chronicler Richard Grafton, who

¹ R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More*, pp. 21, 115-17. For previous doubts, v. Kingsford, *op. cit.* pp. 185-90.

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garbled it at will, supplemented it for Richard's reign with material drawn mainly from Polydore, and printed it in 1543 as part of his prose 'continuation' of Hardyng's verse *Chronicle*. It was this corrupt version of More's English *History*, lacking of course Rastell's insertions from the Latin, which Hall adopted practically word for word, except for a few moralizing additions, in the chronicle entitled *The Union of the Houses of Lancaster and York* that he published in 1548, drawing upon Polydore in his turn for an independent account of the rest of Richard's reign, with elaborations of his own such as the 'orations' of Richard and Richmond at Bosworth, from which the two speeches in Act 5, scene 3, are derived.¹ Twenty years later the industrious Grafton returned to the charge with a fresh account of the usurpation and reign of Richard which formed the chapters on Edward V and Richard III in his *Chronicle at large*, 1569, and virtually consisted of a reprint of Rastell's text eked out by Hall's chronicle, both of which were now available. Finally we come to the play's principal direct source, the chapters on Edward IV, Edward V and Richard III in the *Chronicles* of Holinshed, who furnished a faithful reproduction of Rastell's text, together with much from Hall for what came before and what followed the events More describes, while he also took over some of the items for which Grafton was responsible.

Of all these chronicles two only, the compilations of Hall (or Grafton, 1569)² and of Holinshed, were actually utilized for the drafting of the play. Recourse to Holinshed is proved by verbal links or misreadings, such as those cited in my notes on 1. 1. 137, 2. 3

¹ Chambers, pp. 115-17; Kingsford, pp. 187-8, 263.

² Grafton's *Chronicle at large* follows Hall so closely that it is often impossible to say which of the two is the source.

(*Material*); by the reference to details not given in other sources, such as the bleeding of Henry VI's corpse (1. 2. 55-6) and the omen of Rougemont Castle (4. 2. 102-10); and finally by the error of 'mother's' for 'brother's' at 5. 3. 324, which proves further that the edition used was not the first but the second (1587), in which this error originated. Nor is the play's debt to Hall any less certain, though Hall's close dependence upon Grafton's continuation of Hardyng makes it necessary to keep that in view as a possible alternative. Thus the brace of bishops between whom Richard stands at the audience given to the Mayor in 3. 7, 'ornaments' not spoken of in More or Holinshed, might have been set down to Hall's notorious Protestant prejudice, were they not to be found in Grafton's Hardyng (1543), as were also the points he supplied at 2. 1. 67-9 and 3. 1. 164.¹ A conclusive link with Hall (or Grafton, 1569), however, is to be seen in the reference at 3. 5. 76-8 to a tyrannical execution by Edward IV. All More, Grafton's Hardyng (1543) and Holinshed tell us is the victim's name and that he 'was for a word spoken in haste, cruelly beheaded'; from Hall (or Grafton, 1569) alone could Shakespeare have learnt that he was a London tradesman jesting upon the sign of the crown hanging before his shop.

(b) *Shakespeare's debt to More*

Yet when all is said Shakespeare's chief debt, whether he knew it or not, was to Sir Thomas More; and it is strange, to some extent exasperating, that this of all plays should be the joint product of the two greatest minds of the Tudor age, since it afforded little or no scope for the humanity, tenderness and spiritual depth

¹ See notes below.

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which characterize them both. Had he completed, on his own account, the revision begun in the famous Three Pages of *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, now lying at the British Museum, Shakespeare might have given us all these things and more in a portrait of the great Chancellor himself. As it is we must make the best of the portrait below of our legendary Bunchback, a portrait which is virtually all More's except—a large exception—for the twinkle in the eye and the tone of voice; a tone self-assured, almost impishly gay, and most engagingly cynical, which we first hear in the opening soliloquy and listen to entranced until at last conscience makes its inevitable entry with the ghosts in Act 5—though even then, be it noted, only when the voice is stilled and the mind wrapped in sleep. And yet, since this gaiety is hardly at all evident in what Richard has to say in *Henry VI*,¹ it seems likely that it was suggested by the irony which is so striking a feature of More's *History*.² For though he depicts Richard merely as a grim arch-villain, More constantly views him from a drily humorous standpoint. When Richard, for example, as part of the campaign for the blackening of Hastings's character after his suspiciously hasty execution, orders his paramour, Mistress Shore, to be put to open penance, More remarks that in this he shows himself 'a goodly continent prince, clean and faultless of himself, sent out of heaven into this vicious world for the amendment of men's manners'.³ To a mind like Shakespeare's, which took suggestion as a

¹ What there is of it in *3 Henry VI* was, I suspect, added after Shakespeare began reading the chronicles for *Richard III*.

