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RICHARD III – STORY VERSUS HISTORY

The plan to reach the throne of England.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
I. Shakespeare’s King Richard III.....	3
1.1: The Play.....	4
1.2: Story versus History: a chronological analysis.....	13
Chapter 2: Behind the Play.....	101
2.1: The Author.....	102
2.2: Historical Plays.....	105
2.3: Main Sources.....	110
Conclusion.....	128
Appendix.....	129
Bibliography, Web sources.....	135

INTRODUCTION

It's February 5, 2013, the day when, on every worldwide news station, everyone talks about the confirmation of the discovery of the body of King Richard III. Before that, during my academic career, I had never confronted myself with this character, if not because of brief quotations encountered during my studies on that great writer and playwright called William Shakespeare.

My passion for English literature and theater, together with my great interest for history, led me to further investigate the emblematic figure of this character. English king at the end of a long and difficult period of British history, Richard III is a character who has been the topic of many talks and discussions. The lack of illustrious historical sources, compared to more well-known literary sources, ended up associating this historical character with a theatrical drama role that perhaps does not do justice to who he really was.

I have to admit that I was also drawn to this Shakespearean play in a very particular way. It gives me a different feeling from all of his other works I have read in the past, like *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Winter's Tale* and many others. It has a unique way of grabbing my attention, of involving me into what's happening.

The figure of Richard, in particular, brings out many different feelings and reactions. The line between a real evil person that should bring out disgust and hate, is often crossed into that of a comical psycho that's capable of making you see its point of view on men and women in general, which he considers stupid and easily deceived. From here my idea to make this passion and interest of mine the main purpose of this research with which to finish my course of studies.

This is a study, a journey through time, back to the years of the War of the Roses, as seen from both a contemporary point of view and from that of those who had lived in that troubled period, but to which they related with detachment and humor, in the wake of that new period of calm that they were beginning to experience.

The starting point of this research will be the analysis of the most famous proof of the existence of Richard III: Shakespeare's play.

The work will be analyzed from a critical point of view, through themes, characters, sources and literary genre.

Additional care will be given to the key points of Shakespeare's work, recognizing those that will be the fixed points of all future works.

However, the main purpose of this project is mainly to understand how the figure described by this "play" relates to who King Richard III actually was and who was really behind the creation of this character, be it Shakespeare or someone else. To do so we will analyze the main historical sources that we now have, with particular attention to drawing a clear line between history and literature, thus bypassing those false prejudices that often have contaminated historical evidence. Considered to be a cripple, murderer and a symbol of absolute evil, what truth lies behind the "mask" that Shakespeare and others before him forced him to wear?

CHAPTER 1

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SHAKESPEARE'S KING RICHARD III

CHAPTER 1.1: THE PLAY

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York,
And all the clouds that loured upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.¹

It is with this incipit that for centuries, in theaters, the audience began to read and watch *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, Shakespeare's biggest and most unapologetic tyrant and villain onstage.

Definitely a very interesting work, complex both in structure and context, which has been a topic of discussions throughout the centuries and that still arouses the curiosity of historians and lovers of literature.

Richard III was the last of the four works of Shakespeare on English history that deal with events in England's historical past subsequent to the Norman Conquest in 1066. *Richard III* is usually read and performed on its own, although it concludes a dramatic tale that began with *Henry V* and continued with *Henry VI: Part II* and *Henry VI: Part III*. The reason for this was to show the decline of this family of kings through the rise and fall of all the men and women that have taken part in this long period of English history. On one side we have Henry V, considered one of the greatest English kings; on the other, Richard III, depicted like a devil on earth and subsequently defeated by the first Tudor king, Henry VII.

Shakespeare composed the entire tetralogy early in his career: it seems likely that Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* in about 1591. We can infer this by putting together the dates of two other works: first, we know that the trilogy on Henry VI probably began around 1590; and second, it influenced Christopher Marlowe's *Edward the Second*, which can be dated to 1592 at the latest.

The play picks up toward the end of the famous Wars of the Roses (c. 1455-1485), the series of civil wars fought between two branches of the Royal House of Plantagenet: the Lancaster (whose heraldic symbol was the red rose) and the York (symbolized by the white rose).

¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., London: Arden Shakespeare, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2009, I.i.1-4. All quotations from Shakespeare's tragedy are taken from this edition.

It chronicles the bloody deeds and atrocities perpetrated by its central figure: the murderous and tyrannical King Richard III. Richard invites an eerie fascination, and generations of readers have found themselves seduced by his brilliance with words and his persuasive emotional manipulations even if they reject his evil way of thinking.

Culminating with the defeat of the evil King Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field at the end of the play, *The Tragedy of Richard III* is a dramatization of the recent (for Shakespeare) historical events concluded in 1485, when the Tudor dynasty replaced the power of the Plantagenets in England. In Shakespeare's time, everybody certainly knew about these events. Everyone was particularly fascinated by the character of Richard III, so the audience of Shakespeare could really identify with a number of political prospectives and was even more interested.

While composing the other history plays, Shakespeare focused more on the rise and fall of the main characters. But with Richard, he tries a new way of telling history, taking into account an entire universe of morals and character features. He would not be able to do so without a character like Richard III. For Shakespeare's time, such descriptions are totally unheard of; there is a constant clash between his realistic character and how the Tudor propaganda depicted him. The result is this amoral witty man surrounded by people that end up being his form of entertainment.

What really strikes us about this play is the level of entertainment that Shakespeare attains with an extensive use of soliloquies, dialogues in which Richard himself talks directly to the audience of the theatre, and asides (which is when, while talking to other characters onstage, he turns aside to speak where only the audience can hear him), involving us in his evil plans but also keeping the attention of everyone constantly high.

Today, readers and audiences may find it exceedingly difficult to follow the overlapping webs of political intrigue, family relationships and personal revenge that appear in this play. Fortunately, even if a good knowledge of the historical context would certainly enrich the understanding of the setting, it proves unnecessary. The play is in fact dominated by the hunchback figure of Richard Duke of Gloucester, who later becomes King Richard III through a series of horrible deeds and by murdering his enemies, his kinsmen, even his own wife and most of his supporters before reaching the Battle of Bosworth and crying out «My kingdom for a horse» desperate before his final enemy.

DATES AND PRINTS

As with many other Shakespeare plays, *The Tragedy of King Richard III* poses one big problem: there are many versions of the play, distinguished by various aspects.

As this research focuses more on the aspect of the main character of the play (King Richard III), this chapter will only point out the main general differences between the two most used versions of the play without going into a more in-depth research on the linguistic features of both. This, in order to give the reader a background on the process of writing and publishing these works during that period and to give an explanation on why he might encounter different versions of the play in different editions.

Things in Shakespeare's time were not as regulated as now. Writers did not want to publish the scripts of their plays, as this would have meant giving competitor acting groups the chance of making money by them. Therefore, it was very common that many people, in order to earn easy money, would attend these plays in theatres and write down each character's script in order to make illegal prints from it: it goes without saying that these editions were full of mistakes and made-up lines. This would consequently convince the original writers to publish their own official version of the play in order to preserve the original script, and so in the end many different versions appeared.

There were two different ways of printing a script: QUARTO and FOLIO, each with its own features:

Quarto: A quarto is sheet of printing paper folded twice to form eight separate pages for printing a book. When opened, the result is a page divided in 4 parts both front and back. This was mostly used for printing scripts that still contained errors.

Folio: A folio is a sheet of printing paper folded once to form four separate pages for printing a book. This was used for printing the final revised versions of the scripts for an official printing. Most of the plays that we still buy in bookstores usually derive from this version.

Following is the timeline of the different versions of the play².

- First quarto, 1597. Printed from a manuscript believed to have been prepared from memory by the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's company) to replace a missing prompt-book. Shakespeare's name does not appear on the title-page.
- Second quarto, 1598. Printed from the first quarto. Shakespeare's name is added to the title-page.
- Third quarto, 1602. Printed from the second quarto.
- Fourth quarto, 1605. Printed from the third quarto.
- Fifth quarto, 1612. Printed partly from the fourth quarto and partly from the third³.
- Sixth quarto, 1622. Printed from the fifth quarto.
- First folio, 1623. Printed from a manuscript believed to be Shakespeare's foul papers, collated with the third quarto and probably for some parts of the text with the sixth quarto. The text is longer than the quarto version, but also omits lines found in the latter.
- Seventh quarto, 1629. Printed from the sixth quarto.
- Second folio, 1632. Printed from the first folio.
- Eighth quarto, 1634. Printed from the seventh quarto⁴.

Each Quarto was reprinted from the previous one, with additions and changes and occasional editorial corrections. The 1623 Folio derives from an independent enterprise led by John Heminges and Henry Condell⁵, but it is almost certain that the

² Thanks to the British Library copies of *Richard III*, we now have detailed bibliographic descriptions of all the quarto copies of the play, which show us additional changes made through the years.

³ Copy with title page only from the British Library. Complete copy from the Folger Shakespeare Library.

⁴ For the complete list see Appendix 1

⁵ «In a preface to the First Folio entitled «To the great Variety of Readers», two of Shakespeare's former fellow actors in the King's Men, John Heminge and Henry Condell, wrote that they themselves had collected their dead companion's plays. They suggested that they had seen his own papers: «we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers». The title page of the Folio declared that the plays within it had been printed «according to the True Original Copies». Comparing the Folio to the quartos, Heminge and Condell disparaged the quartos, advising their readers that «before you were abused with divers stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors». Many Shakespeareans of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries believed Heminge and Condell and regarded the Folio plays as superior to anything in the quartos.», excerpt from WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Richard III*, Barbara A. Mowat, Paul Werstine, ed.: Simon and Schuster, 2011, pp. xliv-xlv.

Sixth and Third Quarto were consulted. The relationship between the Quarto and Folio of this play is one of the biggest problems that scholars even now have to face. When analyzing the script of both the Quarto and Folio edition, the printing choice is only the most marginal difference between the two.

In terms of structure, Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen notice the following:

- « The Folio text is about 200 lines longer than the Quarto, a difference more probably due to Quarto cutting and streamlining than Folio expansion. The Quarto has just under 40 lines that are not in the Folio»⁶. These, however, are considered by Furness, one of the first critics to analyze the differences in the early 1900, an «extremely valuable addition»⁷:

Duke of Buckingham. My lord.

Richard III. How chance the prophet could not at that time

Have told me, I being by, that I should kill him?

Duke of Buckingham. My lord, your promise for the earldom -

Richard III. Richmond! When last I was at Exeter,

The Mayor in courtesy showed me the castle

And called it Rougemont, at which name I started,

Because a bard of Ireland told me once

I should not live long after I saw Richmond.

Duke of Buckingham. My Lord -

Richard III. Ay, what's o'clock?

Duke of Buckingham. I am thus bold to put your grace in mind

Of what you promised me.

Richard III. Well, but what's o'clock?

Duke of Buckingham. Upon the stroke of ten.

Richard III. Well, let it strike.

Duke of Buckingham. Why let it strike?

Richard III. Because that, like a Jack, thou keep'st the stroke

Betwixt thy begging and my meditation.

I am not in the giving vein today.⁸

⁶ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Richard III*, Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, ed., London: Macmillan Publishers LTD, 2008, p. 17.

⁷ HORACE HOWARD FURNESS, *The Tragedy of Richard III*, London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1908, p. 7.

⁸ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.ii.97-114.

Siemon explains that the reasons for this omission are still unknown. Some theories point out to metrical irregularities, while according to others, this part was too harsh against «the Jacobean Duke of Buckingham and his patron James I, who had a palace at Richmond»⁹.

- The Quarto contains metrical irregularities and obvious metrical defects that were removed in the Folio;
- The Folio version introduces various alterations to avoid word repetitions;
- The Folio changes different terms of phrase and use of words, which were probably updated to a more contemporary language;
- The Folio has more accurate stage-directions.¹⁰

Frances Teague shows us some peculiar differences between the Folio and Quarto version that would suggest that the quarto version of the play was intended for performance in a more limited space that needed for the folio text. For example, Clarence sleeps in a chair in the quarto, not in a bed like in the Folio. By generally analyzing the differences we can also find that the council in 3.4 do not sit at a table like in the folio; the prisoners' guards in 3.3 do not carry halberds. These are all unnecessary changes if not to reduce space, furniture and stage properties. The folio production was a bit more elaborate visually and required the presence of specific items¹¹. The above timeline is a central debate topic between academics trying to understand which version is the closest one to the original. According to the Cambridge Editors, the path that reduced all of these versions to the two main ones used today can be represented by this scheme:

A1→B1→Q1

A2→B2→F1

A1 is the Author's original manuscript; B1 is a transcript by a different man full of accidental omissions and mistakes. This transcript gave birth to the Quarto of 1597.

⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., p. 325-326.

¹⁰ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Richard III*, Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, ed., cit., pp. 17-18.

¹¹ FRANCES TEAGUE, *Shakespeare's Speaking Properties*: Bucknell University Press, 1991, p. 47.

On the other side, A2 is the Author's original manuscript revised by himself, with corrections and additions, inter-linear, marginal, and on inserted leaves; B2 is a copy of this revised manuscript made by someone before 1623. From B2 the Folio text was printed; the writer of B2 had perhaps occasionally collated this with the 1602 Third Quarto to supplement passages, which were probably illegible in A2.

If this hypothesis were true, then the version closest to the original should be A2, excluding the parts of F1 that were added by the writer of B2 and filling the missing parts with parts of Q1¹².

James Spedding offers us a different point of view. He contests this hypothesis and takes side with the Folio, considering it the original result of Shakespeare's latest changes and corrections; the Quarto is instead a plain version printed without any supervision by the author himself¹³.

There are countless theories involving this topic, but with today's knowledge, there is no way to find out for sure which was the common original, if there ever was one.

Personally, I think that quoting a famous sentence from *An Essay on Criticism* by Alexander Pope could be the best way of closing this argument:

Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.¹⁴

Today, as Thomas Cartelli reminds us, «modern editions of Shakespeare's *Tragedy of King Richard III* are many and varied, but all are based on either the 1597 quarto edition of the play or on the longer 1623 First Folio edition. Given the considerable overlap between Q1 and F, few editors choose to exclude on principle borrowings from one or another text. Consequently, almost all versions of *Richard III* the modern reader might encounter are composite text»¹⁵.

Now, regarding the date when the original play was first written, we still do not have the answer, but we can try to figure out the period judging from other dates. We

¹² WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE – HORACE HOWARD FURNESS, MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, *A New Variorum Edition Of Shakespeare: The Tragedy Of Richard The Third: With The Landing Of Earle Richmond, And The Battle At Bosworth Field*: Ulan Press, 2012, p. 434.

¹³ JAMES SPEDDING, *On the Quarto and Folio of Richard III*: Shakespeare Society Transactions, 1875-6

¹⁴ ALEXANDRE POPE, *An Essay on Criticism*, Slough: Dodo Press, 2007, 1.9-10.

¹⁵ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Richard III*, Thomas Cartelli, ed., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1955, p. xi.

need to start from the day when the story was first registered in the Worshipful Company of Stationers' register, a trade organization that the government established and supervised in order to guard against printing subversive books or books unduly critical of the Crown. If the play met government standards—that is, if it did not attempt to turn the people against the crown—a publisher could print and sell it.

The bookseller Andrew Wise paid the Stationers' Company for a license to print *Richard III* on 20 October 1597. The first quarto was printed for Wise shortly afterwards, by the printers Valentine Simmes and Peter Short.¹⁶

However, the play had surely been written years before.

Janis Lull, in the Cambridge University Press edition, states that the monologue of *Henry VI*:

I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown,
And, whiles I live, to account this world but hell,
Until my mis-shaped trunk that bears this head
Be round impaled with a glorious crown.
And yet I know not how to get the crown,
For many lives stand between me and home:
And I,—like one lost in a thorny wood,
That rends 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:
And from that torment I will free myself,
Or hew my way out with a bloody axe.
Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
And cry 'Content' to that which grieves my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.
I'll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
I'll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
I'll play the orator as well as Nestor,
Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,

¹⁶ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, Antony Hammond, ed., London: Arden Shakespeare (2nd edition), 1981, p. 1.

And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.
I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.¹⁷

is clear evidence that Shakespeare had already conceived *Richard III*, if not already written it when *Henry VI* was completed before mid 1592, and then Shakespeare focused on the composition of *Richard III* between that period and the end of 1593¹⁸, the timespan during which all theatres were closed because of the plague.

Antony Hammond, the man editing of the Arden Shakespeare 1981 edition, anticipates the writing period of these historical plays around 1590-91, then the play went on stage already around June 1592, before the closure of theatres¹⁹. In the end, we can at least say for sure that it was written between 1591 and 1594, thus among the first works of Shakespeare.

In the text we can find many other features that can help strengthen this theory. First of all, even if this is an historical play, Shakespeare uses an enormous amount of historical data, especially from Holinshed's *Chronicle*. We can see that in the list of characters we can count more than 40 people, with only around 10 that cover important roles in the play. This is because he tried to include as much information as possible from the historical sources, but then had to reduce the narrative part because of stage timing. In subsequent plays Shakespeare vastly reduces the number of characters, focusing only on the main story and also changes the structure with more freedom, adding and removing existing or new characters in order to gain more liberty in writing.

¹⁷ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry VI, Part 3*, John D. Cox, Eric Rasmussen, ed., London: Arden Shakespeare (3rd series), 2001, III.ii.148-178.

¹⁸ JANIS LULL, *Plantagenets, Lancastrians, Yorkists, and Tudors, The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 4.

¹⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, Antony Hammond, ed., cit.

CHAPTER 1.2: STORY VERSUS HISTORY: A CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

As previously stated, *King Richard III* is an historical play. We have analyzed the various aspects of this genre, and this play follows these rules with no exception: Shakespeare does not stick to the historical sequence of events in order to meet his needs for writing the drama. Many facts and events were altered, making it at times impossible to really understand how things went. Despite the Elizabethan point of view on history, not everyone agreed on the way Richard III was depicted. As Sharon D. Michalove points out, «William Cornwallis defended Richard's reputation in 1617 in *Essayes of Certain Paradoxes* by publishing an anonymous defense thought to have been written in the early sixteenth century as a response to More's *History*»²⁰(in this case questioning the story of Richard III's manipulation of the citizens of London in his bid for the throne by commending a certain Dr. Shaa to give a sermon in London suggesting that the duke of Gloucester should be king rather than the son of Edward IV).

In particular:

«Never was he noted all the life of King Edward to thirst after the kingdom; never denied he any commandment of his prince, but performed all his employments discreetly, valiantly, successfully. . . . Then how do our chroniclers report for truth, were not their malice greater than either their truth or their judgment? But they are Historians, and must be believed »²¹.

The phrase «were not their malice greater than either their truth or their judgment» has been recently corrected into «their malice greater than either their proof or their judgment» which seems a more sensible rendition²². Now, before proceeding into the

²⁰ SHARON D. MICHALOVE, *The Reinvention of Richard III*, excerpted from *The Ricardian*, September issue, 1995.

²¹ ANONYMOUS, *The Praise of King Richard the Third*, excerpted from William Cornwallis' *Essayes of Certain Paradoxes: To Prove a Villain: 1617*, pp. 78-79.

²² ARTHUR NOEL KINCAID, *The Encomium of Richard III*, London: Rogers Turner Books, 1977, p. 11.

examination of the text, in order to search for the different chronological changes that are found here, I will present the two timelines regarding the historical events regarding Richard III and how these were organized in the play.

- **HISTORICAL TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

1452 - King Richard III was born on 2 October 1452 at Fotheringay Castle. His father was Richard, Duke of York (1411-1460) and his mother Cecily Neville (1415-1495). He had two brothers: King Edward IV and George duke of Clarence.

1460 – Richard’s father was killed during The Battle of Wakefield. Richard spent his childhood at Middleham Castle under the tutelage of his uncle Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick.

1461 – On June 28, coronation of Edward of York, now King Edward IV of England thanks to Warwick who had a key role in deposing King Henry VI.

1470 – October: deposition of Edward IV and restoration of Henry VI;

November 2 the birth of Edward Prince of Wales (later Edward V).

1471 – April 14: Edward IV regained the throne at the Battle of Barnet (Easter Day field);

May 4: final defeat of the Lancastrian forces at the Battle of Tewkesbury;

May 21: death of Henry VI in the Tower of London.

1472 - Richard married Anne Neville on July 12, 1472 (c. 1456-1485). She was the youngest daughter of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and Anne Beauchamp.

1473 - King Richard had a son: Edward of Middleham, also known as Edward Plantagenet (1473 - April 9, 1484). He will remain the only legitimate son of King Richard III of England and his wife Anne Neville; birth of Richard duke of York (Edward IV’s second son).

1478 – Execution for treason of George duke of Clarence, after he sided against his own brother.

1482 - Richard recaptured Berwick-upon-Tweed from the Scots.

1483 – Easter 1483: King Edward IV fell ill. He named his brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester as Protector after his death and entrusted his young sons and little princes, Edward and Richard, to his care. Richard had always remained loyal to King Edward IV;

April 9: Death of King Edward IV at Westminster. He was buried at Windsor Castle; the young prince ascended the throne as Edward V joined by his brother Prince Richard at the Tower of London while awaiting his coronation;

April 30: Earl Rivers, Richard Grey and Thomas Vaughan were taken prisoners by Richard. During that night, Elizabeth Woodville entered sanctuary with her youngest son (duke of York) and her daughters;

June 13: execution of Hastings;

June 16: The coronation of Edward V was cancelled;

June 25: Parliament declared the two little princes illegitimate and, as next in line to the throne, their uncle and Protector, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, was declared the true King. The two little princes were never seen again; execution of Rivers, Grey and Vaughan at Pontefract Castle;

July 6: Richard was crowned at Westminster Abbey.

1484 – death of Edward of Middleham, also known as Edward Plantagenet the only son of King Richard III of England;

March 16: death of Anne Neville, wife of King Richard III.

1485 - Battle of Bosworth Field 22 August 1485: death of King Richard III and defeat of his supporters in Leicestershire against Lancastrian forces led by Henry Tudor. With his death, so ends the Plantagenet family, who had ruled over England for more

than three hundred years. End of the War of the Roses and beginning of the Tudor dynasty.

The entire list of events that are described during the play cover basically 14 years: from May 1471 to August 1485.

- **TIMELINE OF SHAKESPEARE’S PLAY**

Unlike a normal timeline, as there are no chronological dates indicating the exact time in which the events are taking place, we can nonetheless figure out when the events of each Act take place thanks to the chronological timeline. Quite interesting is the way Shakespeare moves from one moment in time to another. He compresses historical time in different ways. By taking into account the various events that take place in each act, we are able to write down a timetable with the events covered and from various historical sources we can also find out when each fact happened.