² Cf. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 209.

³ More, *History of King Richard the Third*, ed. by J. R. Lumby, p. 53; Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 1587, .iii. 724/2.

cat laps milk, such comments, aided by Grafton's touch of the brace of bishops at the audience with the Mayor, were probably enough to supply the whole apparatus of Richard's mock sanctimony: the 'odd old ends stolen forth of Holy Writ', the downcast eye as he says, 'I thank my God for my humility', the shocked protest of 'O do not swear, my lord of Buckingham', and so forth. What More did not and surely would not have suggested is the infectious glee which Richard takes in the concoction and carrying out of his various intrigues, so infectious that whereas with Iago, his nearest parallel, our sympathies are all for the victims, with Richard we despise the victims and almost applaud the villain.

More's *Richard III*, his biographer R. W. Chambers tells us, 'with all its grim characterization of the last Yorkist king... is not a piece of Lancastrian propaganda', as Polydore Vergil's account of the reign and Hall's undoubtedly were, but 'an attack on the non-moral statecraft of the early sixteenth century'.¹ Is he right when he goes on to claim that 'Shakespeare's Richard is More's Richard' in this as in other respects? Does not the pleasure which the dramatist takes in him and makes his audience share, eclipse any such ethical-political significance? To our modern minds, which, despite all the current jargon of ambivalence and ambiguity, are far more of the single-track type than those of the Elizabethans, it would seem that this must be so. But in the post-medieval world, half-Christian, half-pagan, and not in the least rationalistic in our sense of the word, it was not only possible but for persons of any intelligence almost a matter of course to entertain two or three apparently inconsistent attitudes or values at the same time. Nor was there anything novel in condemning on moral or religious grounds a character

¹ R. W. Chambers, *op. cit.* p. 117.

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thoroughly enjoyed on aesthetic ones. By Shakespeare's day playgoers had been accustomed to such 'ambivalence' for centuries. Herod, the Vice, the Devil himself, had been at once horrible and comic in the Miracles. And their failure to understand this two-mindedness in the Elizabethan audience has led many critics astray in their estimate of the true significance of Falstaff. Thus only by realizing that Shakespeare expects us at once to enjoy and to detest the monstrous Richard can we fully appreciate the play he wrote about him. And though this gaiety and attitude of self-assured contempt are additions to More's portrait, we can be sure that had More lived to see Shakespeare's re-creation of his *History* he would have applauded it to the echo, with the pride of a master in a pupil who has bettered his instruction. It is in fact difficult to exaggerate Shakespeare's debt to More at this stage of his development; probably he learnt as much from him as he did from Plutarch later. 'It is from More', Chambers notes for example, 'that Shakespeare takes something of the tragic idea in which his *Richard III* reminds us of Greek drama: the feeling of fate hanging over blind men who can see what is happening to others but are unconscious of their own danger. "The vain surety of man's mind, so near his death"—that is the moral of More's *Richard III*.' Or again observe how in passing from *Henry VI* to *Richard III* we seem to step straight from the medieval into the modern world. That is partly because the rise of totalitarian states, which is the mark of our time, has brought Europe back to the technique of Italian renaissance politics, while *Richard III*, with its intrigues, counterplots, sudden executions, and secret assassinations, is the earliest and most faithful representation in English drama of the character of a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Italian tyrant. But this Shakespeare owed almost entirely to

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More, who was a grown man when Alexander VI died, and having heard much of the Borgias and other Italian rulers may have involuntarily transferred some of their features to the last Yorkist king, persuaded thereto perhaps by Cardinal Morton. And that Shakespeare, to some extent at least, himself realized the Italian analogies is suggested by Richard's scoffing attitude towards religion and his boast (in defiance of history, chronological and biographical alike) that he will 'set the murderous Machiavel to school'.¹ It is even possible that the portrait of the portentous Margaret, which is Shakespeare's own, may owe something to the extraordinary character of that Amazon, if not 'Amazonian trull', Catarina Sforza. In any case the age which produced the real woman would have found nothing beyond belief in the fictitious one.

Shakespeare's audience then accepted the play as, like its main source, a reflection upon 'the non-moral statecraft of the early sixteenth century', and no doubt of the later sixteenth century too. But what about Lancastrian or rather Tudor propaganda? The notion that More's *History* is a deliberate falsification of Richard's career and character in the interests of Henry VII, who it has actually been suggested himself murdered the young princes after Bosworth,² is of course absurd. Minor inaccuracies, like the lacunae, are inevitable in a book left unfinished and unrevised, while the invention of long speeches for characters like Edward IV and Buckingham was what had been expected of a historian since the days of Thucydides. It is even likely that More gave play to his artistic instincts by dramatizing some of the episodes. But

¹ *3 Henry VI*, 3. 2. 193.

² I do not say he was incapable of it. The liquidation of Clarence's son (v. note, 4. 2. 54) shows him clearing the steps to the throne, like a prudent upstart.

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nothing of this touches his veracity, which is surely beyond question: he sincerely believed Richard was the sort of man he depicts, capable not only of the actions he ascribes to him but also of those he admits were mere rumours. Hearsay was indeed the only source available when he wrote; yet hearsay of a very different authority from that upon which a modern journalist might build in an attempt to denigrate a statesman recently dead. True, More's patron, Cardinal Morton is unlikely to have taken an impartial or objective view of Richard. But it is not certain that Morton was his chief, or even an important witness; and, had he been, the information he gave was easily checked by that of many others living during the events of 1483-5, more particularly by what he heard from the lips of his father and grandfather, both men of indubitable integrity and prominent citizens of London. In a word, we cannot doubt that More presents us the essential truth about Richard as he saw it, and if his purpose in setting it forth was to hold the mirror up to later governors and princes, that only means that he like Shakespeare was of his age.¹

And Shakespeare was no more primarily concerned with Tudor propaganda than he was. He could hardly have done other than represent Henry of Richmond as a kind of St George and the king he slays as much like a dragon as a human being may be. No doubt, too, in his revision of the *Henry VI* plays he had accepted the conventional Tudor philosophy of history. Nor did he ever consciously turn his back upon it. It was therefore an element in his *Richard III* as it was in More's. In both, however, it held a very minor position in the scale of values; and as regards the play it is not difficult

¹ Cf. A. F. Pollard, 'The Making of Sir Thomas More's *Richard III*' (*Essays in honour of James Tait*, 1933, pp. 223 ff.).

to see why. *Richard III* was the first 'history' Shakespeare was free to re-create at will. It is not surprising therefore that his rapidly developing genius should impose on the basic political pattern he had inherited from *Henry VI*, if not from an original *Tragedy of Richard III*, new and more fascinating patterns of his own. How new and how highly wrought we shall see in section D (p. xxxvi).

Yet while Shakespeare learnt much from More, he of course took his own way. He was free to dramatize to the top of his bent More's half-dramatized material, and to treat as facts as many of the rumours as he chose. And two departures are particularly noteworthy for the glimpse they seem to give us of his mind. The first is a small but rather amusing point of difference. As everyone knows, Richard's favourite expletive in the play is 'by Saint Paul', though he actually swears 'by Saint John' in the opening scene. In the *History* he swears once only, when he declares that he will not dine until he sees the head of Hastings, and he swears then 'by Saint Paul' in obvious allusion to *Acts* xxiii, which relates how forty Jews took an oath 'that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul'.¹ Perhaps Shakespeare adopted this as Richard's habitual oath, because its protestant flavour added a touch to the mock-Puritan piety which is one of the more entertaining masks that his Richard assumes.² But perhaps he missed the original point in More being probably less familiar with the Scriptures than he.