Acts	Historical Time	Time Covered
Act I	May 1471- Feb 1478	6 years and 9 months
Act II	Feb 1478-Apr 1483	5 years and 2 months
Act III	May 1483-June 1483	7 weeks
Act IV	July 1483-Oct 1483	3 months
Act V	Nov 1483-Aug 1485	1 year and 10 months

The most important part of the play, the third act, only covers 7 weeks of historical time. This shows that Shakespeare stresses the importance of the events of that period. As we can see, the first nineteen years of Richard’s life are not mentioned in the play, as they are irrelevant to the development of the story of this play. Shakespeare concentrates only on the years of Richard’s plans to gain the throne. From the next chapter, my focus will be finding out each of the keywords that made this timetable possible, and, last but not least, finally prove how the different sources that Shakespeare used for this play were incorrect and tainted King Richard’s reputation.

ACT I, Scene 1

The play opens up with a magnificent monologue by Richard, now duke of Gloucester. This is very important as it gives us both historical background and a first presentation of what kind of person the main character really is. Also, the opening soliloquy accomplishes all that a prologue would, and subtlety is the last thing to look for here. As Siemon points out, «Richard is the only character to open a Shakespeare play with a soliloquy»²³.

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York,
And all the clouds that loured upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.²⁴

Here we have a summary of what has happened previously. Richard's brother Edward is the «sun of York»²⁵ who has brought «glorious summer»²⁶ to the kingdom, and Richard's «winter of our discontent»²⁷ is the recently ended civil war, the Wars of the Roses. It was so called because of the white and red roses that symbolized the houses of York and of Lancaster, respectively. Richard was from the House of York, together with his oldest brother, Edward, who later becomes King Edward IV upon victory. Note how he uses chronological words like “Now” and “Winter-summer”: “Now” here has more of a dramatic use, rather than a chronological one, as it does not mean anything without a date. In this case, Edward IV enters London victorious in 1471, Clarence was killed in 1478 and Edward dies in 1483. This proves how time is very unspecific throughout the entire play; “Winter-summer” is a reverse version of the famous opening of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*:

But, in the harvest of my summer joys,
Death's winter nipp'd the blossoms of my bliss.²⁸

²³ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., p. 133.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, I.i.1-4.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, I.i.2.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, I.i.2.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, I.i.1.

²⁸ THOMAS KYD, *The Spanish Tragedy*, Michael Neill, ed.: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013, I.i.12-13.

Then, the tone suddenly changes. Richard is not happy about the current situation, and starts talking about his brother, the King.

And now, instead of mounting barded steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.²⁹

This is the beginning of the comparison between the two brothers. Here he starts describing what has happened since the times of war, and in all of this, Richard feels totally out of place. The idea is represented by the opposition between DRUMS and LUTE, the first recognized as a war instrument, the latter as a vain instrument of love and dances. Also, the symbol of the lute may also relate to sex (to which King Edward IV seemed very addicted)³⁰.

He explains this better soon after, with a horrific description he makes of himself.

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them;³¹

Gloucester paints himself as an unnatural monster. He is lame, ugly, and hunchback. A common belief of the time was that the warped moral being of the individual was often reflected in his physical appearance. What is interesting about this part is that even if here he presents himself as physically impaired and maimed in one of his

²⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.i.10-13.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 134.

³¹ *Ibidem*, I.i.14-23.

arms, later on in the play we see him physically very active, and also quite confident in his ability to seduce women.

Already from here we start to see his character is not very realistic and far from being consistent, but this will appear throughout the play, giving a depth to his character that we cannot yet understand at this stage in the play.

In the first two lines we can also find a typical Shakespearean word play — the word *son* in this instance. Edward IV was indeed the son of the Duke of York, but it also can relate to the word sun, which was the symbol found on his armorial crest. Metaphorically, he was the bright sun of the Yorkist party. Also, the sun is a well-known symbol of royalty. Some theories however indicate that this son/sun was probably Edward V, the infant prince³².

Shakespeare skillfully uses the sun metaphor by also showing that the two brothers were totally different from each other:

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to see my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity.³³

He takes pride in his deviousness and treachery as a pure Machiavelli, and shows himself filled with envy which will motivate him into committing terrible crimes against his own family. Also, Richard here uses two adjectives related to the shepherd's life: “piping” and “descant”. The shepherd’s life was a symbol of tranquility, which Richard obviously did not have.

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.³⁴

Here he is already anticipating how the plot will expand, with him trying to bring down this moment of happiness as he cannot partake in it. Also, we keep finding

³² *Ibidem*, p. 133.

³³ *Ibidem*, I.i.24-27.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, I.i.28-31.

words like “these days”, where in reality, as history indicates, we are talking about years.

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;³⁵

The way to the crown is now blocked by many obstacles, but he is not worried. He has in fact a plan to destroy the present harmony by making his two brothers enemies to each other, without him moving a finger. This is probably the best way of eliciting from the audience hate and disgust, if not already achieved by his physical description. Important is how he uses the word “libels”: these were in fact a kind of bills and pamphlets that were widely used around the 1580’s and 1590’s, so something that the public present at the theatre would immediately understand.

Once again, Richard feels no shame about what he’s doing. In fact:

And if King Edward be as true and just
As I am subtle, false and treacherous³⁶

With the end of this monologue and the entrance of the other characters of the play, we assist at his change of personality. Throughout the entire play, we will see Richard has one persona when he speaks alone, but as soon as somebody else comes on stage, his attitude changes. He is a liar and manipulates so convincingly that we would certainly believe the concern and love he expresses, for example in this act, toward his unhappy brother Clarence when sent to prison in the tower, if we did not hear his earlier vow to destroy Clarence and his brother—a vow repeated as soon as Clarence leaves the stage.

The reason for this is one of Shakespeare’s beloved themes: magic and the supernatural.

A prophecy of an old woman stated that the King was going to be killed by a “G”.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, I.i.32-35.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, I.i.36-37.

This day should Clarence closely be mewed up
About a prophecy, which says that 'G'
Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.³⁷

Being Clarence's real name George, he was sent to the tower under custody. Little knows the king that this was already part of Richard's plan to take over the throne.

After Clarence comes on stage, we see him guarded by Brakenbury:

Brother, good day. What means this armed guard
That waits upon your grace?³⁸

This is another chronological mistake, as Robert Brackenbury was not the lieutenant of the tower when Clarence was executed there in 1478. He was not appointed to that position until after Richard III's ascension in 1483, so five years after Clarence's death.³⁹

You may partake of any thing we say.
We speak no treason, man: we say the King
Is wise and virtuous, and his noble Queen
Well struck in years, fair and not jealous.
We say that Shore's wife hath a pretty foot,
A cherry lip, a bonny eye, a passing pleasing tongue,
And that the Queen's kindred are made gentlefolks.⁴⁰

This part gives us a current situation on the King's love affairs. Of course, this is done ironically. The first woman Richard talks about is Shore's wife, Jane Shore, a very beautiful woman married to a rich merchant in London and Edward's mistress; the second one is the Queen, Edward's wife. Richard will never approve of this marriage. Elizabeth Grey was a widow with two grown sons that she had from the previous marriage. She came from minor nobility and this marriage did not bring anything new

³⁷ *Ibidem*, I.i.38-40.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, I.i.42-43.

³⁹ ROSEMARY HORROX, *Brackenbury, Sir Robert (d. 1485)*, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁴⁰ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.i.89-95.

or particular to the Crown. Moreover, she was part of the Woodvilles, a family that began earning honors and money only thanks to this marriage. As we will see later on, the relationship between them and the Royal family will be much tormented.

Soon after Lord Hastings comes on stage.

According to Furness, the histories say nothing directly of the committal of Hastings to the Tower, although it is implied in the narrative of Sir Thomas More.

«Upon the very tower wharf e so nere the place where his head was of so sone after, there met he with one Hastings a perseuant of his own name. And of their meting in that place, he was put in remembraunce of an other time ... At which other tyme the Lord Chamberlein had ben accused unto king Edward, by the lord Rivers the quenes brother, in such wise that he was for the while (but it lasted not long) farre fallen into the kinges indignadon, and stode in gret fere of himselfe»⁴¹.

This scene presents us two circumstances that may work to Gloucester's advantage. First, Hastings is seeking revenge upon those who imprisoned him, the queen's kindred, so he may prove a good ally for this purpose; second, we get the news that King Edward is «sickly, weak, and melancholy»⁴².

This latter, is given to us thanks to a very unusual question to address to someone just coming out of prison:

What news abroad?⁴³

To this news, Gloucester gives proof of his hypocrisy by shouting:

Now by Saint John, that news is bad indeed.

O, he hath kept an evil diet long,

And over-much consumed his royal person.

'Tis very grievous to be thought upon.⁴⁴

⁴¹ HORACE HOWARD FURNESS, *The Tragedy of Richard III*, cit., pp. 30-31.

⁴² WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.i.136.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, I.i.134.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, I.i.138-141.

Despite his outward show of loyalty and fraternal love, he does not fail to indict Edward as one whose «evil diet»⁴⁵ has «overmuch consumed his royal person»⁴⁶.

At line 145, speaking of Edward, he says,

He cannot live, I hope, and must not die
Till George be packed with post-horse up to heaven.⁴⁷

In the past the post-horse was the fastest means of transport used especially for business purposes. This means that the plan to finish him off is nearing, if not already set.

After everyone leaves the stage, Richard turns back to his other self, and gives details on what his next moves will be: badmouthing once more his brother Clarence and then, after his death, he needs to set up a political marriage, and Warwick's daughter Anne, whose husband he had already killed, is the perfect choice:

The readiest way to make the wench amend
Is to become her husband and her father;
The which will I, not all so much for love
As for another secret close intent
By marrying her which I must reach unto.⁴⁸

Here we see something that might confuse the reader: Richard wants to become both Anne's father and husband. This is not a mistake that has been passed on through time. It is both something meaningful for the play, as he tries to fill in both roles of the two men he killed, but also chronological as it points out the common practice of royal people to have incest relationships with other members of the same family (which will indeed happen further on).

Regarding the «secret»⁴⁹, the reason is not visible during the play. In reality, by marrying Anne Warwick Richard wanted to be at the same level of his brother Clarence, who had married the sister of Anne, Isabel. Both women were the sole

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, I.i.139.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, I.i.140.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, I.i.145-146.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, I.i.155-159.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, I.i.158.

heiresses to the Warwick's fortune, but at the time there was no proof in the history books that Richard was involved at all.

ACT I, Scene 2

This part is psychologically complicated, and is without doubt one of the most difficult scenes in the entire play. It is entirely focused on Richard trying to win Anne's heart. An action that should prove impossible, considering that he had killed her entire family, but Gloucester here gives us a lesson on the weak heart of women. From the beginning, as she is being interrupted from mourning in front of the coffin of Henry VI, her husband's father, she curses Richard for having killed Henry. Both Henry VI and Edward, members of the House of Lancaster, have recently been killed by members of the House of York.

The action takes place in a street, where we have the description of the funeral march of Henry VI's funeral, with Anne crying next to his body. This is a setting typical of Shakespeare's royal embellishment, with the use of parades and big manifestations for the crown members. The presence of Anne here is important for Shakespeare in order to create a tragic scene: in fact, as soon as Anne sees Richard, there is a new monologue focused on a curse, introducing another main topic of this play which we will encounter throughout the entire story.

If ever he have wife, let her be made
More miserable by the death of him
Than I am made by young lord and thee.⁵⁰

Poor Anne still doesn't know what the future holds in store for her when saying so. Here Richard demonstrates his incredible skills in using lies and false repentance to get what he wants.

⁵⁰ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.ii.26-28.

Richard manipulates Anne by feigning gentleness and persistently praising her beauty. He even gets to the point of pushing the guilt onto her, as he motivates the killing as the only way to get to her who had made him fall in love.

He culminates this tactic with a very risky gesture:

Lo, here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword,
Which if thou please to hide in this true breast
And let the soul forth that adoreth thee,
I lay it naked to the deadly stroke
And humbly beg the death upon my knee.⁵¹

Like on a stage, he hands her his sword and asks her either to kill him or to let him live and love him. To this, Anne lets the sword fall on the ground, proving that she lacks the will to kill him and to be revenged.

Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry,
But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.
Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabbed young Edward,
But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.⁵²

Here we finally hear Richard admit the killing of King Henry VI and Prince Edward of Lancaster. Although this is how things went according to Shakespeare's historical fiction, it may have not gone like this in reality.

First of all, it seems that Prince Edward was not killed after the battle, in the Tower, but instead he died on the field.

Kendall, in his book on Richard III, states that «no less than seven contemporary sources offer unanimous testimony that Prince Edward 'was slain on the field,' i.e., in the pursuit».⁵³

But we have other two reliable sources.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, I.ii.177-181.

⁵² *Ibidem*, I.ii.182-185.

⁵³ PAUL MURRAY KENDALL, *Richard the Third*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1955, p. 121.

The first one comes from Clements Markham that said that «*Fleetwood's Chronicle* simply states that Edward, called prince, was taken fleeing to the townwards, and slain in the field⁵⁴»;

In addition, according to Thomas Gaspey, Warksworth, a famous Lancastrian authority stated that «and there was slain in the field prince Edward, who cried for succour to his brother-in-law the duke of Clarence»⁵⁵.

As in this play, Shakespeare tries by all means to picture Richard in the worst possible way, he probably had access to Fabyan's *New chronicles of England and France*, a book written during the reign of King Henry VII, where it is clearly stated that Edward of Lancaster was treacherously invited to Edward IV's tent and «by the king's servants incontinently slain»⁵⁶. This book was strongly on the Lancaster side, so it was well in line with Shakespeare's historical point of view.

Regarding the death of Henry VI, Shakespeare puts the story in a way to look like Richard was the only perpetrator of his killing. This is also wrongly confirmed by More in his book when he asserts that «He slew with his own hands King Henry the Sixth, being prisoner in the Tower...and that without the commandment or knowledge of the king»⁵⁷. However, history tells us that in 1471, Richard held the position of Constable of England, and had no authority to act on his own and kill Henry VI; on the other hand, Richard would have been forced to kill him if his brother Edward IV had ordered him to do so, but it is very unlikely that this happened, and the killing was probably done by someone else. How things really went still remains unclear. According to the official account of the Yorkist triumph, Henry VI died of «pure displeasure and melancholy»⁵⁸. Another interesting testimony is given by an official letter to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan on June 17, 1471 of Sforza di Bettini of Florence, Milanese Ambassador at the French Court who gave his opinion on the matter saying that «King Edward has not chosen to have the custody of King Henry any longer, although he was in some sense innocent, and there

⁵⁴ CLEMENTS R. MARKHAM, *Richard III: His Life & Character Reviewed in the light of recent research*, London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1906, p. 189.

⁵⁵ GEORGE SMOLLETT, *The history of England: from the text of Hume and Smollett to the reign of George the third*: The London printing and publishing company, 1890, p. 518.

⁵⁶ ROBERT FABYAN, *The new chronicles of England and France, in two parts*, Henry Ellis, ed., London: F.C. & J. Rivington, 1811, p. 663.

⁵⁷ THOMAS MORE, *The History of King Richard The Third*, George M. Logan, ed., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, p. 12.

⁵⁸ ALISON WEIR, *The Princes In The Tower*: Vintage, 2008, p. 27.

was no great fear about his proceedings, the prince his son and the Earl of Warwick being dead as well as all those who were for him and had any vigour, as he has caused King Henry to be secretly assassinated in the Tower, where he was a prisoner. . . . He has, in short, chosen to crush the seed»⁵⁹.

This fact is also backed up by the fact that back in 1910, when Henry's bones were examined, «it was found that his skull had been smashed, and the remaining hair matted with blood»⁶⁰.

Arise, dissembler; though I wish thy death,
I will not be thy executioner.⁶¹

Going back to the play, even after admitting his crimes, Richard himself establishes a kind of power over Anne by demonstrating that she cannot back up her words with action, while he backs every claim he makes with swift and violent deeds. The change of heart however is not immediate, but is recognizable through the dialogues by the way she refers to him.

At first she always addresses Richard with the more familiar *thou* and *thee* as a way of showing that she was looking down on him, whereas he addresses her as *you*. Anne shifts to the latter when she finally surrenders to his will and starts falling for him.

After her accepting his ring, proof of his love for her (although in reality they got married one year later), she leaves and lets Richard take care of Henry VI's dead body; a body that minutes before was bleeding again in front of Gloucester, as it was popular belief that murdered bodies would start bleeding again in presence of their killers:

O gentlemen, see, see dead Henry's wounds
Open their congealed mouths, and bleed afresh.
Blush, blush, thou lump of foul deformity,
For 'tis thy presence that exhales this blood
From cold and empty veins where no blood dwells.

⁵⁹ From the British History Online Archives - <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=92257> [accessed on 19.11.2013].

⁶⁰ DULCI M. ASHDOWN, *Royal Murders*, London: The History Press, 2009, p. 51.

⁶¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.ii.187-188.

Thy deeds, inhuman and unnatural,
Provokes this deluge most unnatural.⁶²

This was a fact that according to Holinshed actually happened, but was not by any means linked to the presence of Richard. Hall, on the other hand, never mentions this in his research. Shakespeare here uses this fact to add a supernatural proof that Richard was indeed the murderer.

The references to religion and the supernatural is also introduced at the beginning of Anne's attack on Richard when, talking to him she states:

Avaunt, thou dreadful minister of hell!
Thou hadst but power over his mortal body;
His soul thou canst not have. Therefore begone.⁶³

This is a clear reference to the Bible, in particular:

«And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell».⁶⁴

In the final monologue, Richard goes back remembering how he took part in the murders of the people she cared for, nevertheless managing to win her heart.

One sentence takes us back to investigating the historical mistakes of Shakespeare.

Edward, her lord, whom I, some three months since,
Stabbed in my angry mood at Tewkesbury?⁶⁵

After already proving that he did not in fact kill Edward, we will now focus on the three months' time gap that Shakespeare indicated in this sentence. If we take a look at the historical timetable, we see that the Battle of Tewkesbury was fought on 4 May

⁶² *Ibidem*, I.ii.55-61.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, I.ii.46-48.

⁶⁴ *Holy Bible, The New King James Version*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982, Matthew, 10.28.

⁶⁵ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.ii.243-244.

1471, and we know that King Henry's body (killed on May 21st) was taken to Chertsey soon after.⁶⁶

In addition, at line 228 of the play, Richard redirects the body that was supposed to go to Chertsey and instead goes to Whitefriars. According to Professor Ralph Griffiths, «In 1484 the bodily remains of Henry VI were removed from Chertsey Abbey, where they had lain since his death in 1471, and were relocated to St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, apparently on the orders of Richard III.

The reason for this action remains unclear»⁶⁷. So, this was also wrong information that was probably provided by Shakespeare's sources, as according to both Holinshed and More the body went first to Blackfriars and then to Chertsey by water. The reason why Shakespeare wanted to add this fact was probably just to add another unjustified act that Richard committed against already dead people.

The scene finally closes with a very interesting closing sentence:

Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass,
That I may see my shadow as I pass.⁶⁸

Richard is now happily beginning to like his physical deformity, as it is helping him to make progress in his plan, while Shakespeare can finally close this very intricate scene, which was opened tragically and finishes with an expression of scorn on humankind's (and moreover women's) change of heart.

⁶⁶ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., p. 167.

⁶⁷ RALPH GRIFFITHS, *The burials of King Henry VI at Chertsey and Windsor* in Nigel Saul and Tim Tatton-Brown (eds.) *St George's Chapel, Windsor: History and Heritage*: Dovecote Press, 2010, pp. 104-105.

⁶⁸ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.ii.265-266.

ACT I, Scene 3

A very short but interesting scene that is essential in acquiring a complete understanding of future events.

A key figure of the play finally comes on stage. A very emblematic character, with little stage time but with a weighty presence throughout the entire story: Queen Margaret.

Her presence here is very emblematic, and shows us one more time how Shakespeare changed his style with this play, taking different positions towards the earlier historical plays.

In fact, according to the ending part of *Henry VI*, Clarence asks Edward IV what will happen to Queen Margaret:

What will your grace have done with Margaret?
Reignier, her father, to the king of France
Hath pawn'd the Sicils and Jerusalem,
And hither have they sent it for her ransom.⁶⁹

Edward's reply states as following:

Away with her, and waft her hence to France.
And now what rests but that we spend the time
With stately triumphs, mirthful comic shows,
Such as befits the pleasure of the court?
Sound drums and trumpets! farewell sour annoy!
For here, I hope, begins our lasting joy.⁷⁰

So, as you can see, her presence on the stage of *Richard III* is totally unexpected to the reader who has read these plays in a chronological order and Shakespeare is unfaithful to both his personal order of events but also, again, to the real chronological timeline.

It is widely recognized by historians that Queen Margaret died on 25 August 1482 in Anjou, France, so she was not even alive when Richard III became King and

⁶⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry VI, Part 3*, John D. Cox, Eric Rasmussen, ed., cit., V.vii.50-53.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, V.vii.54-59.

she was already in France by the time these events took place, as she was exiled in 1476.

Analysing this scene itself can destroy the entire belief that this was an historical play. All of the future events that take place from now on are in fact prophesized by Margaret, and the story will now develop on top of her curses. But let's take a look at what happens here.

The action starts with the entrance of Queen Elizabeth and her relatives: her brother, Lord Rivers, and her two sons from a previous marriage, Lord Gray and the Marquis of Dorset. She is worried about her husband's health, as if he were to die, as their two sons are still too young, Richard would be in command until one of them is ready to be King.

Since Gloucester is hostile to her, she fears for her safety and that of her sons.

What we can find here in terms of historical mistakes, is the way Thomas, Lord Stanley, is referred to with the title of Earl of Derby, which he will only receive in 1485. Whether this was a mistake made by Shakespeare himself or by someone else during the passages from Quarto to Folio was a matter of discussion between Hammond, Smidt and Jowett, as throughout the play there are many inconsistencies and the names of Derby and Stanley are often used arbitrarily.⁷¹

Here we see Queen Elizabeth talking to Stanley about his wife, the Countess Richmond. She was Margaret Beaufort, the mother of this play's Duke of Richmond who was born from her first marriage. In this dialogue, Elizabeth states that «She's your wife and loves not me»⁷², almost assuming that the two women were on bad terms with each other. According to Holinshed, this was not the real thing: in his *Chronicles* he talks about a secret conspiracy (or as he called it an «enterprise betweene the two mothers»⁷³) that the two women tried to organize against Richard III by having their respective son and daughter (Elizabeth of York) get married. This is exactly what happens at the end of the story.

⁷¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., pp. 450-451.

⁷² *Ibidem*, I.iii.22-23.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 170.

Richard, after his arrival, begins to put his plan in motion and starts complaining that everyone is accusing him falsely of wrong deeds.

With a brazen face, he justifies himself and starts acting as the victim of the situation:

Cannot a plain man live and think no harm
But thus his simple truth must be abused
By silken, sly, insinuating jacks?⁷⁴

Moreover, he once again shows his manipulative power to spread uneasiness and doubt in everybody's mind:

I cannot tell; the world is grown so bad
That wrens make prey where eagles dare not perch.
Since every Jack became a gentleman,
There's many a gentle person made a jack.⁷⁵

But Richard is far from just accepting insults, and shows that he also has the guts to directly attack someone. The chance arrives when the queen brings the quarrel into the open, saying that Gloucester envies the advancement of her family. To this, he accuses her of having married a «A bachelor, and a handsome stripling too»⁷⁶ thus implying that she, being already a widow, had no rights to be at the King's side.

The arrival of Margaret, overshadows everything else. Her character will be better presented in the next chapter dedicated to the characters, but basically all of her curses here come true.

She enters with strong words, in fact, curses.

She here represents God's judgment upon those who did wrong (in this case destroyed the House of Lancaster).

It was them who built all of which the Yorks were now enjoying,

Thy honour, state and seat is due to me.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, I.iii.51-53.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, I.iii.69-72.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, I.iii.100.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, I.iii.111.

All of this was wrongfully stolen through murders and betrayals.

A husband and a son thou ow'st to me;
And thou a kingdom; all of you, allegiance.
The sorrow that I have, by right is yours,
And all the pleasures you usurp are mine.⁷⁸

By all of her curses, Margaret predicts the fall of the House of York. It is like a cycle of karma, where all of the bad deeds will be punished, and all the sufferance that they had inflicted upon the Lancasters, will be this time be pushed upon them. She even has a prediction for Queen Elizabeth, which is very important for what is going to happen next:

Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,
Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self.
Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's death
And see another, as I see thee now,
Decked in thy rights, as thou art stalled in mine.
Long die thy happy days before thy death,
And, after many lengthened hours of grief,
Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen.⁷⁹

This is probably the most religiously inspired play of Shakespeare, and this entire scene is focused on this: God is listening to her prayers and will finally unleash his wrath upon the sinners.

It might be strange to find themes like curses in the Christian world in which Shakespeare lived; however this theme was very dear to the writer, and a recurring theme in most of his plays.

Richard, moreover, is highly despised by her in this scene, as he reminds her of her own offences.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, I.iii.169-172.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, I.iii.201-208.

This however has a side effect. Seeing Richard being submerged by all of these curses, Elizabeth, who first was attacking him, starts to side with him against this old woman.

To sum up everything, we can organize Margaret's curses in 4 points:

1. King Edward IV should die;
2. Queen Margaret will outlive her children and will see another woman crowned queen;
3. Rivers, Dorset, and Hastings will soon die;
4. Richard's best friends will betray him and he will have sleepless nights full of nightmares.

The curious thing is that except for the King's death which will be natural, all of the following curses will be made true not by God, but by Richard himself, rather like a Devil. This is an interesting fact that I will explain in the analysis of the next scene.

Returning to the story, everything quiets down when the King calls everyone to his side.

The Duke of Gloucester, however, stays behind, and plans with a murderer the assassination of his brother Clarence, still locked up in the tower.

This is how Scene 3 ends, leaving us with a mixed feeling on how we can really consider this an historical play. For us, what we see here appears as almost pure fiction. But we must not forget that at that time, this was the best way of giving people an idea of what had happened before and was truly written to entertain the spectators. We are still far from Walter Scott's historical novels, but it is a very interesting way of writing that was only possible thanks to Shakespeare's bright mind.

ACT I, Scene 4

Out of the many assassinations that Richard III was accused of, the most unjustified one is probably that of his brother Clarence.

Together with Act 1, Scene 3, this is another part of the story that is totally mistaken. And the reason is simple. We know that George, Duke of Clarence was not killed by Richard III, but rather by the older brother Edward IV.

Ironically speaking, Clarence is the man most close to the idea that Shakespeare gave of Richard III. Born on October 21, 1449 he was made Duke of Clarence soon after his older brother, Edward IV, became King in 1461.

During his life, he tried many times to seize control of the Crown. After marrying Isabel Warwick, he soon tried, together with his father-in-law to organize a revolution in order to be the next King. According to Ashdown's research, «in 1469 George, Duke of Clarence joined forces with Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, who had always been Edward's chief ally, to remove Edward from the throne»⁸⁰. The claims used by George were that Edward was an illegitimate son of his mother and had no right to be the king. However the plan failed and he was forced to flee to France. He came back to England when Henry VI became king, as he would have been the next in line in case the Warwick family line became extinct. However things were not that good between him and the Warwick family, so he decided to reconcile with his brother Edward. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, after winning the following battles, restoring Edward IV on the throne, he was consequently greatly disturbed when he heard that his younger brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, was seeking to marry Warwick's younger daughter Anne, and was claiming some part of Warwick's lands. A violent quarrel between the brothers ensued, but Clarence was unable to prevent Gloucester from marrying, and in 1474 the king interfered to settle the dispute, dividing the estates between his brothers. In 1477 Clarence was again a suitor for the hand of Mary, who had just become duchess of Burgundy. Edward objected to the match, and Clarence, jealous of Gloucester's influence, left the court.⁸¹ Edward did not want Clarence to build ties with the immensely wealthy duchy of Burgundy, as this would have given him the chance to buy himself a new army to use against Edward.

⁸⁰ DULCI M. ASHDOWN, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁸¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Ed. Vol VI*: Cambridge University Press, 1910, p. 428.

At this point, Edward did not trust his brother anymore. Clarence was arrested in late June 1477⁸². After being sent to prison in January 1478, both Houses of Parliament passed the bill of attainder, and the sentence of death which followed was carried out on the 17th or 18th of February 1478.

In all of this turmoil, his younger brother Richard was the only one that tried to save his brother from death, not the one who tried to kill him as this play tries to show us; but it proved futile.

The way in which the Duke of Clarence was killed is the main topic of this scene of the play.

The setting, in fact, changes and we are now in the tower following the events that take place around Clarence. We cannot understand the real message behind it without referring to the other book that Shakespeare used to inspire this entire scene: *The Mirror for Magistrates*.

This book has a key meaning that is explained through Clarence's long speeches with Brakenbury: the instability of fortune and the punishment of vice. This book was meant to give an example of other people's miseries in order to dissuade all men from committing sins. Then we have another theme that is constantly present in Shakespeare's plays: the theme of the supernatural represented by the ghosts of fallen great people that come in other people's dreams to tell their stories in long monologues, announcing their own guilt and usually stressing the theme of divine punishment. Also here, Clarence has a terrifying dream: the ghost of Warwick together with a shadow like an angel call him «false, fleeting, perjured Clarence»⁸³. This will not be the only dream that haunts the characters of this play.

But for now, let's take a look at the first of his long speeches.

Methoughts that I had broken from the Tower,
And was embarked to cross to Burgundy;
And in my company my brother Gloucester,
Who from my cabin tempted me to walk
Upon the hatches. There we looked toward England,
And cited up a thousand heavy times,
During the wars of York and Lancaster,

⁸² DULCI M. ASHDOWN, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁸³ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.iv.55.

That had befall'n us. As we paced along
 Upon the giddy footing of the hatches,
Methought that Gloucester stumbled, and in falling
 Struck me (that thought to stay him) overboard
 Into the tumbling billows of the main.
 O Lord, **methought** what pain it was to drown,
 What dreadful noise of water in mine ears,
 What sights of ugly death within mine eyes.
Methoughts I saw a thousand fearful wracks,
 A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon,
 Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
 Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
 All scattered in the bottom of the sea.
 Some lay in dead men's skulls, and in those holes
 Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept-
 As 'twere in scorn of eyes - reflecting gems,
 Which wooed the slimy bottom of the deep
 And mocked the dead bones that lay scattered by.⁸⁴

This is shortly interrupted by Brakenbury to then resume and conclude itself with:

Methought I had, and often did I strive
 To yield the ghost, but still the envious flood
 Stopped in my soul and would not let it forth
 To find the empty, vast and wandering air,
 But smothered it within my panting bulk,
 Who almost burst to belch it in the sea.⁸⁵

Clarence's description of his dream is both full of very strong words but it is also very predictive. It also foreshadows the nightmare Richard himself experiences just before battle in Act V, scene 5. Little does he know right now that he is close to his death, and that it will be very similar to what he dreamt:

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, I.iv.9-33.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, I.iv.36-41.

O Lord, methought what pain it was to drown,
What dreadful noise of water in my ears,
What sights of ugly death within mine eyes⁸⁶

What we notice here is the combined use of skulls and treasures, each relating to mortality and human possession, one of the main concerns of Renaissance writers. This is also a theme that we will later find in *The Tempest*, where the father of the young prince is believed to have drowned, his skull now becoming coral and his eyes pearls.

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.⁸⁷

The verse used here is typical of the Marlovian descriptive style, and every line evokes a clear picture. On this regard, we can also find a clear reference to Marlowe's *Faustus* on line 47:

Unto the kingdom of perpetual night” confronted with “Chief lord and regent of perpetual night!⁸⁸

This part is also full of repetitions, in particular the word *methought* which conveys us the sense of anxiety that Clarence was feeling after this dreadful dream.

In terms of historical references, I must point out that the beginning of this dream was indeed something that really happened. When he says «And was embarked to cross to Burgundy; / And in my company my brother Gloucester»⁸⁹ he is referring to a trip they undertook together. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, after the Second

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, I.iv.21-24.

⁸⁷ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *The Tempest*, Virginia M. Vaughan, ed., London: Arden Shakespeare Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011, I.i.437-443.

⁸⁸ CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE, *Doctor Faustus*: The Harvard Classics, 1909, v.60.

⁸⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.iv.10-11.

Battle of St. Albans in February 1461, his mother sent him with his brother George for safety to Utrecht. They returned in April, and at the coronation of Edward IV.⁹⁰

In the second long speech, instead, we hear Clarence speaking about what he has done in the past, admitting his sins. But he does not talk like a sinner. He talks like a human being who tries to gain our sympathy. His worries, until his death, lie in the safety of his family, not his own. However this proves not enough to avoid God's punishment as already predicted by Margaret.

O God! if my deep prayers cannot appease Thee,
But Thou wilt be avenged on my misdeeds,
Yet execute Thy wrath in me alone;
O, spare my guiltless wife and my poor children.⁹¹

By the time of Clarence's death, his wife, Isabel Neville, was already dead, as she died on 22 December 1476. We know about this because there was a huge scandal at the time. In fact, «on 12th April 1477 without any warrant, 100 of Clarence's retainers dragged Ankarette Twynho (a woman serving his late wife after her last pregnancy) from her home near Frome in Somerset, seized her valuables and shut her up in the jail at Warwick for fear and great menaces and doubt of loss of their lives and goods». According to Clarence, Ankarette had been secretly working for Elizabeth Woodville, and «accused of having administered a venomous drink mixed with poison»⁹². The jury, intimidated by Clarence, carried out the sentence.

As Clarence sleeps, Brakenbury, moved by the monologue heard, reflects on the sorrow of princes who, despite their high rank, often feel «a world of restless care»⁹³ as do lesser folk.

When the two assassins sent by Gloucester come on stage, we assist at a conflict within conscience.

These two characters, even with little stage time, are well constructed. They prove to be real humans, not just “machines” sent to keep the play in motion. They have, each

⁹⁰ *Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Ed. Vol XXIII*: Cambridge University Press, 1910 p. 299.

⁹¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.iv.69-72.

⁹² ALISON WEIR, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁹³ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.iv.81.

one, their own feelings and vision of what they are meant to do: one is sure about the deed, placing money on a higher level compared to God's punishment; the second one, instead, at first becomes reluctant, but this is hastily put aside when reminded of the sum of money he will earn.

Clarence, however a sinner, tries nevertheless to win over the two people's inner conscience by making them remember that killing is a sin, and they should not commit such thing in order to avoid God's wrath.

Erroneous vassal! The great King of Kings
Hath in his tables of His law commanded
That thou shalt do no murder. And wilt thou then
Spurn His edict, and fulfill a man's?
Take heed, for He holds vengeance in His hands,
To hurl upon the heads that break his law.⁹⁴

Here we see something that marks the difference between Clarence and Richard. Here, in fact, the poor man falls into contradiction. He himself is a sinner and committed the same crime he is pleading the killers not to commit. Richard's warning to the murderers seems justified: «do not hear him plead, / For Clarence is well-spoken, and perhaps / May move your hearts to pity, if you mark him»⁹⁵. Eloquence is apparently a gift that Clarence shares with his brother. But, unlike him, is incapable of backing up his words with facts.

As we previously saw with Anne, Richard is truly a mastermind, and hits all of his enemies in their weakest spot.

One of the killers immediately recognizes how weak his words are: «And that same vengeance doth He hurl on thee, / For false swearing, and for murder too»⁹⁶

Clarence's plan fails, only death awaits him, as he deserved.

George, Duke of Clarence was privately executed on February 18th 1478 in the Tower of London, which avoided him the sad destiny of a public execution.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, I.iv.194-199.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, I.iii.346-348.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, I.iv.200-201.

Many believe that Clarence died after being drowned in a butt of malmsey wine. The reason for this is unknown. Some historians believe that it was a misunderstanding, and that it should have been a butt for malmsey.

So the body was probably inserted in a barrel for transportation, or maybe a barrel full of wine in order to preserve the body until its burial.

The way he was killed finds proof in some historical testimonies.

Fabyan writes in the *New Chronicles of England and France*,

« This yere, that is to meane y. xviii. daye of February, the duke of Clarence and 'brother to the kyng, thanne beyng prysoner in y' Tower, was secretly put to deth & drowned in a barell of maluesye within the sayd Tower»⁹⁷.

Polydore Vergil, in the *Anglica Historia*, writes:

«Meanwhile when King Edward, anxious to know what had been accomplished with the duke, and therefore tormented by every passing hour, learned from his ambassadors that nothing had come closer than for Henry to be brought to himself as a captive, he was exceedingly chagrined the business had not gone well, but he was mollified when he learned that he was being kept in custody, and then chose to place the question of his wealth, which was very slender, ahead of his other concerns. And so he became somewhat precise in pursuing his self-interest, but, mindful of his honor, after he had sufficiently replenished the treasury, lest he be guilty of avarice, he was then employing his liberality to prove himself to be a good and useful sovereign for the commonwealth when, behold, he committed a monstrous crime. For he suddenly commanded the arrest and execution of his brother Duke George of Clarence, who was put to death, as they say, in a barrel of Cretan wine, setting the worst example in human memory»⁹⁸.

⁹⁷ ROBERT FABYAN, *op. cit.*, p. 666.

⁹⁸ POLYDORE VERGIL, *Anglica Historia*: 1555, Book XXIV.

Notice how this death was already planned and hinted at throughout the play. First, Clarence dreams about drowning in water; then, the first thing he asks for when he meets the killers is «Where art thou, keeper? Give me a cup of wine»⁹⁹.

Shakespeare plays a lot with this theme of putting hints of future events in his plays, especially here. Also, we must not forget that in the previous scene, Margaret had implored God to punish Clarence: her prayer has been answered.

Now, I would like to answer a question that came up during the analysis of the previous scene. Why God's justice is performed through villains. This should be apparently in contrast with what religion teaches. But according to Tudor theory, this wasn't the case. In fact, even evil people may serve as God's hands in order to punish the sinners, as, ultimately, even they will eventually fall as sinners themselves, so Justice in the end prevails and no inconsistencies may be found.

At the end of Scene 4, the second murderer refuses the promised reward, as he knows that they have done the «most grievous murder»¹⁰⁰ as previously warned by his conscience.

This marks the end of the first Act.

⁹⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., I.iv.160.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, I.iv.272.

ACT II, Scene 1

Back to the Palace, we find King Edward suddenly calling everyone. The reason for this is that he finally starts to feel better and wants everyone to make peace between them, in order to put an end to all the internal conflicts which were happening while he was ill.

Why, so. Now have I done a good day's work.
You peers, continue this united league.
I every day expect an embassy
From my Redeemer to redeem me hence;
And more in peace my soul shall part to heaven,
Since I have made my friends at peace on earth.
Hastings and Rivers, take each other's hand;
Dissemble not your hatred. Swear your love.¹⁰¹

The scene begins with Edward putting peace between Rivers (the brother of the Queen) and Hastings. The latter seems to have never had a good relationship with the Woodville and Queen Elizabeth's relatives, as he was a loyal Yorkist. Edward seems aware of this and tries to put an end to this long-lasting fight.

Richard's appearance as always brings a tone of falseness in the room, as he steals the attention, gives proof of his innocence, and repents of all of his sins. When he is informed that everyone has made peace and all problems are settled, he declares himself devoted to everyone present:

A blessed labour, my most sovereign lord.
Amongst this princely heap, if any here
By false intelligence or wrong surmise
Hold me a foe;
If I unwittingly, or in my rage,
Have aught committed that is hardly borne,
By any in this presence, I desire
To reconcile me to his friendly peace.

¹⁰¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., II.i.1-8.

'Tis death to me to be at enmity;
I hate it, and desire all good men's love.
First, madam, I entreat true peace of you,
Which I will purchase with my duteous service;
Of you, my noble cousin Buckingham,
If ever any grudge were lodged between us;
Of you and you, Lord Rivers and of Dorset,
That all without desert have frowned on me;
Dukes, earls, lords, gentlemen; indeed, of all.
I do not know that Englishman alive
With whom my soul is any jot at odds
More than the infant that is born tonight
I thank my God for my humility.¹⁰²

With his usual ability in speaking, he masks in his speech two direct attacks to the people present in the room. At first, he refers to them as «heap»¹⁰³, which was not very flattering, and then, on line 69 he clearly marks the difference in rank between nobles and common gentlemen.

This peaceful scene is soon after destroyed by Queen Elizabeth's sentence:

A holy day shall this be kept hereafter.
I would to God all strifes were well compounded.
My sovereign liege, I do beseech your highness
To take our brother Clarence to your grace.¹⁰⁴

To which Richard immediately replies:

Why, madam, have I offered love for this,
To be so flouted in this royal presence?
Who knows not that the gentle Duke is dead?¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, II.i.53-73.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, II.i.54.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, II.i.74-77.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, II.i.78-80.

Everyone is suddenly astonished by this fact and they all look pale. The fact that everyone reacts like this could also be interpreted as a sign that all of them had at least the intention of getting rid of Clarence and somehow feel guilty.

Edward publicly admits that his order was indeed that of having Clarence killed

Is Clarence dead? The order was reversed.¹⁰⁶

but that the order should have been cancelled.

This situation gives Richard the chance to free himself from any possible accusation, giving moreover a terrible sense of guilt to his older brother.

This marks the end of the very short lasting peace, which would have been of hindrance to Richard's plans.

He does not hesitate in blaming Edward for the killing of their brother, and he even suspects the Queen's relatives.

God grant that some, less noble and less loyal,
Nearer in bloody thoughts, but not in blood,
Deserve not worse than wretched Clarence did,
And yet go current from suspicion.¹⁰⁷

The die is cast, and Richard begins his personal war against the Woodville.

Almost immediately, at line 97, Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby comes on stage, and he begs the king to pardon one of his dear servants that had killed one attendant of the Duke of Norfolk.

This situation is like a mirror of what happened with Clarence.

The king now faces the possibility of giving freedom to someone guilty of a crime, while his dear brother George did not receive any pardon. He then remembers all of which Clarence had done for him, and how nobody ever tried to convince him to free his brother.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, II.i.87.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, II.i.92-95.

With his soul full of sorrow, he calls Hastings to his side, and leaves the room, with his health now worsened with this terrible heartbreak.

But this, not before telling the terrible fate everyone there has:

O God! I fear Thy justice will take hold
On me, and you, and mine and yours for this.¹⁰⁸

One more time, after Margaret predictions, the fall of the house of York and all of its relatives is repeated, but no one pays any attention to this.

Richard himself is too busy developing his plans,

This is the fruits of rashness: marked you not
How that the guilty kindred of the Queen
Looked pale when they did hear of Clarence' death?
O! They did urge it still unto the king.
God will revenge it. Come, lords, will you go
To comfort Edward with our company?¹⁰⁹

Although this scene proves to be very dramatic for the plot of this story, we have already seen how reality is different. King Edward IV wanted Clarence's death, and he wanted it more than Richard did.

Clarence was too much of a threat to his reign, and had to be disposed of.

Shakespeare here probably brings to a higher level of tragedy what More had already written in his version of facts,

“King Edward (albeit he commanded it [Clarence's death]), when he wist it was done, piteously bewailed and sorrowfully repented.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, II.i.132-133.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, II.i.135-140.

¹¹⁰ THOMAS MORE, *The History of King Richard The Third*, cit., p. 9.

ACT II, Scene 2

Scene 2 opens in a room of the palace, and gives a portrait of a destroyed family. We see the son and daughter of Clarence together with their grandmother, the Duchess of York, mother of Edward, Clarence and Richard.

The old woman tries her best to deny their father's death, but her actions prove the contrary.

She finally gives up when she says:

My pretty cousins, you mistake me both;
I do lament the sickness of the King,
As loath to lose him, not your father's death.
It were lost sorrow to wail one that's lost.¹¹¹

thus admitting that not only Clarence was already dead, but also Edward is now close to death. The two children seek revenge.

Both call God, asking for divine punishment.

Then you conclude, my grandam, he is dead.
The King mine uncle is to blame for it.
God will revenge it, whom I will importune
With earnest prayers, all to that effect.¹¹²

The poor woman is then shocked when the boy says that he knows who caused his father's death. It was the king, provoked by the queen.

Their uncle Richard told them so, and also gave proof of his devotion to the two kids and his poor brother Clarence.

Grandam, we can, for my good uncle Gloucester
Told me the King, provoked to it by the Queen,
Devised impeachments to imprison him;

¹¹¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., II.ii.8-11.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, II.ii.12-15.

And when my uncle told me so, he wept,
And pitied me, and kindly kissed my cheek,
Bade me rely on him as on my father,
And he would love me dearly as his child.¹¹³

The duchess knowing the truth that lies beyond the words of her son Richard, tries to convince the children that he is not the saint he appears to be, but this proves useless. She is ashamed of giving birth to such an evil man.

This is not the first time we hear or see Richard cry. We have already seen him cry in front of Clarence when he was being taken to the tower, and Clarence himself uses this when trying to prove that Richard was not the one who ordered his death in front of the killers.

It cannot be, for he bewept my fortune,
And hugged me in his arms, and swore with sobs
That he would labour my delivery.¹¹⁴

James Siemon in his edition of *Richard III* tries to further investigate the matter. He shows us how, unlike the other plays, Richard here cries when he has never done so. Not even at his father's murder in *King Henry VI, Part 3* where he says:

I cannot weep; for all my body's moisture
Scarce serves to quench my furnace-burning heart:
Nor can my tongue unload my heart's great burthen;
For selfsame wind that I should speak withal
Is kindling coals that fires all my breast,
And burns me up with flames that tears would quench.
To weep is to make less the depth of grief:
Tears then for babes; blows and revenge for me
Richard, I bear thy name; I'll venge thy death,
Or die renowned by attempting it.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, II.ii.20-26.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, I.iv.243-245.

¹¹⁵ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Henry VI, Part 3*, cit., II.i.79-88.

Always according to Siemon, «Richard does not weep in More, but he employs grossly hypocritical tears in Mirror»¹¹⁶.

The reasons for this change in the character of Richard can be either a correction that Shakespeare adds after reading the Mirror, or probably a way to once more exaggerate Richard's evil mind, as he lowers himself to the level of a babe in order to satisfy his desire.