The second and more fundamental difference is the part played by the City in the two accounts of Richard's rise to power. As Herford observes, 'Holinshed's [i.e. More's] Richard is as malignant and as resolute' as

¹ Cf. R. Noble, *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge*, p. 136.

² Cf. *supra* pp. xv-xvi. A flavour of Chadband seems to hang about Richard's whole circle, see e.g. 3. 2. 109-10, n.

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Shakespeare's; 'but he is more cautious, and he has reason to be so. For he has to deceive or to master the trained political intelligence of England', whereas in the play 'this obstacle is insignificant, for of that political intelligence there is very little to be seen. The "Citizens" who in 2. 2 timidly shake their heads as they "see the waters swell before a boisterous storm", but "leave it all to God" are not men before whom very great circumspection was needed. . . . And they are fitly represented by the credulous Mayor of 3. 5'.¹ In the *History*, on the other hand, the Mayor, brother of the sycophantic preacher, Dr Shaw, is indeed a climber who has been previously got at.² But he is an exception; and More never lets us forget that the ordinary citizens of London are clear-eyed and hostile, if helpless, spectators of Richard's successive moves towards the crown. When for example Richard tells them how urgently necessary the execution of Hastings had been, 'every man answered him fair as though no man mistrusted the matter, which of truth no man believed'.³ The defamatory proclamation misses fire entirely since everyone notices that a document issued two hours after Hastings's death must have taken a very much longer time to prepare and engross; one citizen sardonically observing 'that it was written by prophecy'.⁴ And the two civic gatherings, the one to hear Buckingham at the Guildhall and the other to offer Richard the crown at Baynard's Castle, are brilliantly described from the citizens' point of view. Three times Buckingham's outrageous proposal, backed by scurrilous attacks upon the good name of the Queen and the Duchess of York in order to stamp as bastards both the

¹ *Eversley Shakespeare*, vi. 393-4.

² See note, 3. 5. 102-3.

³ More, *op. cit.* pp. 51-2. I modernize More's spelling.

⁴ More, p. 53.

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young princes and their father Edward IV, is listened to by the horrified body in 'a marvellous obstinate silence'; and when for the fourth time he adjures them to declare whether or no they agreed to Richard's election as king, 'the people', indeed, 'began to whisper among themselves secretly that the voice was neither loud nor distinct, but as it were the sound of a swarm of bees', but all he could get to declare themselves were a few prentice boys and a claue of his own retainers who shouted 'as loud as their throats could give, "King Richard! King Richard!" and threw up their caps in token of joy'. 'And therewith', concludes More, 'the lords came down and the company dissolved and departed, the more part all sad; some with glad semblance that were not very merry, and some... not able to dissemble their sorrow were fain at his [Buckingham's] back to turn their face to the wall, while the dolour of their heart burst out at their eyes.'¹ Such was the attitude of the average citizen. The deputation to Baynard's Castle next day was a more select body, viz. the Mayor, the aldermen and the chief commoners, the last category no doubt selected as well as select. Their attitude was therefore more cynical though no less critical. For, as Richard stood above them in the gallery and Buckingham at their head humbly offered him the crown, (More comments deliciously) 'there was no man so dull that heard them but he perceived well enough that all the matter was made [=arranged] between them... And so they said that these matters be kings' games, as it were stage-plays, and for the more part played upon scaffolds; in which poor men be but the lookers-on. And they that wise be will meddle no farther. For they that some time step up and play with them, when they cannot

¹ More, pp. 73-4.

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play their parts, they disorder the play and do themselves no good'.¹

Yet though the citizens did nothing overt to 'disorder the play', Richard's successive ineffective attempts to win their applause show that the play was a failure even before its crowning scene of the coronation. And whether More's account of his career be strictly historical or not, it remains a remarkable constitutional document inasmuch as it tells us how a trained and profound political intelligence in England during the first half of the sixteenth century regarded the relations between the monarchy and public opinion. A dramatist, however, has little use for constitutional theory, and anything but a docile and credulous city would have disordered the play as Shakespeare conceived it. Yet is there not something more than this in the difference between the two treatments? For More was himself a Londoner and his father or grandfather may well have been one of those present at the Guildhall and Baynard's Castle, whereas Shakespeare was, at any rate in intention, a country gentleman, and nothing he writes elsewhere about the rising citizen class, or citizens in general, displays much sympathy for or understanding of them.