This very intimate scene is suddenly interrupted by Elizabeth, who enters on stage lamenting, with messy hair, and giving everyone the terrible news: the King is dead. The Duchess of York joins her in her grief and what we see is a terrible image of despair.

Elizabeth cries for her lost Edward; the two children cry for their father, while the Duchess mourns both of her lost sons.

All engage in something that looks like a challenge between who has lost more. Apparently the unlucky winner is the Duchess of York who had lost two sons and a husband:

Was never mother had so dear a loss.
Alas! I am the mother of these griefs.
Their woes are parcelled; mine is general.
She for an Edward weeps, and so do I.
I for a Clarence weep, so doth not she.
These babes for Clarence weep, and so do I;
I for an Edward weep, so do not they.
Alas! You three, on me, threefold distressed,
Pour all your tears. I am your sorrow's nurse,
And I will pamper it with lamentations.¹¹⁷

Dorset and Rivers immediately follow Elizabeth, reminding her that things must be immediately organized in order to have her son, Edward, crowned as the new king.

¹¹⁶ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., p. 160.

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, II.ii.79-88.

Madam, bethink you, like a careful mother,
Of the young prince your son: send straight for him;
Let him be crowned. In him your comfort lives.
Drown desperate sorrow in dead Edward's grave
And plant your joys in living Edward's throne.¹¹⁸

Before proceeding, I must point out one thing.

Talking about chronological events, we need to remember that the conjunction of Clarence's death and Edward's is just Shakespeare's invention. In fact, Clarence died in 1477, while Edward died in 1483.

Putting these two deaths next to each other serves Shakespeare only to give a higher tragic value to the play and to give a reason for Edward's death. It is in fact unknown why he died so suddenly (he died at the age of 41).

A contemporary description of the king, may give us a hint at what the possible cause of his death was.

According to the Italian priest Dominic Mancini which was reporting the English events to the archbishop of Vienne, he one day wrote that:

«In food and drink he was immoderate: it was his habit, so I have learned, to take an emetic for the delight of gorging his stomach once more. For this reason,...he had grown fat in his loins... He was licentious in the extreme: moreover it was often said that he had been most insolent to numerous women after he had seduced them, for, as soon as he grew weary of dalliance, he gave up the ladies much against their will to other courtiers.»¹¹⁹

The arrival of Richard, along with Buckingham, Hastings, Stanley, and Ratcliffe serve only for continuity of the play. We see how Richard and Buckingham seek the same goal, which is to go together to get the Prince and to separate him from Elizabeth and the rest of the Woodville family. Buckingham here gets the role of the man of action that puts into movement Richard's plans.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, II.ii.96-100.

¹¹⁹ EVANS, MICHAEL R., *The Death of Kings: Royal Deaths in Medieval England*, London: Continuum, 2007, p. 67.

Another thing does not match with reality. Richard was not there when Edward IV died. He was in the north of England, at Middleham Castle serving the role of protector of the Northern regions as Edward ordered him to do.

We have proof of this, as Kendall shows us, by a letter dispatched not by the Queen, but by one of Lord Hastings' men, as he was a very close friend of Edward.

The message stated as follows:

«The King has left all to your protection-goods, heir, realm. Secure the person of our sovereign Lord Edward the Fifth and get you to London.»¹²⁰

This letter was intended to have Richard come back to London and stop the plans of Elizabeth and the Woodville to take control over young Edward V.

Other two will follow the first letter. The first one sent by Richard himself, confirming his intention to come back; the second one is very important and provides the reason for what is going to happen next in the play, as in reality: «The Woodvilles, had usurped the direction of affairs. Only by a desperate effort had he succeeded in limiting the escort which would bring Edward up to London to two thousand men. Richard should not fail to come strong and secure the King»¹²¹.

An internal fight over who would control the new young king is beginning.

¹²⁰ PAUL MURRAY KENDALL, *op. cit.*, Chap. 2.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, Chap. 2.

ACT II, Scene 3

Scene 3 is totally invented and does not take into account any chronological event which can be analyzed.

It is however important for the play as a window scene.

By turning away from the actions that develop around the nobles, we finally take a look at what common people (like the ones watching the play) were thinking about this power struggle.

It has a function of involving even more the spectators and putting them in front of some of the worries they also had.

Each of the three citizens represents a different point of view.

The first one is very optimistic, maybe also too much. He believes that everything will go smoothly.

The second one, however, thus being not too pessimistic, fears that change is not always good and hopes that the new king will have good advisors.

But the third man is totally pessimistic, and gives also reasons for this: the king is too young, and he brings the example of Henry VI, who was however guided by virtuous men, while the current king will have by his side the Duke of Gloucester whom he considers full of danger, and the haughty and proud Queen's relatives.

Better it were they all came by the father,
Or by the father there were none at all,
For emulation who shall be nearest
Will touch us all too near, if God prevent not.
O, full of danger is the Duke of Gloucester,
And the Queen's sons and brothers haught and proud;
And were they to be ruled, and not to rule,
This sickly land might solace as before.¹²²

¹²² WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., II.iii.23-30.

ACT II, Scene 4

The scene opens in the palace, where the Archbishop of York informs Elizabeth that the young Prince Edward will reach London in about two days.

However, in the background, the plan set in motion by Buckingham and Richard, finally reaches its climax.

Before that, however, we have a particular scene, considered a “comic relief”. It is basically one last moment of fun and easy play before the play turns into its most tragic part.

There are four main characters on stage: Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, Little York, the youngest son of Edward IV, and the Archbishop of York.

The boy is the center of the comic scene (ironically, as he will soon die), and the joke revolves around a sentence that his uncle Richard Gloucester told him regarding the fact that the younger brother was taller than the oldest:

Grandam, one night, as we did sit at supper,
My uncle Rivers talked how I did grow
More than my brother. “Ay,” quoth my uncle
Gloucester,
‘Small herbs have grace; great weeds do grow apace.’
And since, methinks I would not grow so fast
Because sweet flowers are slow and weeds make haste.¹²³

To which the boy's grandmother replies:

Good faith, good faith, the saying did not hold
In him that did object the same to thee.
He was the wretched'st thing when he was young,
So long a-growing, and so leisurely,
That if this rule were true, he should be gracious.¹²⁴

¹²³ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., II.iv.10-15.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, II.iv.16-20.

The child then moves on to repeat a common belief that was going around at those times regarding the birth of Richard, which told that he was born with teeth.

Marry, they say my uncle grew so fast
That he could gnaw a crust at two hours old;
'Twas full two years ere I could get a tooth.
Grandam, this would have been a biting jest.¹²⁵

This myth has also been used in another of Shakespeare's plays: Henry VI, Part III, right when Richard stabs Henry VI:

Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born,
To signify thou camest to bite the world:
And, if the rest be true which I have heard,
Thou camest-- (V.vi.53-56)

This scene is suddenly interrupted by a messenger (which some editions of the Quarto indicated as the Marquis of Dorset), to inform everyone that due to an order of Richard and Buckingham, Rivers, Gray and Vaughan had all been arrested and sent to the castle of Pomfret, a place where it was common practice to send prisoners sentenced to death.

Elizabeth realizes that their attempt to control Edward V has already been destroyed, and decides to run and hide in the Sanctuary together with her youngest child, in order to avoid certain death.

Ay me! I see the ruin of my house:
The tiger now hath seized the gentle hind;
Insulting tyranny begins to jut
Upon the innocent and aweless throne.
Welcome destruction, blood and massacre.
I see, as in a map, the end of all.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, II.iv.27-30.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, II.iv.50-55.

The Archbishop helps them by taking both of them to the Sanctuary and by entrusting Elizabeth with the Great Seal, which was handed to him after King Edward's death. It was the proof that he saw in her the right person to govern over the reign.

All of what is described in this scene really happened. According to history, «On the 29th of April 1483, supported by the Duke of Buckingham, he intercepted his nephew [Edward V] at Stony Stratford and arrested Lord Rivers and Richard Grey, the little king's half-brother. It was in Richard's charge that Edward was brought to London on the 4th of May. Richard was recognized as protector, the Woodville faction was overthrown, and Queen Elizabeth Woodville with her younger children took sanctuary at Westminster. For the time the government was carried on in Edward's name, and the 22nd of June was appointed for his coronation. »¹²⁷

One more thing regarding the Archbishop of York. He was indeed the same man described in this play. We find proof of this thanks to Ross, who points out that after celebrating the funeral of Edward IV, he did indeed pass on the Seal to Elizabeth, and he really believed in her. As by doing this he lost the loyalty of the royal family, he was removed from his position on May 13, 1483.¹²⁸

He will be subsequently charged of conspiracy and imprisoned in the Tower of London.

A more complete description by Henry Leigh Bennett of what happened states that «Rotherham's fidelity to Elizabeth led to the forfeiture of the chancellorship.

At the death of Edward IV (9 April 1483) the vantage of power seemed in the queen and her kindred. Before the month closed the boy king was in Gloucester's hands, the queen's brother, Lord Rivers, and her son, Lord Grey, were imprisoned, and the queen herself was seeking sanctuary.

Lord Hastings assured Rotherham that there was no danger to the young king, and that all would be well. "Be it as well as it will," was Rotherham's reply, "it will never be as well as we have seen it." He hastened with his retinue of servants in the middle of the night to the queen, and found her sitting on the rushes among the trunks and household stuff for her use in sanctuary. Rotherham assured her of his loyalty,

¹²⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Ed. Vol XXIII, cit., p. 299.*

¹²⁸ CHARLES ROSS, *Richard III*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 76.

declared that if anything should happen to the young king he would crown the next brother, the Duke of York, who was still with the queen, and, as the greatest proof of faithfulness he could give, put the great seal into her hands. This surrender was of course indefensible, and after a few hours' reflection, he sent for the seal again. But for his action that night he was deprived of office before the end of May, and on 13 June, concurrently with the hurried and brutal execution of Hastings, he was thrown into prison». ¹²⁹

¹²⁹ HENRY LEIGH BENNETT, *The Dictionary of National Biography: Volume 49*: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885ca., p. 302.

ACT III

Act III, has previously seen, is the most important part of the play with seven scenes, in which Shakespeare narrates all of the most important events that take Richard III to the throne. This part is very long, and contains a lot of unnecessary information for this historical research.

Therefore, I will conduct my analysis without separating the different scenes, investigating entirely all of the historical references without segmenting them, in order to present a complete outlook on the real events that took place in this time frame.

Scene 1 focuses on Edward IV's sons and how Richard III puts them out of the line of succession to the throne.

After the arrival of the rightful heir, Richard immediately greets him, accompanied by his closest allies, Buckingham and Catesby.

The young boy immediately notices the absence of his other uncles, pointing out that an entire branch of his family (on his mother's side) was missing.

Richard tries to convince the boy that he should be wary about those people:

Sweet Prince, the untainted virtue of your years
Hath not yet dived into the world's deceit,
Nor more can you distinguish of a man
Than of his outward show, which, God He knows,
Seldom or never jumpeth with the heart.
Those uncles which you want were dangerous;
Your grace attended to their sugared words
But looked not on the poison of their hearts.
God keep you from them, and from such false friends.¹³⁰

The young boy here proves to be far from being stupid, and immediately notices that Richard has indeed been planning something. But unfortunately he is not really aware of his uncle's real objective. He is also unaware that Richard had already imprisoned them in Pomfret.

¹³⁰ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., III.i.7-15.

Still unsatisfied by the current situation, he asks again why his mother and his younger brother are still not here, requesting the presence of Hastings.

I thought my mother and my brother York
Would long ere this have met us on the way.
Fie, what a slug is Hastings, that he comes not
To tell us whether they will come or no.¹³¹

Lord Hastings enters, and informs everyone that Elizabeth and her younger son, the young duke of York, have taken sanctuary (which was an act that meant that someone was after them and they had to take refuge).

Buckingham understands the plan of the Queen, and suddenly comes up with a counter plan to solve that situation and carry on Richard's project.

Fie, what an indirect and peevish course
Is this of hers! Lord Cardinal, will your grace
Persuade the Queen to send the Duke of York
Unto his princely brother presently?
If she deny, Lord Hastings, go with him,
And from her jealous arms pluck him perforce.¹³²

The real identity of this Lord Cardinal is not very clear. As Siemon points out, there are two interpretations.

The two men who could possibly be this cardinal are Thomas Rotherham, who was historically a member of the Woodville party, and Thomas Bouchier, who was among «neutral councillors»¹³³.

More uses one name in the Latin version, and the other one in the English version of his *History*.

George Logan dedicates a brief note in his edition of More's book, and according to him «Thomas Rotherham was in fact no longer lord chancellor at this point, having been replaced by John Russel»¹³⁴.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, III.i.20-23.

¹³² *Ibidem*, III.i.31-36.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 245.

Shakespeare probably identified the cardinal we talk about here as Thomas Bouchier, Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury, as he tries to remark the fact that both the Queen and her son were under holy protection.

We should infringe the holy privilege
Of blessed sanctuary. Not for all this land,
Would I be guilty of so deep a sin.¹³⁵

Luckly for Richard, Buckingham has already come up with the right words to use.

You are too senseless-obstinate, my lord,
Too ceremonious and traditional.
Weigh it but with the grossness of this age,
You break not sanctuary in seizing him.
The benefit thereof is always granted
To those whose dealings have deserved the place
And those who have the wit to claim the place.
This prince hath neither claimed it nor deserved it
And therefore, in mine opinion, cannot have it.
Then taking him from thence that is not there
You break no privilege nor charter there.
Oft have I heard of sanctuary men,
But sanctuary children, never till now.¹³⁶

This is where we see how important was for Richard III to have a good right hand man working for him. Buckingham manages to persuade the Cardinal to revoke the Church's protection for Prince Edward's younger brother and to have him delivered into Richard's hands.

Hastings finally leaves with the Cardinal to go fetch Elizabeth and young York. Richard needs both his brother's sons under control, otherwise if he were to kill just one, the other one would immediately be next in line.

¹³⁴ THOMAS MORE, *The History of King Richard The Third*, cit., p. 51.

¹³⁵ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., III.i.41-43.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, III.i.44-56.

After this small break, the scene focuses once more on the dialogue between the new Edward and Richard.

Richard in fact suggests that the two nephews rest in the Tower until the moment of the coronation.

Where it seems best unto your royal self.
If I may counsel you, some day or two
Your highness shall repose you at the Tower;
Then where you please and shall be thought most fit
For your best health and recreation.¹³⁷

It's no surprise that Prince Edward is not happy about the idea. Recently the Tower has been a place where many executions were committed, last but not least, the murder of his beloved uncle Clarence.

Again, Buckingham comes up with the right answer to convince young Edward. He uses the legend which affirmed that that place was built by the great Julius Caesar. It is however been historically proven that the oldest part of it dates only to the 11th century, around 1078.

Also, according to Vergil, the tower was not a scary place, as it was also used by Edward IV as a royal residence, thus «this [lodging] causyd no suspytion»¹³⁸.

The Prince however is not really sure about the legend:

Is it upon record, or else reported
Successively from age to age, he built it?¹³⁹

He also gives a personal opinion on how history works:

But say, my lord, it were not registered,
Methinks the truth should live from age to age,

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, III.i.63-67.

¹³⁸ POLYDORUS VERGIL, *op. cit.*, Book XXV.

¹³⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., *cit.*, III.i.72-73.

As 'twere retailed to all posterity,
Even to the general all-ending day.¹⁴⁰

This demonstration of intelligence makes Richard laugh and he shares his humor with the public with another aside:

So wise so young, they say, do never live long.¹⁴¹

thus giving another insight of what's going to happen next.

Buckingham however manages to convince the young prince, which starts fantasizing about his future as a king.

An if I live until I be a man,
I'll win our ancient right in France again
Or die a soldier as I lived a king.¹⁴²

The right to reign over France was a debate that, as Siemon tells us, «was repeatedly asserted by English invasions during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453)». Henry V himself was named «King of England and Heir of France»¹⁴³.

Soon after, the younger brother enters, him too stating that he was against the idea of going to the Tower.

After a short discussion and a game based on words, the two young men finally leave the scene and go to the Tower.

Richard meets with both Buckingham and Catesby in order to discuss the next steps of his plan.

The first issue they need to sort out is if they can use Lord Hastings and Lord Stanley as their allies.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, III.i.75-78.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, III.i.79.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, III.i.91-93.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 252.

Buckingham asks Catesby his opinion:

What think'st thou? Is it not an easy matter
To make William, Lord Hastings, of our mind
For the instalment of this noble Duke
In the seat royal of this famous isle?¹⁴⁴

Catesby replies with a very short and concise answer:

He for his father's sake so loves the Prince
That he will not be won to aught against him.¹⁴⁵

He [Stanley] will do all in all as Hastings doth.¹⁴⁶

Strangely enough, the historical identity of Lord Hastings matches the one found in Shakespeare's play. The Hastings family was in fact a loyal supporter of the house of York since at least 1435, when William's father Leonard started serving the family. This loyalty brought fortune into the Hastings house, with many lands, titles and positions. Things took a wrong turn with the death of Edward IV, which began the internal struggle between the Woodvilles and Richard III over the control of Edward V. When he was forced to decide between taking side with either the Woodvilles or the Duke of Gloucester, William Hastings tied his loyalty to Edward V, the rightful heir to the throne¹⁴⁷.

In order to do so, he first decided to take side with the Duke of Gloucester, as he trusted the man and also because the house of Hastings was not on good terms with the Woodvilles.

However, when he realized that Richard III was planning to become the next King, he will oppose the idea and will be sentenced to death.¹⁴⁸

This loyalty that Hastings had towards Edward V's father is also remarked by Holinshed when quoting Queen Elizabeth which disliked the man «for the great

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, III.i.161-164.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, III.i.165-166.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, III.i.168.

¹⁴⁷ ROSEMARY HORROX, *Richard III: A Study of Service*: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 116.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p.116.

fauour the king bare him: and also for that she thought him secretlie familiar with the king in wanton companie»¹⁴⁹.

Back to the play, Buckingham then suggests Richard to hold a council in the palace on the next day.

Well then, no more but this: go, gentle Catesby,
And as it were far off, sound thou Lord Hastings
How he doth stand affected to our purpose
And summon him tomorrow to the Tower
To sit about the coronation.
If thou dost find him tractable to us,
Encourage him, and tell him all our reasons.
If he be leaden, icy, cold, unwilling,
Be thou so too, and so break off the talk,
And give us notice of his inclination;
For we tomorrow hold divided councils,
Wherein thyself shalt highly be employed.¹⁵⁰

Richard tells Catesby to inform Hastings of the fact that his enemies, the Woodvilles, have all been imprisoned; this should convince him to join sides with Richard.

Commend me to Lord William. Tell him, Catesby,
His ancient knot of dangerous adversaries
Tomorrow are let blood at Pomfret Castle;
And bid my lord, for joy of this good news,
Give Mistress Shore one gentle kiss the more.¹⁵¹

After the departure of Catesby, Buckingham wants to know what will be of Hastings if he were to decline the offer.

Richard has no doubts about this, and by saying so, he also informs Buckingham of the prize he has in store for him if the plan succeeds.

¹⁴⁹ RAPHAEL HOLINSHED, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, London: Johnson, 1808, p. 363.

¹⁵⁰ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., III.i.169-180.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, III.i.181-185.

Chop off his head; something we will determine.
And look when I am king, claim thou of me
The earldom of Hereford and all the moveables
Whereof the King my brother was possessed.¹⁵²

Holinshed records that Richard agreed to Buckingham's «quiet possession of the earldome of Hereford»¹⁵³ and «of his owne mind promised [Buckingham] a great quantitie of the kings treasure, and of his household stuffe».¹⁵⁴ This fact has also been recorded by More, which tells us that «the protector [Richard III] should grant him the quiet possession of the earldom of Hereford, which he claimed as his inheritance, and could never obtain it in King Edward's time»¹⁵⁵. As we see, the topic of the quiet possession is used by both authors.

Logan once more gives us the historical reason behind the use of these words: «Buckingham had inherited half of the great estate of the last earl of Hereford, Humphrey de Bohun (d.1373), through descent from one of the two Bohun daughters, who were their father's co-heiresses. The rest had gone to the Lancastrian kings through the marriage of the other daughter to Henry IV. This line having been extinguished with the death of Henry VI and his son, Buckingham regarded himself as rightful heir of the entire estate»¹⁵⁶.

Scene 2's importance lies more in the structure of the play, rather than its historicity. While Catesby is travelling towards Hastings house, a messenger of Lord Stanley, his dear friend, disturbs the latter.

Stanley had a dream:

He dreamt the boar had razed off his helm.
Besides, he says there are two councils kept,
And that may be determined at the one
Which may make you and him to rue at th'other.
Therefore he sends to know your lordship's pleasure,
If you will presently take horse with him

¹⁵² *Ibidem*, III.i.193-196.

¹⁵³ RAPHAEL HOLINSHED, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 378.

¹⁵⁵ THOMAS MORE, *The History of King Richard The Third*, *cit.*, p. 50.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

And with all speed post with him toward the north,
To shun the danger that his soul divines.¹⁵⁷

Once more, dreams have the power to predict the future (the boar was the symbol of Richard III, so the dream meant that they would have been killed by Richard). Unfortunately, Hastings is sure of his position, as he was also very loyal to the York family, and is convinced that nothing bad will happen to both of them.

After dismissing the messenger, he is reached also by Catesby that informs him of the two separate councils regarding the coronation of Edward V.

Catesby tries to see if Hastings would give his vote to Richard if he were to be crowned King.

It is a reeling world indeed, my lord,
And I believe will never stand upright
Till Richard wear the garland of the realm.¹⁵⁸

Hastings is also informed of the fact that the Queen's relatives have been sent to prison:

Ay, on my life, and hopes to find you forward
Upon his party for the gain thereof;
And thereupon he sends you this good news,
That this same very day your enemies,
The kindred of the Queen, must die at Pomfret.¹⁵⁹

Hastings, however, keeps his loyalty to the true heir to the crown, thus we have proof of what it has been told about him:

Indeed, I am no mourner for that news,
Because they have been still my adversaries.
But that I'll give my voice on Richard's side

¹⁵⁷ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., III.ii.10-17.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, III.ii.37-39.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, III.ii.45-49.

To bar my master's heirs in true descent,
God knows I will not do it, to the death.¹⁶⁰

This only means one thing. Hastings must die.

The scene ends in irony, with Hastings very happy about the current situation, with his long lasting enemies sentenced to death. He even refuses to talk to the priest. Little he knows that he will be the next victim of Richard.

Scene 3 concludes the part of Elizabeth's relatives. We see Rivers, Vaughan and Grey guarded by Richard Ratcliffe while they enter the prison at Promfret Castle. They find themselves totally innocent, and Rivers tells Ratcliffe that their killers will eventually pay for this crime, thus adding the list of death wishes against Richard. In his last moments, Grey remembers Queen Margaret's curse, as they took part in the plan to kill Henry VI and his son, and the only thing they now have to do is to wait their death. Their only wish is to save Elizabeth and her two sons from this cruel fate.

Then cursed she Richard; then cursed she Buckingham;
Then cursed she Hastings. O, remember, God
To hear her prayers for them, as now for us.
And for my sister and her princely sons,
Be satisfied, dear God, with our true blood,
Which, as thou knowst, unjustly must be spilt.¹⁶¹

They embrace together and march to their death.

Scene 4 finally brings us to the decisive meetings which will change history. As Buckingham had already stated, there will be two meetings in total. The first one will be secret (at Crosby House according to Hall¹⁶²), while the second one will be public in order to inform everyone of what will happen next.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, III.ii.50-54.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, III.iii.17-22.

¹⁶² «And to auoyde al suspicion, he caused all the lordes whiche he knewe to be faithfull to the kyng to assemble at Baynardes castle to comen of the ordre of the coronacion, whyle he and other of his complices & of his affinitee at Crosbies place contriued the contrary and to make the protectour kyng: to which counsail there were adhibite very fewe, and they very secrete» from EDWARD HALL, *The*

The topic of these councils should be the organization of the crowning of Edward V, but that is just a lie. The true reason for one of these will be to understand who are the people that will form an alliance with Richard and who must be eliminated. This is also stated by More: «But the protector [Richard III as protector of Edward V] and the Duke [Buckingham], after that that they had set the lord cardinal, the archbishop of York, the bishop of Ely, the Lord Stanley, and the Lord Hastings (then lord chamberlain), with many other noblemen, to commune and devise about the coronation in one place, as fast were they in another place contriving the contrary, and to make the protector king.[...]For little all folks withdrew from the Tower and drew to Crosby's Place in Bishopsgate Street, where the protector kept his household»¹⁶³.

Shakespeare's play focuses on the public council, which took place in the Tower. We see all the most influential people taking their seats at the table in order to decide together the topics of the meeting: Buckingham, Lord Stanley, Hastings, the Bishop of Ely, Ratcliff, Lovel, with others; Richard is not present from the beginning. Hastings immediately takes charge and asks about the date of the coronation of Edward V:

Now, noble peers, the cause why we are met
Is to determine of the coronation.
In God's name speak: when is the royal day?¹⁶⁴

The Bishop of Ely, who is there in order to give the meeting a more religious trait, thinks that things should be taken care of as soon as possible. Buckingham however thinks that they all should wait for Richard's opinion, as the protector of the young heir. He also marks clearly that he doesn't know much of Richard's feelings (apparently distancing himself from him), while Hastings, instead, is very close to him.

We know each other's faces; for our hearts,
He knows no more of mine than I of yours,

Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke, London: J. Johnson, 1809, p. 358.

¹⁶³ THOMAS MORE, *The History of King Richard The Third*, cit., p. 50.

¹⁶⁴ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., III.iv.1-3.

Or I of his, my lord, than you of mine.
Lord Hastings, you and he are near in love.¹⁶⁵

Hastings is flattered by the statement, and makes no excuses. And even exaggerates this, saying that whatever his decision, this will surely please Richard.

But you, my honourable lords, may name the time,
And in the Duke's behalf I'll give my voice,
Which I presume he'll take in gentle part.¹⁶⁶

He is, by taking Buckingham's bait, creating an alibi for Richard, and protecting him from what's going to happen next.

Richard suddenly makes his appearance, giving almost the idea of not being interested at all at the current situation:

My noble lords and cousins all, good morrow.
I have been long a sleeper; but I trust
My absence doth neglect no great designs
Which by my presence might have been concluded.¹⁶⁷

After this, things begin to change.

Richard, with a very simple and innocent question, has the chance to send away the Bishop of Ely, and can finally begin his attacks on Hastings soon after updating Buckingham on the current situation:

Catesby hath sounded Hastings in our business,
And finds the testy gentleman so hot
That he will lose his head ere give consent
His master's child, as worshipful as he terms it,
Shall lose the royalty of England's throne.¹⁶⁸

They both withdraw for a moment and then come back to meet everyone.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, III.iv.10-13.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, III.iv.18-20.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, III.iv.22-25.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, III.iv.36-40.

Richard: I pray you all, tell me what they deserve
That do conspire my death with devilish plots
Of damned witchcraft, and that have prevailed
Upon my body with their hellish charms?

Hastings: The tender love I bear your grace, my lord,
Makes me most forward in this princely presence
To doom th'offenders, whosoe'er they be.
I say, my lord, they have deserved death.

Richard: Then be your eyes the witness of their evil.
Look how I am bewitched! Behold, mine arm
Is like a blasted sapling withered up;
And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch,
Consorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore,
That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.

Hastings: If they have done this deed, my noble lord –

Richard: If? Thou protector of this damned strumpet,
Talk'st thou to me of ifs? Thou art a traitor.
Off with his head! Now by Saint Paul I swear
I will not dine until I see the same.
Lovell and Ratcliffe, look that it be done.
The rest that love me, rise and follow me.¹⁶⁹

Pretending to be enraged, Richard shows everyone his arm, and begins attacking Elizabeth and Lady Shore, accusing them of sorcery. Hastings here commits a terrible mistake. He hesitates, and almost goes against Richard with that "If". We have already pointed out that it was thought that Hastings had a relationship with Mistress Shore. Now, he was almost defending her. Richard takes the chance and accuses him of treachery and wants his immediate execution. He finally removes another obstacle and puts doubts into the other men's minds regarding who should really reign over England.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, III.iv.58-78.

In the end, the only ones to remain onstage are Hastings and his executioners. He remembers the words of Stanley and Margaret, and accuses himself of being too overconfident. He also remembers now how his horse stumbled three times on the way to the Tower. Only that same morning he was happy about his enemies' death; now he will join them with the same fate.

His last words are very remarkable:

O bloody Richard! Miserable England,
I prophesy the fearfull'st time to thee
That ever wretched age hath looked upon.
Come, lead me to the block; bear him my head.
They smile at me that shortly shall be dead.¹⁷⁰

The part of Hastings being sentenced to death for treachery is true. But Rosemary Horrox informs us that the timing in which he is killed in the play is incorrect. This is because historically, Hastings was executed about two weeks before the Woodvilles. The scene at the council happened probably on the 13th of June, and Hastings was arrested along with Morton and Stanley and then immediately beheaded, while Rivers and Grey were executed around the 25th of June.¹⁷¹

The reason behind this inversion is obvious for a dramatic point of view. It serves as a way of marking the irony of laughing at other people's misfortunes while not paying attention to what is happening to us.

Scene 5 is another narrative part focused on the dialogue between Richard and Buckingham. They need to clear themselves by any possible false accusation against them in the murder of Hastings as this was sudden and apparently inexplicable. They change into worn out armors and Richard tells Buckingham to act like their life was in danger.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, III.iv.102-106.

¹⁷¹ ROSEMARY HORROX, *Hastings, William, first Baron Hastings (c.1430–1483)*, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Oxford University Press, 2004.
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12588> [accessed 04 Jan 2014]

Come, cousin, canst thou quake, and change thy colour,
Murder thy breath in the middle of a word,
And then again begin, and stop again,
As if thou were distraught and mad with terror?¹⁷²

When the Mayor of London finally arrives, and finds out that Hastings has been killed. Both Richard and Buckingham play their part, and once again Richard remarks how he used to trust Hastings, before he was ruined by Mistress Shore:

So dear I loved the man that I must weep.
I took him for the plainest harmless creature
That breathed upon this earth a Christian;
Made him my book, wherein my soul recorded
The history of all her secret thoughts.
So smooth he daubed his vice with show of virtue
That, his apparent open guilt omitted-
I mean his conversation with Shore's wife-
He lived from all attainder of suspect.¹⁷³

Buckingham proves once again the perfect partner of Richard:

Well, well, he was the covert'st sheltered traitor
That ever lived.
Would you imagine, or almost believe,
Were't not that by great preservation
We live to tell it, that the subtle traitor
This day had plotted in the council house
To murder me and my good lord of Gloucester?¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., III.v.1-4.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, III.v.24-32.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, III.v.33-39.

Richard puts pressure on the poor Mayor, and before he even has the chance of answering he immediately defends himself:

What? Think you we are Turks or infidels?
Or that we would, against the form of law,
Proceed thus rashly to the villain's death,
But that the extreme peril of the case,
The peace of England and our persons' safety,
Enforced us to this execution?¹⁷⁵

The Mayor decides to believe this version of the events and is even easily influenced by Richard and Buckingham, to the point of making their accusations his own:

Now fair befall you! He deserved his death,
And your good graces both have well proceeded
To warn false traitors from the like attempts.¹⁷⁶

I never looked for better at his hands
After he once fell in with Mistress Shore.¹⁷⁷

The mayor also guarantees that he will inform everyone of what has happened as if he himself was present at the time of the crime. Richard can now move on to the next and probably final step of the plan: Buckingham needs to ruin Edward IV's reputation by convincing everyone that he was not the legitimate son of their father, and so his children were far from being the right heirs to the throne.

Back in Scene 5, when Richard ordered Buckingham to ruin Edward's reputation, he gave some hints on how to get to the point:

Go, after, after, cousin Buckingham.
The Mayor towards Guildhall hies him in all post.
There, at your meetest vantage of the time,
Infer the bastardy of Edward's children.
Tell them how Edward put to death a citizen
Only for saying he would make his son

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, III.v.41-46.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, III.v.47-49.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, III.v.50-51.

Heir to the crown, meaning indeed his house,
 Which, by the sign thereof, was termed so.
 Moreover, urge his hateful luxury
 And bestial appetite in change of lust,
 Which stretched unto their servants, daughters, wives,
 Even where his raging eye or savage heart,
 Without control, lusted to make a prey.
 Nay, for a need, thus far come near my person:
 Tell them, when that my mother went with child
 Of that insatiate Edward, noble York
 My princely father then had wars in France,
 And by true computation of the time
 Found that the issue was not his begot,
 Which well appeared in his lineaments,
 Being nothing like the noble duke, my father.
 Yet touch this sparingly, as 'twere far off,
 Because, my lord, you know my mother lives.¹⁷⁸

After a short pause given by Scene 6, Scene 7 is all focused on this big controversy, whether Edward IV was a legitimate King or not. In order to do so, they try to push two different claims.

The first one is that Edward IV and Richard III had a different father, thus accusing his mother of having an affair with another man; the second one instead aims to destroy the legitimacy of Edward IV's children by showing that he was already married to another woman before the marriage with Elizabeth. According to historical evidences, the only thing Richard really tried to prove was the illegitimacy of the children, not of his brother.

Polydore is the only one who hints at this part, saying that Duchess Cecily, «being falsely accused of adultery, complained afterwards in sundry places to right many noble men, whereof some yet live, of that great injury which her son Richard had done her»¹⁷⁹.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, III.v.72-94.

¹⁷⁹ POLYDORUS VERGIL, *op. cit.*, Book XXV.

However, if she really had complained, we would for sure have other historical evidences of different trials, which, as we know, never took place.

Instead, for what concerns the illegitimacy of Edward's children we have many references. One of the most important ones comes from the parliament rolls that recorded the following:

«And how also [we consider] that at the time of contract of the same pretended marriage [between Edward and Elizabeth], and before and long time after, the said King Edward was and stood married and troth plight to one Dame Eleanor Butler, daughter of the old earl of Shrewsbury, with whom the same King Edward had made a precontract of matrimony, long time before he made the said pretended marriage with the said Elizabeth Grey in manner and form abovesaid.[...]Also it appeareth evidently and followeth that all the issue and children of the said King Edward been bastards and unable to inherit or to claim anything by inheritance, by the law and custom of England... Over this, we consider that ye be the undoubted inheritor to the said crown...»¹⁸⁰.

Once it was proven that Edward had already accepted another marriage before Elizabeth, nothing else could stand against Richard's race to the throne. Shakespeare basically uses all these legends in the play, rather than just using the one that truly allowed Richard to have the right to rule over England in order to show how cunning and desperate the duke of Gloucester was to obtain the Crown, to the point of even tainting his mother's reputation.

Here in the play however, things do not go so well immediately. Buckingham in fact, goes back to Richard with bad news: the people still doubted him. But they immediately come up with a plan which shows us even more how false Richard was in the play: Buckingham will bring the Mayor and the citizens to Richard's house, where he will be found between two religious men and he will do everything to deny his interest in the power.

¹⁸⁰ Excerpts from "An Act for the Settlement of the Crown" (1484), ANONYMOUS, *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, London: Record Commission, 1767-77, 6.240-41.

The mayor is here at hand. Intend some fear.
Be not you spoke with but by mighty suit;
And look you get a prayer book in your hand,
And stand between two churchmen, good my lord,
For on that ground I'll make a holy descant.
And be not easily won to our request;
Play the maid's part: still answer nay, and take it.¹⁸¹

The plan is a total success. The Mayor and the citizens end up asking Richard to take the throne as the only virtuous man.

Cousin of Buckingham, and sage, grave men,
Since you will buckle fortune on my back,
To bear her burden, whe'er I will or no,
I must have patience to endure the load;
But if black scandal or foul-faced reproach
Attend the sequel of your imposition,
Your mere enforcement shall acquittance me
From all the impure blots and stains thereof,
For God doth know, and you may partly see,
How far I am from the desire of this.¹⁸²

Richard will be crowned the next day.

This is how Act 3 ends, with Richard finally obtaining what he lusted for during the entire play. But the road to maintain the newly reached power is far from being completed, as he will have to face new obstacles he never predicted.

¹⁸¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., III.vii.44-50.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*, III.vii.226-235.

ACT IV, Scene 1

Act 4 opens with a short scene involving the three major female characters of the play: Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess of York and Lady Anne. The three women try to visit the now imprisoned children of Edward IV, but Brackenbury stops them, as Richard ordered him so.

In doing so, he unintentionally calls Richard "the King":

Right well, dear madam. By your patience,
I may not suffer you to visit them.
The King hath strictly charged the contrary.¹⁸³

He tries to correct himself, but the three women have already understood everything; soon after, the arrival of Lord Stanley confirms everything: he refers to Lady Anne as "the Queen".

Come, madam, you must straight to Westminster,
There to be crowned Richard's royal queen.¹⁸⁴

Elizabeth, now fully aware of the situation, tells her son Dorset to flee to France and ask help to the Earl of Richmond, a supporter of Henry VI that went to France when the Yorks took power.

Anne is left with her terrible doom. Becoming the next Queen of England, married to Richard III now seems the worst possible thing.

And I with all unwillingness will go.
O, would to God that the inclusive verge
Of golden metal that must round my brow
Were red-hot steel to sear me to the brains.
Anointed let me be with deadly venom,
And die ere men can say 'God save the Queen'¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.i.15-17.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, IV.i.31-32.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, IV.i.57-62.

This point of view is also shared by the other two women:

Go, go, poor soul; I envy not thy glory.
To feed my humour wish thyself no harm.¹⁸⁶

While the Duchess of York laments one more time for the terrible child she gave birth to, Elizabeth closes the first scene lamenting the terrible destiny that awaits her two poor children:

Stay, yet look back with me unto the Tower.
Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes
Whom envy hath immured within your walls,
Rough cradle for such little pretty ones;
Rude ragged nurse, old sullen playfellow
For tender princes, use my babies well.
So foolish sorrows bids your stones farewell.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, IV.i.63-64.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, IV.i.97-103.

ACT IV, Scene 2

Scene 2 takes us back to Richard and Buckingham. While this should be the beginning of everything, it is on the contrary the beginning of the end. Richard is still not satisfied and feels uneasiness as the two children of his brother Edward are still alive:

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?¹⁸⁸

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.¹⁸⁹

Buckingham here, for the first time, tries to evade Richard's requests. He personally feels that their goal was already met, but the new king does not think so.

O bitter consequence
That Edward still should live 'true noble prince'!
Cousin, thou wast not wont to be so dull.
Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead,
And I would have it suddenly performed.
What sayst thou now? Speak suddenly. Be brief.¹⁹⁰

This is the breaking point between the two men, which will eventually lead to the demise of King Richard III. Buckingham has his doubts regarding whether to kill the two young boys or not. He decides to ask for some time, but still wants Richard to give him the lands he asked for in return for the help he gave him to reach the throne.

The deep-revolving, witty Buckingham
No more shall be the neighbour to my counsels.

¹⁸⁸ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.ii.4-6.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, IV.ii.8-10.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, IV.ii.15-20.

Hath he so long held out with me, untired,
And stops he now for breath? Well, be it so.¹⁹¹

Immediately after, Lord Stanley informs Richard that Dorset has fled to Richmond on the other side of the sea.

Richard begins to understand that his position is far from being solid. He decides by himself to change strategy. First, he decides to ask Tyrrel, a man capable of doing anything for money¹⁹², to dispose of the two children; then, he will also have to get rid of Lady Anne, his wife, and Clarence's children:

Come hither, Catesby. Rumour it abroad
That Anne my wife is very grievous sick.
I will take order for her keeping close.¹⁹³

Look how thou dream'st! I say again, give out
That Anne my queen is sick and like to die.
About it, for it stands me much upon
To stop all hopes whose growth may damage me.¹⁹⁴

Many things need to be cleared regarding Anne Neville. First of all, their wedding lasted 13 years. They even had a child, which is never mentioned in the entire play. Their son however did not live long.

According to the *Croyland Chronicles*:

«However, in a short time after, it was fully seen how vain are the thoughts of a man who desires to establish his interests without the aid of God. For, in the following month of April, on a day not very far distant from the anniversary of King Edward, this only son of his, in whom all the hopes of the royal succession, fortified with so many oaths, were centred, was seized with an illness of but short duration, and died at

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*, IV.ii.42-45.

¹⁹² «Sir James Tyrrel is associated with the murder of the children of Edward IV in Polydore Vergil. Thomas More characterizes him as a man of “right goodlye personage” led astray by Richard III, who exploited his high ambitions. Historically Tyrrel prospered under Henry VII until his execution in 1502 for favoring Edmund de la Pole». WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., p. 131.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, IV.ii.50-52.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, IV.ii.56-59.

Middleham Castle, in the year of our Lord, 1484, being the first of the reign of the said King Richard. On hearing the news of this, at Nottingham, where they were then residing, you might have seen his father and mother in a state almost bordering on madness, by reason of their sudden grief.»¹⁹⁵

Regarding the reason behind her death, the lack of information do not allow us to clearly identify why she died so young. Michael Hicks in his research tries to find some answers. What we know is that she died in 1485, a few months before Richard, for an unknown illness. However, there were some rumors which implied that Richard III had poisoned her.¹⁹⁶ According to Siemon, also Hall and Holinsed believed in the theory of poisoning, or else that Richard aggravated her mental stress to the point of killing her¹⁹⁷: «either by inward thought and pensyuenes of hearte, or by intoxicacion of poison»¹⁹⁸.

Richard continues talking about Clarence's children:

Inquire me out some mean poor gentleman,
Whom I will marry straight to Clarence' daughter.
The boy is foolish, and I fear not him.¹⁹⁹

We have already seen his children previously after Clarence's death, but they have never been introduced.

His two children were Margaret, Countess of Salisbury and Edward, Earl of Warwick. In the play, Shakespeare has them removed in two ways: Margaret is forced to marry another man, while Edward is disposed of in unknown ways, as he could pose a threat to him.

We do have historical proof of what has happened to the two children of Clarence. As Siemon points out, «Edward was executed by Henry VII in 1499 and Margaret

¹⁹⁵ INGULF, *The Croyland Chronicle: The Third Continuation of the History of Croyland Abbey*: July, 1483 – March, 1485, Part VIII

¹⁹⁶ MICHAEL HICKS, *Anne Neville: Queen to Richard III*: Tempus, 2006, p. 196.

¹⁹⁷ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., p. 321.

¹⁹⁸ EDWARD HALL, *op. cit.*, p. 407.

¹⁹⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.ii.53-55.

was attainted and executed by Henry VIII in 1541»²⁰⁰; both were killed because they still posed a terrible threat to the newly established peace in England.

Line 60 brings us to another turn of events. Richard admits that he has committed many crimes in order to get where he got to but he needs to do one more thing to keep his position: marry his niece Elizabeth, daughter of Queen Elizabeth and Edward IV. This will give him more chances of proving the world that he is the legitimate King:

I must be married to my brother's daughter,
Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass.
Murder her brothers, and then marry her -
Uncertain way of gain. But I am in
So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin.
Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye.²⁰¹

Polydore Vergil in his *Anglica historia*, as proved by H. A. Kelly in her study, denounced how Richard attempted to marry his own niece Elizabeth²⁰²: «cum per id Ricardus rex facinus facinore cumulare ausus religionem neglexerit, neptis connubium petendo, ac ob istuc Deum magis iratum sibi fecerit, unde eius ruina erupit»²⁰³.

Which has been translated and expanded by Edward Hall in his *Chronicle*:

«For her submyssion made to hym, he negiectyng Goddes lawes, honest order and Christyan religion, presumyng to accumulate myschiefe vpon myschiefe, desyred of her the mariage of her daughter hys naturall nyece, whiche thyng he woulde not haue thought lykely to haue obteyned: The quene and her daughters styll for feare of him contynuyng in sanctuafy. Whiche vnlawfull desyre (consydyng for that entent he had ryd his wyfe oute of the worlde) prouoked the Ire of God and the swoorde of vengeance agaynste hym[...]»²⁰⁴.

²⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

²⁰¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.ii.60-65.

²⁰² HENRY ANSGAR KELLY, *Canonical Implications of Richard III's Plan to marry his niece*, *Traditio*: Fordham University, 1967, cit., p. 269.

²⁰³ POLYDORE VERGIL, *op. cit.*, Book XXV.

²⁰⁴ EDWARD HALL, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

Hall also gives testimony of this happening by accusing Queen Elizabeth of rendering Richard « Yea a tyraut more then Nero, for he hath not only murdered his nephewe beyng his kyng and souereigne lord, bastarded his noble brethern and defamed the wombe of his verteous and womanly mother, but also compased all the meanes and waies y he coule inuent how to stuprate and carnally know his awne nece vnder the pretence of a cloked matrimony[...] »²⁰⁵.

Despite the number of people accounting for this version of the story, there are no real historical evidences of this ever happening. The main purpose of this scene was for Shakespeare to make Richard lose any kind of sympathy from the public. In just one scene, he has ordered his own wife's death, killed or disposed of his brother's children and even attempted incest with his niece.

Right before the end of the scene, Buckingham comes back on stage. He tries to show Richard that he is convinced about following him once more, but the King has no interest in him anymore, and even refuses to give Buckingham the lands he had promised him.

Buckingham fully understands his position, which is now really close to that of Hastings and decides to desert Richard:

And is it thus? Repays he my deep service
With such contempt? Made I him king for this?
O, let me think on Hastings and be gone
To Brecknock while my fearful head is on.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 417.

²⁰⁶ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.ii.117-120.

ACT IV, Scene 3

This entire scene is based on a mystery that continues today, almost 600 years later: what happened to Edward IV's children?

There are many theories regarding this event, but many of these are purely hypothetical, so I will just focus on the most reliable sources at least to the present.

According to the play, Richard sends them to the Tower and then asks Tyrrel to kill them both.