(c) *'The Mirror for Magistrates' and the
 Clarence scenes*

So much for More and the chronicles. But there were other 'histories' of Richard Crookback available, three literary accounts in particular, still extant and all probably composed before Shakespeare wrote his play, which is I think certainly indebted to one of them and almost certainly to another. Earliest of the three is a group of so-called 'tragedies' in *The Mirror for*

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 78–9.

Magistrates (Part I, 1559; Part II, 1563),¹ composed by William Baldwin and other versifiers, who present eminent or notorious personages in history telling their sad or terrible stories, as 'mirrors' or salutary warnings to those who come after. That Shakespeare was thoroughly conversant with this very large and very dull volume has been suggested in two books widely read in recent years.² Neither author offers any evidence for the thesis beyond general probability, and finding none myself in any of the seven Histories which it has been my lot to edit since 1939, Histories which present as many as twenty-one of the figures in Baldwin's gallery of mirrors, I grew increasingly sceptical as time went on. There are similarities, of course, as there were bound to be in literary compositions which drew their material from the same chronicles. But this made the wide divergencies all the more striking; divergencies of interpretation, of attitude, of the facts selected for treatment. Furthermore, in view of the frequency with which Shakespeare echoes the very words of his indubitable sources, like Golding, Holinshed, or North, it was surely remarkable that no verbal parallels could be observed between these seven histories and *The Mirror*, if the latter had been, as is claimed, 'one of the important influences of Shakespeare's youth'.³ And then I came to *Richard III*, eighth and last history to be edited in the Lancastrian double-cycle, and discovered unquestionable parallels in the very first scene! Two will be enough, I think, to establish the point. The business of the 'G' prophecy which feeds

¹ I quote below from the edition edited by Dr Lily B. Campbell in 1938, to the advantage of us all.

² E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 1944; Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's 'Histories': mirrors of Elizabethan policy*, 1947.

³ Tillyard, *op. cit.* p. 72.

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Edward IV's suspicions of his brother Clarence, and comes from Polydore, not More, is thus clumsily set out by Holinshed:

Some haue reported that the course of this noble mans death rose of a foolish prophesie, which was that after K. Edward one should reigne whose first letter of his name should be a G.¹

The eighteenth tragedy of *The Mirror* is that of George, Duke of Clarence, who tells us, in Baldwin's doggerel,

A prophecy was found, which sayd a G,
 Of Edwardes children should destruccion be.
 Me to be G, because my name was George
 My brother thought, and therfore did me hate.
 But woe be to the wicked heades that forge
 Such doubtful dreames to brede vnkinde debate.²

And in Shakespeare's version, Richard tells us,

Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
 By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,
 To set my brother Clarence and the king
 In deadly hate the one against the other . . .
 About a prophecy, which says that G
 Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.³

Holinshed gives no hint, as does *The Mirror*, that the prophecy was forged by 'wicked heads'; Shakespeare shows us the wicked head forging it. Holinshed speaks of 'grudge' and 'malice' between the brothers; the word with Shakespeare and *The Mirror* is 'hate'. Holinshed says nothing, as they do, about the murder of Edward's heirs. Finally, the two couplets which state the prophecy have the same rhyme, the same rhythm, and are in other respects so similar that one is a palpable echo of the other. The connexion is certain: the Clarence 'tragedy' in *The Mirror* was one of the

¹ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 1587, iii. 703/1.

² *The Mirror*, 'Clarence', M 181-6. ³ I. I. 32-40.