In this part, we see Tyrrel going back to Richard and describe what happened:

The tyrannous and bloody act is done,
The most arch of piteous massacre
That ever yet this land was guilty of.
Dighton and Forrest, whom I did suborn
To do this piece of ruthless butchery,
Albeit they were fleshed villains, bloody dogs,
Melted with tenderness and mild compassion,
Wept like two children in their deaths' sad story.
'O thus', quoth Dighton, 'lay the gentle babes'.
'Thus, thus', quoth Forrest, 'girdling one another
Within their alabaster innocent arms.
Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,
And in their summer beauty kissed each other.
A book of prayers on their pillow lay,
Which once', quoth Forrest, 'almost changed my mind.
But, O, the Devil - ' There the villain stopped;
When Dighton thus told on: 'We smothered
The most replenished sweet work of nature,
That from the prime creation e'er she framed.'
Hence both are gone with conscience and remorse;
They could not speak, and so I left them both
To bear this tidings to the bloody King.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.iii.1-22.

Of the many that account for the theory of Richard murdering the two children we have that of Dominic Mancini, which tells us that the two princes were hidden in the Tower. Alison Weir puts our attention on one particular record:

Dr. John Argentine, «a Strasbourg doctor and the last of his attendants whose services the King enjoyed, reported that the young King, like a victim prepared for sacrifice, sought remission of his sins by daily confession and penance, because he believed that death was facing him»²⁰⁸. Always according to Weir, this theory is also corroborated by the French chronicler Molinet²⁰⁹.

Another source of information comes from the *Croyland Chronicle*, which, in relation to these events, records: «In the meantime, and while these things were going on, the two sons of king Edward before-named remained in the Tower of London, in the custody of certain persons appointed for that purpose. In order to deliver them from this captivity, the people of the southern and western parts of the kingdom began to murmur greatly, and to form meetings and confederacies. It soon became known that many things were going on in secret, and some in the face of the world, for the purpose of promoting this object, especially on the part of those who, through fear, had availed themselves of the privilege of sanctuary and franchise. There was also a report that it had been recommended by those men who had taken refuge in the sanctuaries, that some of the king's daughters should leave Westminster, and go in disguise to the parts beyond the sea; in order that, if any fatal mishap should befall the said male children of the late king in the Tower, the kingdom might still, in consequence of the safety of his daughters, some day fall again into the hands of the rightful heirs. On this being discovered, the noble church of the monks of Westminster, and all the neighbouring parts, assumed the appearance of a castle and fortress, while men of the greatest austerity were appointed by king Richard to act as the keepers thereof. The captain and head of these was one John Nesfeld, Esquire, who set a watch upon all the inlets and outlets of the monastery, so that not one of the persons there shut up could go forth, and no one could enter, without his permission. At last, it was determined by the people in the vicinity of the city of London, throughout the counties of Kent, Essex, Sussex, Hampshire, Dorsetshire, Devonshire,

²⁰⁸ DOMINIC MANCINI, *The Usurpation of Richard III*, C.A.J. Armstrong, ed.: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. 93.

²⁰⁹ ALISON WEIR, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

Somersetshire, Wiltshire, and Berkshire, as well as some others of the southern counties of the kingdom, to avenge their grievances before-stated; upon which, public proclamation was made, that Henry, duke of Buckingham, who at this time was living at Brecknock in Wales, had repented of his former conduct, and would be the chief mover in this attempt, while a rumour was spread that the sons of king Edward before-named had died a violent death, but it was uncertain how»²¹⁰.

The Richard III Society has gathered additional information that may help us understand what happened:

In 1483, the date of the last incontrovertible sighting of the princes, we are faced with two conflicting accounts, those of the French spy Dominic Mancini and the *Great Chronicle of London*. According to the latter the boys were seen «shotyng and playyng in the Gardyn of the Tower by sundry tymys»²¹¹ during the mayoralty of Sir Edmund Shaa which ran until 28 October, while according to Mancini they were simultaneously «seen more rarely behind the bars and windows, till at length they ceased to appear altogether»²¹².

It seems undeniable that the two princes were indeed held captive in the Tower. Thomas More describes with many details the planning of the murder of the two princes by the hands of Tyrrel, and also tells us that years later, before being executed, Tyrrel «confessed the murder in manner above written; but whither the bodies were removed, they could nothing tell»²¹³. However, according to Logan's research, «Neither of these supposed confessions is extant. Henry VII gave out that he had confessed to the murders, but the claim lacks corroboration [as he] had an overwhelming interest in wanting Edward's sons believed dead»²¹⁴.

This time, it seems at least clear why Richard was accused of the disappearance of the two princes, as it is undeniable that he would gain profit from this happening. Nevertheless we have no real proof that he killed them or ordered someone to do it for him. Their presence would have been a terrible threat to the House of Tudor, so

²¹⁰ INGULF, *op. cit.*, Part VIII

²¹¹ ANONYMOUS, *Great Chronicle of London*, A.H. Thomas, I.D. Thornley, ed., London: 1938, p. 234.

²¹² DOMINIC MANCINI, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

²¹³ THOMAS MORE, *The History of King Richard The Third*, cit., p. 101.

²¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

Richard was not the only one who would have wanted them dead. The way in which Clarence's children ended up, is a clear proof that up until Henry VIII, the remnants of the house of York were considered as a menace that needed to be eradicated.

Back to the play, Richard resumes the events that he organized:

The son of Clarence have I pent up close,
His daughter meanly have I matched in marriage,
The sons of Edward sleep in Abraham's bosom,
And Anne my wife hath bid the world good night.²¹⁵

If we consider the play, these things seem to have taken place in almost the same day. However, as Siemon writes in his research, «Actions here occurring within a day transpired over three years, from the murder of the princes after Richard's coronation (1483) to Anne's death (1485)»²¹⁶. This confirms the already expressed theory that Shakespeare compresses time depending on the importance it gives in his play.

The scene ends with Richard's delight soon interrupted by Catesby who brings bad news:

Bad news, my lord. Morton is fled to Richmond,
And Buckingham, backed with the hardy Welshmen,
Is in the field, and still his power increaseth.²¹⁷

Buckingham has decided to leave Richard's side, and a new terrible threat is approaching, with Richmond aiming at stealing the throne from Richard III.

It is time to make haste and try to win Elizabeth's heart.

²¹⁵ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.iii.36-39.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 331.

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*, IV.iii.46-48.

ACT IV, Scene 4

As previously anticipated, Richard meets with Queen Elizabeth in order to convince the two women of the importance of the marriage. This scene is very similar to the one where Richard tries to win Anne's heart. The way in which these things are represented only increase the hate the audience feels towards this evil character. Before getting to the main point, however, we have a short conversation between Elizabeth and Margaret, who is finally tasting her revenge, after seeing all of her curses come true:

Bear with me. I am hungry for revenge,
And now I cloy me with beholding it.
Thy Edward he is dead, that killed my Edward,
Thy other Edward dead, to quit my Edward.
Young York, he is but boot, because both they
Matched not the high perfection of my loss.
Thy Clarence he is dead that stabbed my Edward,
And the beholders of this frantic play,
Th' adulterate Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey,
Untimely smothered in their dusky graves.²¹⁸

She also has a new prophecy regarding Richard:

Richard yet lives, hell's black intelligencer,
Only reserved their factor to buy souls
And send them thither. But at hand, at hand
Ensues his piteous and unpitied end.
Earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar, saints pray,
To have him suddenly conveyed from hence.
Cancel his bond of life, dear God I prey,
That I may live to say, 'The dog is dead.'²¹⁹

²¹⁸ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., IV.iv.61-70.

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*, IV.iv.71-78.

Then, Richard finally appears, and has a very long conversation with Elizabeth. At first she is totally against the marriage:

And must she die for this? O, let her live,
And I'll corrupt her manners, stain her beauty,
Slander myself as false to Edward's bed,
Throw over her the veil of infamy.
So she may live unscarred of bleeding slaughter,
I will confess she was not Edward's daughter.²²⁰

However, as we have already seen throughout the entire play, a woman's heart is changeable and subject to men's desires. Richard here is very cunning, and makes a very reasonable point, by convincing Elizabeth that if she were to marry him and have a child, that would give new hope to Queen Elizabeth, as she would see a new heir which comes from the same line of her dead husband.

Look what is done cannot be now amended.
Men shall deal unadvisedly sometimes,
Which after-hours gives leisure to repent.
If I did take the kingdom from your sons,
To make amends, I'll give it to your daughter.
If I have killed the issue of your womb,
To quicken your increase I will beget
Mine issue of your blood upon your daughter.
A grandam's name is little less in love
Than is the doting title of a mother.
They are as children but one step below,
Even of your metal, of your very blood,
Of all one pain, save for a night of groans
Endured of her for whom you bid like sorrow.
Your children were vexation to your youth,
But mine shall be a comfort to your age.

²²⁰ *Ibidem*, IV.iv.206-211.

The loss you have is but a son being king,
And by that loss your daughter is made queen.²²¹

The Queen surrenders and informs Richard that she will try and convince her daughter to marry him. He will have to write her shortly after to understand her decision.

Then, Richard's attention switches back to the imminent war. He begins giving orders to Ratcliff, Catesby and Stanley, who comes in bringing bad news: Richmond is already at sea with a full army to get the throne of England.

Richard questions the reason for this:

Is the chair empty? Is the sword unswayed?
Is the King dead? The empire unpossessed?
What heir of York is there alive but we?
And who is England's king but great York's heir?
Then tell me, what makes he upon the seas?²²²

After some tactical decisions, we have a really short Scene 5 where we see the Earl of Derby giving a message to Richmond through a messenger:

Sir Christopher, tell Richmond this from me:
That in the sty of this most bloody boar
My son George Stanley is franked up in hold;
If I revolt, off goes young George's head.
The fear of that holds off my present aid.²²³

Richard III is already surrounded by traitors. Sir Christopher really existed. And he indeed served as messenger in 1483, but for the Countess of Richmond, not Lord Stanley²²⁴. He will later serve as chaplain to Henry VII²²⁵.

²²¹ *Ibidem*, IV.iv.291-308.

²²² *Ibidem*, IV.iv.469-473.

²²³ *Ibidem*, IV.v.1-5.

²²⁴ CAROLINE AMELIA HALSTED, *Life of Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby: Mother of King Henry the Seventh*: Kessinger Pub Co., 2009, p. 139.

²²⁵ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., p. 375.

ACT V, Scene 1

Buckingham after being captured is seen asking to see Richard. According to historical references, things really went as Shakespeare described them.

In fact, in the autumn of 1483 he did indeed start a rebellion against Richard III.

There are no clues explaining what his goal was, whether to help Richmond or even try to become the new king himself.

The rebellion did not last long. As explained by the play, on All Soul's Day, 2 November 1483, he was sentenced to death and beheaded at Salisbury without getting the chance of meeting Richard once more.²²⁶

Why then, All Souls' Day is my body's doomsday.
This is the day which, in King Edward's time,
I wished might fall on me when I was found
False to his children and his wife's allies.
This is the day wherein I wished to fall
By the false faith of him whom most I trusted.
This, this All Souls' Day to my fearful soul
Is the determined respite of my wrongs:
That high All-seer which I dallied with
Hath turned my feigned prayer on my head
And given in earnest what I begged in jest.
Thus doth he force the swords of wicked men
To turn their own points in their masters' bosom.
Thus Margaret's curse falls heavy on my neck:
'When he', quoth she, 'shall split thy heart with sorrow,
Remember Margaret was a prophetess.'
Come, lead me, officers, to the block of shame.
Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame.²²⁷

²²⁶ CAROLE RAWCLIFFE, *The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham: 1394-1521*: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 35.

²²⁷ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., V.i.12-29.

The only unrealistic aspect of this scene is that in the play, his execution happens when the war has almost began, while in reality Richmond and Richard will fight against each other two years later.

For the play, this part is important as it hints at the spiritual aspect that will be the main characteristic of Scene 5.

ACT V, Scene 2

Scene 2 finally introduces the man that now embodies the role of the savior: the Earl of Richmond.

First king of the house of Tudor, Henry VII, the surviving heir of the house of Lancaster, won the Crown from Richard III and the house of York at the Battle of Bosworth Field in August 1485. He was the son of Edmund Tudor, earl of Richmond and maternal half brother of Henry VI, and Margaret Beaufort, cousin of Henry VI. With the death in 1471 of Prince Edward and Henry VI after Edward IV's restoration, the direct male line of Lancaster was extinguished and the dynasty's claim to the Crown passed to the Beaufort, so Richmond became the leading Lancastrian claimant. He fled to France while running away from Edward IV, and there remained until after Edward's death.²²⁸

The way in which Shakespeare depicts him is that of a superhero that saves England from the usurper. However, Richmond was just clever enough to understand when to hide and when to attack in order to become King. His right to become King is as doubtful as that of Richard: the difference is that Richmond just waited for the right time, instead of planning things like Richard did along with the murders he actually committed.

The wretched, bloody and usurping boar,
That spoiled your summer fields and fruitful vines,
Swills your warm blood like wash, and makes his trough
In your embowelled bosoms, this foul swine

²²⁸ JOHN A. WAGNER, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses*: ABC-CLIO, 2001, p. 119.

Is now even in the centre of this isle,
Near to the town of Leicester, as we learn.
From Tamworth thither is but one day's march.
In God's name, cheerly on, courageous friends,
To reap the harvest of perpetual peace
By this one bloody trial of sharp war.²²⁹

As this was composed under the Tudor propaganda, it must not come as a surprise to see how justice follows Richmond while Richard is left with bad dreams and betrayals.

All for our vantage. Then in God's name, march.
True hope is swift and flies with swallow's wings;
Kings it makes gods, and meaner creatures kings.²³⁰

God is one of Richmond's ally, together with many others that the next scene will present us.

²²⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., V.ii.7-16.

²³⁰ *Ibidem*, V.ii.22-24.

ACT V, Scene 3 & 4

This third scene is very interesting when comparing these two main characters. We see how both Richard and Richmond prepare for the night before the battle, on the two sides of the battlefield.

First, we see Richard talking to his army. He questions why they all have a sad face, and the answer is that they all question the result of this battle.

Richard too, seems far from being calm.

Up with my tent. Here will I lie tonight,
But where tomorrow? Well, all's one for that.²³¹

Immediately after, Richard begins giving orders to everyone, and speaks like someone with a lot of experience on the battlefield, organizing everything in order to be prepared the next morning. He then reminds Lord Stanley not to betray him, or his son will die. He fears a rebellion during the fight, which would totally ruin the formation and lead to his defeat.

On the other side, we see Richmond and his soldiers.

The atmosphere is very different: Richmond does not have much experience, and almost relies on his soldiers. Everyone seems very relaxed, and most of the discussions are more related to interpersonal issues rather than battlefield strategies. His only main concern is related to Lord Stanley, and whether he will assist them in battle or not; a messenger will soon after bring him good news: Stanley will help them for sure.

The comparison between the two camps continues. On Richmond's side everyone is praying to God, not because they are scared, but in a more religious way, implying that they are true servants of God; on the other side, Richard drinks wine and is anxious about the battle and starts doubting of everyone on his side. He, who betrayed many during his plan to reach the throne, now fears the same.

²³¹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., V.iii.7-8.

Before falling asleep, Richmond prays to God:

O Thou, whose captain I account myself,
Look on my forces with a gracious eye;
Put in their hands Thy bruising irons of wrath,
That they may crush down with a heavy fall
The usurping helmets of our adversaries;
Make us Thy ministers of chastisement,
That we may praise Thee in the victory.
To Thee I do commend my watchful soul,
Ere I let fall the windows of mine eyes:
Sleeping and waking, O, defend me still!²³²

His victory means God's victory. This also marks the clear difference between Richmond and Richard: there is no other part in this play where Richard does something like this.

While Richmond easily falls asleep, Richard is having a lot of problems.

In the end, after he manages to fall asleep, we finally assist to the procession of ghosts: all of the main characters that Richard has killed throughout the play, come visit both him and Richmond in their sleep.

What they bring is however very different.

They all side with Richmond, praying for him and announcing that he will be the winner of the battle; Richard, on the other side, gets cursed by everyone.

When the King wakes up, he has totally lost control over his emotions:

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 now 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.

²³² *Ibidem*, V.iii.108-117.

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?
 O, 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.
 Perjury, perjury, in the highest degree;
 Murder, stern murder, in the direst degree;
 All several sins, all used in each degree,
 Throng to the bar, crying all, 'Guilty! guilty!'
 I shall despair. There is no creature loves me,
 And if I die, no soul will pity me:
 And wherefore should they, since that I myself
 Find in myself no pity to myself?
 Methought the souls of all that I had murdered
 Came to my tent; and every one did threat
 Tomorrow's vengeance on the head of Richard.²³³

This is where we see who Richard really is. A man full of contradictions, almost a fool, maniac who now, on the last of his moments, is already a victim of despair. He begins feeling pity for himself, but he must not do so, as he must love himself. Despair was a terrible feature during the Elizabethan age, as it meant the total loss of hope in any kind of salvation. He knows God is not by his side.

Richmond instead has the leisure of oversleeping, and when he wakes up he is full of joy and hope:

The sweetest sleep and fairest-boding dreams
 That ever entered in a drowsy head

²³³ *Ibidem*, V.iii.177-206.

Have I since your departure had, my lords,
Methought their souls whose bodies Richard murdered,
Came to my tent, and cried on victory.
I promise you my soul is very jocund
In the remembrance of so fair a dream.²³⁴

Richmond, in his final speech to his troops marks again the justice that they lead in this battle against the evil:

God and our good cause, fight upon our side.
The prayers of holy saints and wronged souls,
Like high-reared bulwarks, stand before our faces.
Richard except, those whom we fight against
Had rather have us win than him they follow.
For, what is he they follow? Truly, gentlemen,
A bloody tyrant and a homicide;
One raised in blood, and one in blood established;
One that made means to come by what he hath,
And slaughtered those that were the means to help him;²³⁵

When the battle begins, Stanley immediately changes side, and Richard orders his son's execution; however there is no time, as Richmond's army is already in front of them.

After a fierce battle, we see Catesby asking help for the King whose horse has been slain. We then find what is probably the most famous part of this play.

Slave, I have set my life upon a cast,
And I will stand the hazard of the die.
I think there be six Richmonds in the field;
Five have I slain today instead of him.
A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!²³⁶

²³⁴ *Ibidem*, V.iii.227-233.

²³⁵ *Ibidem*, V.iii.240-249.

²³⁶ *Ibidem*, V.iv.9-13.

It's the 22nd of August 1485. The battle of Bosworth marks the end of the never-ending War of the Roses.

There are many testimonies of what happened on this day. I will select the most relevant ones:

According to John Rous, a Warwickshire priest, «at length, as the life of King Richard neared its evening, many secretly left him and joining the exiled southerners became adherents of Henry, earl of Richmond, nephew of Henry VI, by his uterine brother. Landing at Milford Haven in Wales on the Feast of the Transfiguration with a relatively small band, Henry gained many followers on the road. When finally he met King Richard and his great army on the eighth day of the feast of the Assumption A.D. 1485, on the border of Warwickshire and Leicestershire, he slew him in the field of battle»²³⁷.

Diego de Valera, a Castilian courtier, instead, chronicles the events as following: «When King Richard was certified of the near approach of Earl Henry in battle array, he ordered his lines and entrusted the van to his grand chamberlain with 7,000 fighting men. My Lord “Tamerlant” with King Richard’s left wing left his position and passed in front of the king’s vanguard with 10,000 men, then, turning his back on Earl Henry, he began to fight fiercely against the king’s van, and so did all the others who had plighted their faith to Earl Henry. Now when Salazar, your little vassal, who was there in King Richard’s service, saw the treason of the king’s people, he went up to him and said: “Sire, take steps to put your person in safety, without expecting to have the victory in today’s battle, owing to the manifest treason in your following”. But the king replied: “Salazar, God forbid I yield one step. This day I will die as king or win”. Then he placed over his head-armour the crown royal, which they declare be worth 120,000 crowns, and having donned his coat-of-arms began to fight with much vigour, putting heart into those that remained loyal, so that by his sole effort he upheld the battle for a long time. But in the end the king’s army was beaten and he himself was killed, and in this battle above 10,000 are said to have perished, on both sides. Salazar fought bravely, but for all this was able to escape. There died most of those who loyally served the king, and there was lost all the king’s treasure, which he

²³⁷ JOHN ROUS, *Historia Johannis Rossi Warwicensis de Regibus Anglie*, T. Hearne, ed., London: 1716, p. 218.

brought with him into the field. After winning this victory Earl Henry was at once acclaimed king by all parties. He ordered the dead king to be placed in a little hermitage near the place of battle, and had him covered from the waist downward with a black rag of poor quality, ordering him to be exposed there for three days to the universal gaze»²³⁸.

Jean Molinet, historiographer to Burgundian, in 1490 tells us that «the vanguard of King Richard, which was put to flight, was picked off by Lord Stanley who with all of 20,000 combatants came at a good place to the aid of the earl. The earl of Northumberland, who was on the king's side with 10,000 men, ought to have charged the French, but did nothing except to flee, both he and his company, to abandon his King Richard, for he had an undertaking with the earl of Richmond, as had some others who deserted him in his need. The king bore himself valiantly according to his destiny, and wore the crown on his head; but when he saw this discomforture and found himself alone on the field he thought to run after the others. His horse leapt into a march from which it could not retrieve itself. One of the Welshmen then came after him, and struck him dead with a halberd, and another took his body and put it before him on his horse and carried it, hair hanging as one would bear a sheep»²³⁹.

Finally, another testimony comes from Polydore Vergil: « The story goes that Richard could have rescued himself by flight. For those around him, seeing that from the beginning of the battle that their soldiers were fighting slowly and sluggishly, and that others were furtively slinking away from the battlefield, suspected fraud and urged him to flee. And then, when the battle had clearly turned against him, they brought him a swift horse. But he was not unaware that the people loathed him and abandoned all hope of future success, and is said to have replied that on that day he would make an end either of fighting or of his life, such was the man's ferocity and spirit. Because he knew for sure that on that day he would either pacify his realm or lose it forever, he went into battle wearing the crown, so as to make either a beginning or an end of his reign in that battle. And so the wretch quickly suffered that same end that it wont to befall those who equate right, law, and honor with their own will, impiety, and

²³⁸ E.M. NOKES, G. WHEELER, *A Spanish account of the battle of Bosworth*, from *The Ricardian*, 2, no. 36: 1972

²³⁹ JEAN MOLINET, *Chroniques de Jean Molinet*, G. Doutrepont, O. Jodogne, ed., Académie royale de Belgique. Classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques, Collection des anciens auteurs belges vol. I: Brussels, 1935, p. 435.

rascality. These are indeed examples which can deter those who keep no hour free of crime, cruelty, and felony, more vividly than can any words.»²⁴⁰.

As we can see, everyone agrees on the fact that Richard was betrayed in battle and abandoned by his troops. We also find references to what inspired the line of the horse, although depending on the reference, the horse served as a way of running cowardly or a way to charge again into battle.

There are many that say that Richard did indeed enter the battle wearing his crown. It was something that had no proof, until, in 2012, the body of Richard III was finally discovered. According to the article published on the Telegraph website, «Several accounts of Richard III reveal that he rode into battle wearing his crown which, despite this making him an easy target, is consistent with the location of the battlefield injuries he sustained on his skull»²⁴¹ thus confirming also this fact.

²⁴⁰ POLYDORE VERGIL, *op. cit.*, Book XXV.

²⁴¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/archaeology/10031896/King-Richard-IIIs-teeth-and-jaw-reveal-monarchs-anxious-life-and-violent-death.html> [accessed on 27 November 2013]

ACT V, Scene 5

The rest is history as we know it.

We will unite the white rose and the red.
Smile heaven upon this fair conjunction,
That long have frowned upon their enmity.
What traitor hears me and says not amen?
England hath long been mad and scarred herself:
The brother blindly shed the brother's blood;
The father rashly slaughtered his own son;
The son, compelled, been butcher to the sire.
All this divided York and Lancaster,
Divided in their dire division.
O, now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true succeeders of each royal house,
By God's fair ordinance conjoin together;
And let their heirs, God, if Thy will be so,
Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace,
With smiling plenty and fair prosperous days.
Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,
That would reduce these bloody days again
And make poor England weep in streams of blood.
Let them not live to taste this land's increase
That would with treason wound this fair land's peace.
Now civil wounds are stopped; peace lives again.
That she may long live here, God say amen.²⁴²

The Tudors will now reign over England, and in this speech Richmond refers to its dynasty as the “true succeeders”, the rightful heirs. It's something that the Tudor propaganda always repeted, but if we consider that Richmond will be the one behind the death of Clarence's son, it seems clear that they still feared that the Yorks would come in power once again, and that the people would recognize them as the real successors.

²⁴² WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., V.v.19-41.

CHAPTER 2

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BEHIND THE PLAY

CHAPTER 2.1: THE AUTHOR

To date, we do not have much information on who William Shakespeare really was. His signature also changes every time, leaving us no trace of what his real writing was (Willm Skaksp, William Shakespe, Wm Shakspe, William Shakspere, Willm Shakspere or William Shakspeare. Helge Kokeritz dedicates an entire research on this topic²⁴³, and came to the conclusion that the name should be pronounced with a short “a” like in “shack”.

In his life, he will be referred to as the “Bard of Avon”²⁴⁴ as he was born and brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon.

There are no official documents regarding the date of his birth. According to Bryson, there is a tradition that indicates this date as April 23, 1564, on Saint George’s day (which is also the recognized date of his death fifty-two years later)²⁴⁵.

The only real thing we know about his birth is that he was baptized on April 26, 1564, and, as in those time babies died easily, everyone tried to baptize them as soon as possible. The date is given to us by the official registry of Stratford’s church, which began taking note of all births starting from 1538.

A study undertaken by Caroline F.E. Spurgeon of London University, tried to build his real physical appearance thanks to some hints, which she found in some of his works.

In *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*, she describes him as a «compactly well-built man, probably on the slight side, extraordinarily well coordinated, lithe and nimble of body, quick and accurate of eye, delighting in swift muscular movement. I suggest that he was probably fair-skinned and of a fresh color, which in youth came and went easily, revealing his feelings and emotions. All his senses were abnormally acute, especially - probably - those of hearing and taste».²⁴⁶

He spent much of his life under the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and the problem regarding the successor to the throne was a daily issue throughout the entire time.

²⁴³ HELGE KOKERITZ, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*: Yale University Press, 1963.

²⁴⁴ DIANE STANLEY, *Bard of Avon: The Story of William Shakespeare*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers LLC, 1998.

²⁴⁵ BILL BRYSON, *Shakespeare: The World as Stage*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers LLC, 2007.

²⁴⁶ CAROLINE SPURGEON, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us*: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 202.

It is common belief (although there is no official record) that he received a good education at the local King's New School, where he learned to read and write and dedicated much of his time to studying Latin. What happened to him after he was fifteen years old is still a mystery. According to Roy Strong, Shakespeare left Stratford in 1585 «to avoid prosecution for poaching at Charlecote»²⁴⁷.

There is no real evidence on when Shakespeare's began his activity in London's theatres.

The first time we find a reference accounting for Shakespeare's works is found in Robert Greene's last work, "*Groats-worth of Witte*", registered in the Stationers' Register on September 20, 1592, where we read: «Yes, trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes Factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shakescene in a country»²⁴⁸.

This is a clear attack on Shakespeare, as he was trying to reach an academic level of writing, apparently pushing down those who "legitimately" earned the spot.

In 1594, after reaching an established position as a playwright, he became a shareholder in one of the most popular acting companies in London: the Lord Chamberlain's Men. He will stay with them for his entire career.

After spending some years at the court of Queen Elizabeth I, the Lord Chamberlain's Men changed their name into the "King's Men" in 1603, and they always had a close relationship with the court of the new King James, where they performed seven of Shakespeare's plays between 1 November 1604 and 31 October 1605.

Shakespeare's golden years for his activity were between 1589 and 1613.

Between the first registered works of Shakespeare we find the three parts of Henry VI and Richard III, written in the first years of 1590s when historical dramas, especially those concerning the War of the Roses, were extremely popular.

²⁴⁷ WARREN HOPE, *The Shakespeare Controversy: An Analysis of the Authorship Theories*: McFarland & Co Inc, 2009, p. 132; Cfr. ROY STRONG, *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits*, London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1969.

²⁴⁸ STEPHEN GREENBLATT, *Will In The World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*: Pimlico, 2005, p. 213.

During this period, he also worked on some comedies, trying to reach the highest possible level of skills and wit.

Then, until about 1608, he decided to focus on tragedies, like *Othello*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

Already by 1597, 15 of the 37 plays written by him were published and enacted in the theatre, and this guaranteed a constant income of money to the company, which allowed him to keep writing without having to find other jobs and also gave the company the chance to build in 1599 their own theater, the Globe, which he built on the Thames River. The theatre was later destroyed by a fire in 1613 and rebuilt one year later.

We have to wait until 1623 to see the first collection of works written by William Shakespeare, 7 years after his death.

Today, Shakespeare is still considered one of the best playwrights of history and contemporary people still enjoy these works of art that are now more than 400 years old.

CHAPTER 2.2 - THE HISTORICAL PLAYS

The difference between playwright and historian may be summed up by saying that it is only Shakespeare who obliges us to undertake a fresh activity of the imagination every time we read it²⁴⁹

Historical drama was one of the main topics of plays during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, reaching its peak during the last 15 years of the 1500, the period in which William Shakespeare started writing.

As Dominique Goy-Blanquet states, “Like most of his contemporaries, Shakespeare was aware of time’s destructive powers. Unlike most of them, he was also sensitive to its healing qualities.”²⁵⁰

Of all of the many historical events that took place in the past, the most interesting ones were those that took place around the War of the Two Roses, between the Lancasters and Yorks.

Many noble families used to hire historians to write their family histories, which tended to privilege the events most flattering to their patrons.

We even have notorious examples of various historians that throughout the years changed several time sides during the war, thus revising their chronicles, like the famous chronicler John Hardyng²⁵¹.

Talking about William Shakespeare, we can see that his plays may be divided into three categories - comedies, tragedies and histories.

History themed plays brought massive audiences to the theatre.

When trying to categorize Richard III, it is often described as an historical play, pertaining to the list of plays linked to the history of English kings, which develops through 10 different plays linked together:

²⁴⁹ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, Peter Ure, ed., London: Methuen, 1956, cit., p. xxxiii.

²⁵⁰ DOMINIQUE GOY-BLANQUET, *Elizabethan historiography and Shakespeare’s sources*, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays*: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 57.

²⁵¹ For more information on Hardyng, HENRY ANSGAR KELLY, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare’s Histories*: Harvard University Press, 1970.

1. *Henry IV, Part I*
2. *Henry IV, Part II*
3. *Henry V*
4. *Henry VI, Part I*
5. *Henry VI, Part II*
6. *Henry VI, Part III*
7. *Henry VIII*
8. *King John*
9. *Richard II*
10. *Richard III*

Apart from the British line, there were as well several other plays based upon Roman history:

1. *Julius Caesar*
2. *Antony and Cleopatra*
3. *Coriolanus*

All of these works were the result of historical research that Shakespeare himself undertook to find references. The source for most of the English history plays, as well as for *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, is the well-known *Chronicle* by Raphael Holinshed, while the main source for the Roman plays was Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans Compared Together* (which Shakespeare would have studied in grammar school).

But is there really a way of distinguishing historical plays from normal tragedies?

Shakespeare himself was very concerned with history and politics and always tried to put some of these issues into his works, and this has led to a long debate on whether this genre exists or not.

This made people very confused on how to divide the different kinds of plays he was writing, as there was no official categorization.

At first, people started viewing these historical plays as normal tragedies, given that most of the English histories center their action on the reign of a monarch and the narrative ends with his death. This led to many changes in the titles of the plays like: *The Life and Death of King John*, *The Life and Death of King Richard the Second*, and *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*. Sometimes, the opposite happened: tragedies

and even comedies were labelled 'histories': in 1600 a Quarto appeared entitled *The Most Excellent History of the Merchant of Venice*, and in 1607–8, another Quarto: *Mr William Shakespeare his True Chronicle History of the Life and Death of King Lear and his Three Daughters*.

But what are the main characteristics of these so-called historical plays?

- 1) Inaccurate historical details: there is no accurate precision regarding time and space. Dramatizing is the focus of these, and this comes better when moving freely through time. Also, these plays were intended for people that mostly did not have an education that could point out any of these mistakes. We have recurrent characters that should not be there but bring continuity to the plays (e.g. Richard does not urge his father to take the crown; he was two at the time; Margaret stays in France and does not direct battles. Her appearance in *Richard III* is not historical; Queen Margaret is dead by the time Richard is king).
- 2) They [the historical plays] explore politics and structures: English history plays reflect the nationalism of England under Queen Elizabeth. Renaissance England was governed by the Tudors who believed in the "Divine Right" of Kings, which was to rule over injustice. These monarchs were committed to the house of Lancaster, which had defeated that of York, and thus Shakespeare's plays portrayed the latter as usurping murderers. Also, at the end of the play, as Robert Pierce shows us, "the union of Richmond and Queen Elizabeth's daughter symbolizes the triumph of Providence"²⁵², thus underlining how important was the birth of the Tudor dynasty for England. Dramatizing the events of this reign involved not only making sense of, and giving a dramatic shape to, the chroniclers' accounts of the Wars of the Roses between York and Lancaster, but relating the surges of national politics to the persistent conflict between England and France during the Hundred Years War. We also get a warning on how civil wars can ruin lives and so must be avoided, together with a nostalgic view of the Middle Ages with the description of how the medieval society came to an end because of corrupted

²⁵² ROBERT B. PIERCE, *Shakespeare's History Plays – The Family and the State*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971, p. 91.

and opportunist politics (with the word “politician” that was introduced from the French language).

- 3) They tended to be unrealistic in stage performances: Elizabethan playhouses were not very organized for illusions. Even if we do not have exact descriptions about how the actors used to dress, we know that it was not much different from how they dressed usually outside, except for some items from the past (like an old style pair of boots) that would give the impression that they were staging something relating to the past. Places and times were evoked through dialogues, serving as “chronotopes” to help the public better understand what was happening. Sometimes we also encounter items that did not exist at the historical time represented in the play. These were not simple mistakes, but probably a way of linking the past to the present. A very interesting thing is that courts were not represented with printed backdrops or scenic items, but with varieties of theatrical rituals: processions, music, and formal speech.
- 4) Utopian Dream: throughout Shakespeare’s plays, there is always a search for the perfect world. This can be seen for example in *The Tempest*, or, in the opposite way, in *Richard III*. Countless times the characters of this play have pointed out how being under King Richard would mean bringing hell to Earth. The arrival of Richmond is, of course, the liberation from the evil and the beginning of a newly united Britain that will then be raised to the state of an ideal kingdom under the Tudor dynasty.

We can sum up everything by considering these historical plays a way of entertaining people by giving them a more romantic view of their history but also by transmitting the values and principles of the Crown they were living under, with particular attention to the role of the new Tudor dynasty. There were many people at the time that declared having a blood relationship to past royal families thus claiming to be the real inheritors of the throne; knowing about this, Shakespeare, as Robert Ornstein asserts, “does not suggest that men chose sides in the War of the Roses according to their beliefs in de facto authority or legitimacy. They took sides because of their

feudal attachments, because of the appeal of family honor and pride, or as they were prompted by ambition, greed, patriotism or revenge”²⁵³.

For this, Shakespeare has been often considered like a regime writer but a more in-depth analysis will show that his plays investigated the figure of the King not only as a political figure, a role model, but taking also into account his psychological reasoning, with all his doubts and contradictions. Shakespeare tries to investigate human history not only by considering the personal point of view, but also how society influences it. We speak here of “homo politicus”, or else the search for human development through historical politics.

²⁵³ ROBERT ORNSTEIN, *The Artist as Historian in Holderness' Shakespeare's History Plays*, London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1992, pp. 44-45.

CHAPTER 2.3 – MAIN SOURCES

Shakespeare would have never done such an incredible play without having some sources to rely on. We must not forget that this was not Shakespeare's first historical play, so he was already used to finding references in old books in order to put together the plot of the story. As already seen during our historical analysis, Shakespeare narrates the events of the story with an enormous number of historical mistakes. This was due, as we have seen, by different factors, like his new style of writing, the influence the Tudors had on the events that took place around the York family and last, but not least, the kind of sources he used. After investigating these inconsistencies and explaining how things really went, I will now outline the main sources that I have already cited in the precedent chapter, which the author used to get the incorrect information about Richard III.

- **THE NEW CHRONICLES OF ENGLAND AND FRANCE (1516)**

This is considered one of the earliest historical sources regarding the reign of King Richard III. It was written by Rober Fabyan and published posthumous in 1516. Little we know about the author. He was never considered a true writer, and most of his work consisted in compiling other people's works. His *Chronicles* were his only best know piece of work. Divided into two volumes, it focuses on historical events from the birth and naming of Albion (Britain) by Brutus in the first century until the reign of King Henry VII. It deals with both political scandals and plots to gain the Crown together with normal citizens' point of view. According to Henry Craik in his critical introduction²⁵⁴, this book had five different editions.

²⁵⁴ HENRY CRAIK, *English Prose*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916.

- 1) Published in 1516 by Richard Pynson, it had a limited number of copies, as some of his expressions with regard to the wealth of the Church, “seem to have provoked the wrath of Wolsey, and by his orders part of that edition was destroyed”.
- 2) The second edition was printed by William Rastell in 1533, and added historical details of the reign and death of Henry the VII. The new batch of information was added by Rastell and possibly other people, as well as other writings of Fabyan himself right before he died. This edition also includes a closing passage and poetic verse in Latin and English composed by Fabyan.
- 3) A third edition came out in 1542, published this time by Reynes and Bonham; this was highly edited, removing many of the details unwanted by the Church, like the struggles between the Church and the Crown.
- 4) Finally, in 1559, thanks to Kingston, we have a fourth edition, which restores the *Chronicles* to the unedited second edition, together with the updated historical events up until Queen Elizabeth I.
- 5) The modern edition of this text was published in 1811 by Henry Ellis, containing the historical events already included in the fourth edition with added editorial features like index and genealogical notes as well as sundry editorial comment and amendment. This is the most complete version of this book.

The reliability of this source depends on the topic. We know that Fabyan was very pro-Lancaster, and this highly influenced the historical details related to the York Dynasty, especially when talking about Richard. Instead, regarding historical facts that took place during his time, he proves himself very important, as he collected a large number of testimonies of different people of the time, filling pages with important real time impressions on how history was taking place. Fabyan’s *History* was called by himself *The Concordance of Histories*, and it is important as showing the first attempt, earnest although uncritical, to weigh authorities against one another. There is no evidence that Shakespeare used this source directly, but as this book was used by Holinsed and Hall, so it was used indirectly.

- **CHRONICLES OF ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND IRELAND (1577)**

Holinshed's *Chronicle*, also known as Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, is a collaborative work published in several volumes and two editions:

- 1) the first edition, published in 1577, was printed in two volumes, the first contained the descriptions of Britain, Scotland and Ireland, plus the histories of Scotland and Ireland, and the history of England until 1066; the second instead had the chronicles of England from 1066 until 1576.
- 2) the second edition, published in 1587 was expanded into three volumes: the first was the description of Britain and the history of England until 1066, the second one was the description and histories of both Ireland and Scotland, while the third volume contained the newly updated history of England from 1066 until 1586.

It was basically a large, comprehensive description of British history.

The most important source of information regarding this book comes from the recent project organized by Oxford University and their recent book *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*, published in December 2012.

The two editions of Holinshed's *Chronicle*, like many other books at the time, were full of problems, like inconsistencies, misprints, and censorship. However, putting these problems aside, «what makes Holinshed fascinating in this regard is the fact that the text is so ideologically divided. The various contributors represented different confessional stances, and we can see Reformation conflicts being negotiated within the text and between the successive editions»²⁵⁵.

Shakespeare used the revised second edition of the *Chronicle* as the source for most of his history plays, the plot of *Macbeth*, and for portions of *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*. He also used it as a primary source for the historical events of *Henry V*.

²⁵⁵ PAULINA KEWES – IAN W. ARCHER – FELICITY HEAL, *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles*: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Being not an original historical source, but a retelling of historical events, in recent years Holinshed was confronted with Shakespeare, which had a different way of retelling history in a more interesting way. We find proof of this in different editions of Shakespeare's plays. Holinshed «tells his story well, though not so well as Shakespeare»²⁵⁶; Shakespeare transcends Holinshed's «formless and prosaic narrative»²⁵⁷; Shakespeare's speeches are «full of colour and life entirely absent from the source»²⁵⁸.

A more in depth analysis of this, is given us by Paola Pugliatti:

«with occasional exceptions, the design of the *Chronicles* was loose, their narration of facts was paratactic and undramatic, stylistic inventiveness was lacking, their linguistic rendering was dull and uniform, their way of producing historical explanations was through accumulations and contiguity, their relationship to tradition conformist... Nothing better than compliance with the official political theories could be expected from the chroniclers... Where in Holinshed indecision signals eclecticism in information gathering, in Shakespeare it assumes the form of problematisation, it becomes polyvalence»²⁵⁹.

In the end, the real role of the *Chronicles* was not to give a form of entertainment, but was rather a storehouse of examples that could turn into debate in order to reflect on how the past might influence the present.

Jacques Amyot's preface to Plutarch's *Lives* proves the perfect example for this: «it is a certain rule and instruction which by examples past teacheth us to judge of things present and to foresee things to come, so as we may know what to like of and what to follow, what to dislike and what to eschew»²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁶ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *The First Part of King Henry IV*, Arthur R. Humphreys, ed., London: Methuen, 1981, p. xxiii.

²⁵⁷ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, Arthur R. Humphreys, ed., London: Methuen, 1981, p. xxxiii.

²⁵⁸ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, Antony Hammond, ed., London: Methuen, 1981, p. xxxii.

²⁵⁹ PAOLA PUGLIATTI, *Shakespeare the Historian*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1996, cit., pp. 23-24-49.

²⁶⁰ PLUTARCH, *The lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*: Roland Baughman, ed, New York: Heritage Press, 1941, p. xxxi.

- THE UNION OF THE TWO NOBLE AND ILLUSTRIOUS FAMILIES OF LANCASTER AND YORK (1548)

Holinshed's work was, as already stated, like a puzzle of many different historical accounts.

One of the main sources he used was *The Union of the two noble and illustrious families of Lancaster and York*, a chronicle written by the Tudor historian Edward Hall (1498–1547) and published in 1548.

The quantity of things that Holinshed seems to have taken directly from this source is so vast that, according to Tillyard, Holinshed's influence on Shakespeare must be downgraded as «Shakespeare went to both chronicles for his facts but Hall is his warrant for the ideas according to which the facts are arranged»²⁶¹.

Published in 1548, these chronicles cover the period from the deposition of Richard II in 1399 to the death of Henry VIII in 1547.

The amount of work needed to narrate this long timeline of events was carried out by Hall himself together with fellow chronicler Richard Grafton, which finished the work using Hall's notes and took care of the publishing after Hall's death.

For Hall, as Peter Mack states, «eloquent writing is an important attribute of history, because a well-written work will increase the fame and memory of the actions, and because appropriate style will increase the impact of the examples on the readers»²⁶².

This work was probably the most used source for Shakespeare when writing his four-play cycle historical plays set during the War of the Roses.

As we can see from the title, the main subject of this work was the birth of the Tudor's Dynasty, which saved England from the many years of wars that brought economic destruction together with the death of many people.

Hall was very active in both religion and politics. He was a lawyer and spent his years of education in Cambridge. His deep interest in society guided him to becoming a member of parliament.

²⁶¹ PAULINA KEWES – IAN W. ARCHER – FELICITY HEAL, op. cit., p. xxxi. Cfr. EUSTACE M. TILLYARD, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1944.

²⁶² PETER MACK, *Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice*: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 150.

History for him was an instrument for teaching moral lessons, for presenting both edifying and cautionary examples of the past behavior of princes – a way of thinking that was totally in line with most Tudor historians.

During the sixteenth century, England was still scared of the horrors which took place during the precedent century, and Hall tries to investigate the causes that made that age so sadly remarkable.

In the first pages of his famous work, he says: «What mischiefe hath insurged in realmes by intestine deuision, what depopulacion hath ensued in countries by ciull discencio, what detestable murder hath been comitted in citees by seperate faccions, and what calamitee hath ensued in famous regioes by domestical discord & vnnaturall controuersy: Rome hath felt, Italy can testifie, Fraunce can bere witnes, Beame can tell, Scotlande maie write, Denmarke can shewe, and especially this noble realme of Englande can apparantly declare and make demonstracion[...]But what miserie, what murder, and what execrable plagues this famous region hath suffered by the deuision and discencion of the renoumed houses of Lancastre and Yorke, my witte cannot comprehende nor my tounge declare nether yet my penne fully set furthe.»²⁶³

After studying different sources, like Sir Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* and Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, Hall fully came up with the idea that the Lancastrian usurpation of 1399 was the main cause that brought civil war during the fifteenth century. It was God's punishment on the Lancaster house for its usurpation by making Henry VI incapable of ruling, thus giving the house of York the right chance to come in power. The latter will be subsequently punished for the ambition and tyranny of King Richard III with the final defeat and the birth of the house of Tudor.

Unfortunately, Hall in his writings was not very impartial.

Under the Tudors, Richard III's crimes were an actual topic of discussion, and were much more blackened, worsening the already tainted reputation of the last York King, thanks to the already bad reputation More and Vergil attributed him.

All of this information ended up on Shakespeare's desk, and gave him the idea that brought us the incredible villain that we find in his famous play.

²⁶³ EDWARD HALL, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

- THE HISTORY OF KING RICHARD THE THIRD (1543)

The historical analysis of Shakespeare's King Richard III would not be possible without taking into account what is probably the main source of inspiration that led Shakespeare into creating this particular play: *The History of King Richard The Third* written by Sir Thomas More.