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sources of *Richard III*. My other example is scarcely less cogent, and is more interesting for the light it throws upon Shakespeare's mind at work. Baldwin's Clarence concludes the account of his death in the Tower with these lines:

Howbeit they bound me whether I would or no,
 And in a butte of Malmesey standing by,
 Newe Christned me, because I should not crie.¹

The quibble in the last line is the more arresting that light touches are rare in *The Mirror*. It certainly arrested Shakespeare, who gave it, however, a wittier and more pregnant point by associating it with the 'G' prophecy. Informed by Clarence that the crime for which he is sent to prison is the name George, Richard exclaims:

Alack, my lord, that fault is none of yours;
 He should, for that, commit your godfathers:
 Belike his majesty hath some intent
 That you should be new-christ'ned in the Tower.²

And by turning the old jest and setting this fresh nap upon it, Shakespeare loses nothing of its former relevance; on the contrary he adds irony and depth to it, since every spectator who knew anything of history would know of the baptism that awaited Clarence. Baldwin's wise-crack becomes in Richard's mouth charged with hideous omen.

These parallels seem to have escaped the notice of the critics above-mentioned, although both had been singled out in 1900 by Churchill, who did not, however, realize their full value as evidence.³ Others adduced by

¹ *The Mirror*, *loc. cit.* M 369-71. ² I. I. 47-50.

³ Churchill, *op. cit.* pp. 239-41. Tillyard makes no mention of this book, the most important monograph on the sources of *Richard III* yet published, and Campbell dismisses it in a couple of pages.

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him, together with some he overlooks, will be cited in my notes. Here I wish to draw attention to the fact that all of them come from one only of the eight 'tragedies' in *The Mirror* which concern *Richard III*. And though I have recently reread everything Baldwin and his collaborators put into the mouth of Henry VI, Edward IV, Rivers, Hastings, Buckingham, Richard of Gloucester, and Mistress Shore in turn, with an ear open for echoes in the play, I did not detect a single parallel worth considering. I am therefore driven to conclude both that Shakespeare consulted *The Mirror* for *Richard III* alone of his histories and that the only 'tragedy' he made use of was *Clarence*.

What then led him to turn to *The Mirror* for these scenes? The only reason I can suggest is that he opened the volume to look at another item, which he may well have recalled and wished to re-read before going to work upon what is to many modern readers the outstanding passage in *Richard III*. I refer to Clarence's Dream, which might have been composed in deliberate rivalry of Sackville's *Induction*, the only genuine poem in *The Mirror* except *The Complaynt of Buckingham* by the same writer. The latest of a long line of English vision-poems going back to the *Roman de la Rose* of the thirteenth century, Clarence's Dream, as a fearful vision of the after-life, belongs to a special class of such poems, which drew their inspiration from the sixth book of the *Aeneid* and Dante's *Inferno*; and here its only vernacular forerunners, apart from the *Induction*, are Sir David Lindsay's *Dreme* and Gavin Douglas's Prologue to the seventh book of the *Aeneid*, both in late Middle Scots. When we recollect how little poetry of real merit was available in the language of his day before the nineties, can we doubt that Shakespeare had read and admired Sackville's majestic study of horrifying desolation long before 1593, or that its influence was

still at work when he sat down to write Clarence's Dream; a dramatic poem, be it noted, entirely of his own invention, without a hint of the kind anywhere in the chronicles? Surely, when Clarence tells us

I passed, methought, the melancholy flood
 With that sour ferryman which poets write of
 Unto the kingdom of perpetual night,¹

his creator was thinking of Sackville among other poets, and may even have had in mind his lines:

We passed on so far furth tyl we sawe
 Rude Acheron, a lothsome lake to tell
 That boyles and bubs vp swelth as blacke as hell,
 Where grisly Charon at theyr fixed tide
 Stil ferreies ghostes vnto the farder side.²

Prince Edward's cry, again,

Seize on him, Furies, take him unto torment,³

looks like an echo of Sackville's

Sorrowe I am, in endeles tormentes payned,
 Among the furies in the infernall lake.⁴

Lastly, if all this be granted, it will be granted also that after re-reading one poem in *The Mirror* for the Clarence scenes, Shakespeare would naturally have turned and glanced through the Clarence 'tragedie' itself and have consciously or unconsciously picked up a word or two here and there from it.

(d) *The influence of 'The True Tragedy of Richard III' and other pre-Shakespearian dramas*

Next in point of time after *The Mirror* come two dramatic compositions, in which Richard figures as a typical villain of the Senecan type. One of these is an

¹ I. 4. 45-7.

² *Mirror*, 'The Induction', ll. 479-83.

³ I. 4. 57.

⁴ Induction, ll. 108-9.