Although left uncompleted, this book is considered a masterpiece, and while most of the plot of *Richard III* is clearly derived from Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Shakespeare's depiction of Richard as a brilliant villain is based upon More's text.

The book was written in two versions: one in English and one in Latin, which are not direct translations of each other, but «original works displaying the particular merits of each language»²⁶⁴. Both begin narrating the events starting from the same date, April 9, 1483, with the death of King Edward IV, Richard's older brother, and continue describing the events that took place over the following three months until the coronation of King Richard III.

This is where the Latin version ends, while the English one goes on, with the believed plan that Richard organized to dispose of Edward's sons and the defection of Richard's main ally, the Duke of Buckingham.

We do not know exactly when More wrote the book. According to George Logan, who took care of the modern English version of this book, «The only piece of external evidence on the matter comes from More's nephew William Rastell, who in the edition of More's English *Works* that he published in 1557 says that More wrote the *History* about the year of our Lord 1513. Some passages of the work, however, cannot have been written until after 1513»²⁶⁵. The reason to doubt about this is that some parts seem to have taken inspiration from Fabyan's *Chronicles*, which were published some years later (although we cannot exclude that the two knew each other and maybe exchanged information).

What we know for sure is that this piece of work was left unfinished, and first appeared in Richard Grafton's *Continuation of Harding's Chronicle* in 1543, eight years after More's death. The following publishing will be in 1557 in More's *Works*.

²⁶⁴ PETER ACKROYD, *The life of Thomas More*, London: Vintage, 1999, p. 155.

²⁶⁵ THOMAS MORE, *The History of King Richard The Third*, cit., p. xxii.

Throughout his life, Thomas More was very interested in history. According to his sixteenth-century biographer Thomas Stapleton, he «studied with avidity all the historical works he could find»²⁶⁶.

There are many reasons that brought him close to the life of Richard III: one is probably that he seemed very interested in tyranny, which was also confirmed by his friend Erasmus.

But the main one is that he had a very close relationship with a man that was very close to the Crown affairs during the time of Richard III: John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England, whom More joined at a young age as his student.

As Ackroyd reminds us, «at the time More first encountered him, the archbishop was the single most important example of the new unity and stability which the burgeoning Tudor dynasty had brought to the throne. Morton had managed to serve under both Yorkist and Lancastrian sovereigns [...] and by almost single-handedly arranging the marriage between Henry VII and Elizabeth of York he brought to an end those dynastic struggles which had threatened the peace and good government of England»²⁶⁷,

Being one of the main protagonist of the Tudor's instauration, there is no doubt that he was clearly against the old Lancaster and York families, particularly Richard III, and this surely had a big influence on his student especially considering that More served Morton around 1490-92, when he was between twelve and fourteen years old, and when the events that took place around Richard III happened less than a decade before.

The Richard of Thomas More is indeed treacherous and cunning, with subtle wit and described with cold irony; just as the Richard of Shakespeare, we find falsehoods and false devotions to the King and to the women.

Moreover, More's research is heavily dependent upon oral sources, in particular anecdotal memories of people that witnessed those events. An interesting list of different oral sources More used to gather information is given us by Pollard; of all these, a very interesting one is related to the death of the Princes, the children of King Edward IV: «I shall rehearse you the dolorous end of those babes, not after every way

²⁶⁶ PHILIPPE E. HALLETT, ERNEST EDWIN REYNOLDS, *The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More*, London: Burns&Oates, 1966, p. 14.

²⁶⁷ PETER ACKROYD, *op. cit.* p. 31.

that I have heard, but after that way that I have so heard by such men and by such means as methinketh it were hard but it should be true»²⁶⁸.

According to George Logan «we know for certain that More's oral informants included his father – who must have told him more than just the rumored conversation referred above»²⁶⁹.

Even if More knew that some of the information were not true or didn't have enough backup details to confirm them, he was always careful not to offend the sensibilities of the witnesses.

The following step in recreating the full events, was that of putting together these memories and tying them together making a kind of moral drama which intertwines evil, faith and fortune (from the Reign of the evil Richard until the glorious birth of the Tudor dynasty).

What is still unclear is why this masterpiece was left unfinished. There are two possibilities regarding this fact.

The first one involves the fact that maybe More was not sure about the credibility of some of the sources, and didn't want to take any risks by publishing with his own name something that might have not been true; the second one, which is rather amusing, is given to us by the prefatory letter to *Utopia* (1516):

«Most of my day is given to the law-pleading some cases, hearing others, arbitrating others, and deciding still others. I pay a courtesy call to one man and visit another on business; and so almost all day I'm out dealing with other people, and the rest of the day I give over to my family and household; and then for myself-that is, my studies-there's nothing left. My own time is only what I steal from sleeping and eating»²⁷⁰.

²⁶⁸ ALBERIC FREDERICK POLLARD, *The Making of Sir Thomas More's Richard III*, Leonard William Longstaff Saint Thomas More Collection, 1933, pp. 422-25.

²⁶⁹ THOMAS MORE, *The History of King Richard The Third*, cit., p. xxiv.

²⁷⁰ THOMAS MORE, *Utopia*, George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams, ed.: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 4.

- ANGLICA HISTORIA (1534)

Polydore Vergil (c. 1470 – 18 April 1555) was an Italian humanist, native of Urbino. He was known to be a scholar, historian, priest and diplomat. In 1502 he was sent to England by Pope Alexander VI as a sub-collector of Peter's Pence.

According to Denys Hay, after just two years, he became Bishop of Bath and Wells and in 1508 he was also given the role of Archdeacon of Wells

Being widely recognized as a very important person, he was later invited at court by King Henry VII, who commissioned him a monumental project, which was to write an "official" history of England around 1505²⁷¹.

The reason why I put the word official in brackets, is because it was indeed official as it was commissioned by the royal family, but that does not mean it was also the "true" history.

King Henry VII, former Richmond, archenemy of King Richard III, had of course a very personal opinion of his predecessor, and this is very noticeable in Polydore's work.

The result was a totally incorrect historical description of Richard, which accuses him of many crimes he was never accused of (Vergil who is accused of destroying documents that contradicted his point of view and his history, is the first to accuse Richard of the murder of his nephews) thus starting a never-ending chain of mistakes that will influence all of the following literature.

Regarding the writing of the book, we can identify three different main editions of the *Anglica Historia*:

- 1) The first edition that was completed in 1534
- 2) The second one dates to 1546
- 3) The third edition of 1555, with updated history until 1538 was published the same year of Vergil's death.

²⁷¹ DENYS HAY, *Polydore Vergil: Renaissance historian and man of letters*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.

Thanks to the studies undertaken by the US Richard III Foundation, Inc²⁷², we have a good idea of what Polydore wrongly asserted in his works regarding Richard III:

- Henry VI was put to death in the Tower of London and cites that Richard, Duke of Gloucester killed him with his sword so his brother, Edward IV, would be free from further hostility.
- Richard, Duke of Gloucester is not accused of killing his brother, George, Duke of Clarence but states that Edward IV did out of fear of the prophecy that after his reign someone with the letter "G" would rule England.
- Upon hearing of the news of Edward IV's death, Richard III began his campaign to seize the throne from his nephew, Edward V. When Richard meets Buckingham at Northampton, Vergil states it was at this time that Richard revealed his plan to take the throne. Anthony Woodville and Thomas Vaughan are mentioned as being arrested. Hastings, who originally sided with Richard, now called a council meeting in St. Paul's Church that included friends of Edward V. Some members of the council urged that Edward V should be rescued from Richard while others urged that they wait until Richard arrived in London to explain his actions. Richard supposedly declares that he realizes any harm to his nephews would mean that it could rebound to the country and him.
- The princes were conveyed to the Tower to await the coronation of Edward V. The council meeting of June does not mention that Richard appeared in a pleasant mood, left and then returned in an agitated mood. Vergil cites that Richard entered the council and stated that he was in great danger, that he has not been able to sleep, eat or drink. He continues by showing his arm is withered and that Elizabeth Woodville, used witchcraft on him. Hastings, who had supported him, responded that the queen should be punished. Richard repeats the story and Hastings' response is the same. Richard then accuses

²⁷² <http://www.r3.org/> [accessed on 20.10.2013]

Hastings of seeking Richard's destruction. Richard's men enter and Hastings was taken out and beheaded.

- Shaw's sermon, according to Vergil, denies the report that Shaw referred to the princes as bastards and has Richard present at the sermon. After Richard's coronation, Richard traveled to Gloucester and there planned to kill his nephews. Brackenbury refuses to kill the princes and it is left to Tyrell to carry out the King's will and murders the princes. Hall and Shakespeare would later copy Vergil's account of the Queen's lament upon hearing the news that her sons were dead. Vergil cites the discord between Buckingham and Richard because Richard would not give Buckingham the Hereford lands. Buckingham retires to Brecknock informing the Bishop of Ely his intent to overthrow Richard. Ely approves of Buckingham's intent employing Reginald Bray to act as a go-between for Buckingham and Margaret Beaufort. Before the disenchantment between Richard and Buckingham, Elizabeth Woodville and Margaret Beaufort had begun to make plans to place Henry Tudor on the throne provided he marries Elizabeth of York.
- Richard learned of the conspiracy and when he discovers Buckingham is the chief instigator summons him to court. Buckingham responds that he is ill. Richard leads his army towards Salisbury. Buckingham's soldiers desert him and scatter to Brittany or Flanders. Buckingham was then beheaded.
- Vergil claims that Richard spread a rumor abroad that his wife, Anne Neville, was dying. Upon hearing of the news, she asked Richard why he was anticipating her death. It is presumed by Virgil that Richard reassures her with loving words and a few days later, she dies. Richard then focuses on his desire to marry his niece, Elizabeth of York. However, because of the counsel and her dislike for Richard, he decides to wait.

Following is part of the description Polydore makes of Richard, in reference to his ability to deceive people and getting rid of people who could have ruined his plans to reach the Crown:

« Therefore, by hiding and veiling his greed under the name of public utility, he so misled the nobles' minds that, with the exception of those few from whom he had never concealed his true intent, they could in no wise perceive why he was creating delays, or to what end his counsels were tending: he proposed many things, and explained few, for a guilty mind is wont to vacillate. But meanwhile, when he recognized that William Hastings more than anyone else was urging and pressing that Prince Edward should receive his due honour, and that he, uniquely among the Peerage, enjoyed popularity for his grace and liberality, and had the greatest authority among honourable men of all ranks, and either feared his power or despaired that he could bring him over to his way of looking at things, decided to remove this man before revealing his counsel to the others, in whom he did not yet have any great confidence»²⁷³.

Generally referred to as the father of English history, some people have not a very good opinion about him.

One of these people, was Edward Littleton, who, in 1628, during a debate in the House of Commons regarding which University was more ancient between Oxford and Cambridge, being Vergil in favor of the latter, he referred to him with the following comment: «What have we to do with Polydore Vergil? One Vergil was a poet, the other a liar»²⁷⁴.

Overall, we can clearly see how the *Anglica Historia* influenced More and Shakespeare into creating the most evil Richard III.

²⁷³ POLYDORE VERGIL, *op. cit.*, Book XXV.

²⁷⁴ DANIEL WOOLF, *Reading History in Early Modern England*: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 24.

- MIRROR FOR MAGISTRATES (1559)

There are many other texts that Shakespeare seems to have used in constructing *Richard III*, but the following are considered minor sources: *The Mirror of Magistrates*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*.

A special mention is necessary in regards to the death of Clarence, which was surely inspired by one of the tragedies written in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, a collection of monologues in verse connected by prose passages on political and moral issues.

According to Jessica Winston, this book was collaboratively composed by William Baldwin and a group of seven other writers in the early 1550s.

This work's first edition appeared in 1559. Other editions followed in 1571, 1574, 1575, 1578, and 1587. The *Mirror* dealt primarily with English history from the reign of Richard II to the fall of Richard III at Bosworth's Field in 1485 and contains eight tragedies linked to the story of Richard III. Only the one is related to the assassination of George of Clarence and was used as a source for writing Act I, Scene 4.

«The first printing of 1559 contained nineteen lives, beginning with several drawn from the reign of Richard II (1377-99) and concluding with two drawn from the reign of Edward IV (1461-83), including that of George, Duke of Clarence. The second printing of 1563 included eight additional portraits, most of them drawn from the reign of Richard III (1483-85), including the retrospective illuminations of William Lord Hastings and another spoken by Richard in an unusually confessional mood.²⁷⁵

The purpose of this volume was to teach monarchs and other nobles wisdom and virtue «by showing them the results of a variety of vices, including tyranny, ambition, and pride»²⁷⁶.

According to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*, «The principal poetic form employed by all contributors to *A Mirror* is the complaint, one of the most fashionable literary genres of the second half of the sixteenth century, a vogue that A

²⁷⁵ SHAKESPEARE, WILLIAM, *Richard III*, Thomas Cartelli, ed., cit., p. 167.

²⁷⁶ JESSICA WINSTON, *Studies in Philology*: Vol. 101, n° 4, Pembroke: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, pp. 381.

Mirror helped to create. The ghosts of the historical figures in *A Mirror* lament their fate—whether deserved or not—and point their audience, the writers of the tragedies, toward the moral that they draw from the tale. [...] the moral is pointed to the need for the magistrate to pursue the right path rather than the expedient one, and to stand up to his king or queen if necessary, which belies *A Mirror's* reputation as a conservative text that simply supports the status quo»²⁷⁷.

Now, regarding the influence this text had on Shakespeare's play, the wrong information he took out of this book is clear from the beginning.

Already from the incipit of the Tragedy 18 dedicated to him:

«How George Plantagenet, third son of the Duke of York, was by his brother, King Edward, wrongfully imprisoned, and by his brother Richard miserably murdered»²⁷⁸.

We see that Edward is the man considered guilty for Clarence's death. The latter moreover, appears as a poor innocent man who had done nothing wrong.

During the play's analysis in the previous chapter, we have seen that Clarence was not so innocent, and that King Edward IV had many reasons to give his brother the sentence he got.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare uses this version of the story, and this is not the only theme that he "copies" from the *Mirror of Magistrates*.

For by his queen two goodly sons he had,
Born to be punished for their parents' sin,
Whose fortunes calked made their father sad,
Such woeful haps were found to be therein:
Which to avouch, writ in a rotten skin
A prophecy was found, which said a G
Of Edward's children should destruction be.

²⁷⁷ DAVID SCOTT KASTAN, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*: Oxford University Press, 2012.

²⁷⁸ CAMPBELL, LILY BESS, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960.

Me to be G, because my name was George
My brother thought, and therefore did me hate.
But woe be to the wicked heads that forge
Such doubtful dreams to breed unkind debate:
For God, a glaive, a gibbet, grate or gate,
A Grave, a Griffeth or a Gregory,
As well as George are written with a G.²⁷⁹

This is a clear reference to the prophecy that Richard talks about in the beginning of the play while anticipating us his plan of getting rid of his brother Clarence.

This day should Clarence closely be mewed up
About a prophecy, which says that 'G'
Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.²⁸⁰

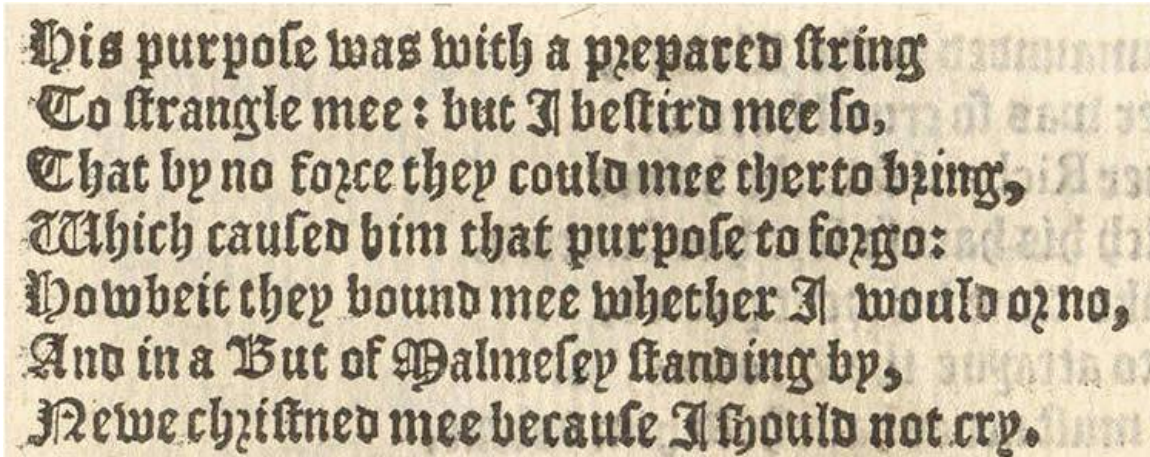
Another mystery of the play is now solved. Shakespeare gets his motif for the disappearance of Clarence from this story, by just explaining it in 3 lines. The way Clarence is killed is also inspired from this book as we can see in the next lines:

This feat achieved, yet could they not for shame
Cause me be killed by any common way.
But like a wolf, the tyrant Richard came
(My brother, nay my butcher, I may say)
Unto the Tower when all men were away,
Save such as were provided for the feat:
Who in this manner did strangely me entreat.
His purpose was with a prepared string
To strangle me. But I bestirred me so
That by no force they could me thereto bring,
Which caused him that purpose to forgo.
Howbeit they bound me whether I would or no,
And in a butt of Malmsey standing by
New christened me, because I should not cry.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ CAMPBELL, LILY BESS, *op. cit.*, Tragedy 18, 176-189.

²⁸⁰ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., *cit.*, I.i.38-40.

²⁸¹ CAMPBELL, LILY BESS, *op. cit.*, Tragedy 18, 358-371.



His purpose was with a prepared string
To strangle mee: but I bestird mee so,
That by no force they could mee therto bring,
Which caused him that purpose to forgo:
Howbeit they bound mee whether I would or no,
And in a But of Balmeley standing by,
Newe christned mee because I should not cry.

The death of Clarence, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, 1587. British Library, C.71.c.4, f. 184v.

The only difference we find in this part is that Shakespeare does not call Richard on stage during this part. During the entire play, Richard never takes an active part in the killings, and his not being there makes the scene in which Clarence is told that the real perpetrator is not Edward, but Richard, much more tragic.

The death of Lord Hastings was also taken from here, in particular Tragedy 21, with its incipit: «How the Lord Hastings was betrayed by trusting too much to his evil counselor Catesby, and villainously murdered in the Tower of London by Richard Duke of Gloucester»²⁸².

This concludes the list of sources that Shakespeare used to write his play. According to a recent study conducted by Harold F. Brooks, it is also recognizable in *Richard III* the use of various models from Seneca, especially the courtship of Megara by Lycos in the *Madness of Heracles*, comparing it to the scene where Richard tries to win Anne's heart immediately after the funeral procession.²⁸³

²⁸² CAMPBELL, LILY BESS, *op. cit.*, Tragedy 21.

²⁸³ HAROLD BROOKS, "Richard III, *Unhistorical Amplifications: The Women's Scenes and Seneca*" in *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 75, n° 4, October 1980, pp. 721-37.

- THE TRUE TRAGEDY OF RICHARD THE THIRD (1594)

The story of this play is surrounded by many doubts.

Many people still question if this was either a different play written at the same time Shakespeare wrote his own version, or if it is one of those copied versions that someone made in order to make some easy money.

This very wide topic is highly investigated and can be the main objective of an entire research. I will just give the most important facts in how this play relates to the one studied in my research.

What we know for sure is that it is anonymous.

According to Chambers, the play was registered at the Stationer's Register on June 19, 1594, which means that it dates before Shakespeare's first quarto (1597). Also, the quarto version of this play will be the only one ever printed²⁸⁴ and according to WW Greg, only three copies have survived until our time.²⁸⁵

There is no evidence that Shakespeare used this play as a source for his one, apart from one particular similarity at the end of the play: Richard's plea for a horse.

In *The True Tragedy*, in fact, Richard shouts:

A horse, a horse, a fresh horse!²⁸⁶

instead of Shakespeare's

A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!²⁸⁷

In the end, those were the times in which plays involving the previous War of the Roses were very famous and attracted a lot of public. So it would not be so strange that two major plays on the same character would go around at the same time. What is clear is that Shakespeare's popularity destroyed all competition, and proved one more time his ability in gaining people's attention.

²⁸⁴ EDMUND KERCHEVER CHAMBERS, *The Elizabethan Stage: 4 Volumes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, p. 43.

²⁸⁵ WALTER WILSON GREG, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, London: The Malone Society Reprints, 1929, p. v.

²⁸⁶ ANONYMOUS, *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third: 1594*, xviii.1.

²⁸⁷ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *King Richard III*, James R. Siemon, ed., cit., V.iv. 7.

CONCLUSION

The main objective of this research is now clearly reached.

Shakespeare can be considered innocent regarding the wrong idea that his play gave about the true identity of King Richard III.

Sure, he created a very evil and cunning main character.

He, at certain points, exacerbates even more the evil figure described by More, attributing also to Richard the murder of his brother Clarence, which was at the time believed to be the responsibility of Queen Elizabeth and her relatives.

Nevertheless, he is not the one who gave Richard his terrible fame.

Shakespeare only plays with the stereotype that the men of his time built around his character, and exaggerates it to the maximum in order to obtain the kind of entertainment he was trying to give to his spectators.

The misfortune of Richard III was that of being the last King that ruled during a war that lasted too many years and had brought people's patience to its limits.

He, in the end, was the scapegoat for the failure of the number of Kings that preceded him and were incapable of putting an end to the civil war.

The monstrosity and deformity of his appearance was rather the horrible memory that people still had of those terrible years and that was placed upon him.

An alternative modern vision on what happened in the life of Richard III, especially regarding his final moments, can be seen thanks to Michael K. Jones and his book *Bosworth 1485 – Psychology of a Battle*²⁸⁸, which is by no means a true historical description of the battle, but a very intimate reinterpretation of what happened near Bosworth in August 1485 compared to what Shakespeare has told us about it.

²⁸⁸ MICHAEL K. JONES, *Psychology of a Battle - Bosworth 1485*, London: The History Press, 2010

APPENDIX 1

DIFFERENCES IN THE EDITIONS OF RICHARD III

Richard III, First Quarto, 1597

The tragedy of King Richard the third. Containing, his treacherous plots against his brother Clarence: the pittiefull murder of his iunocent [sic] nephewes: his tyrannicall vsurpation: with the whole course of his detested life, and most deserued death. As it hath been lately acted by the Right Honourable the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants. At London: printed by Valentine Sims, [and Peter Short] for Andrew Wise, dwelling in Paules Chuch-yard [sic], at the signe of the Angell, 1597.

[94] p.; 4o

Richard III, Second Quarto, 1598

By William Shake-speare.

At London: printed by Thomas Creede, for Andrew Wise, dwelling in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of the Angell, 1598.

[94] p.; 4o

Richard III, Third Quarto, 1602

Newly augmented, by William Shakespeare.

London: printed by Thomas Creede, for Andrew Wise, dwelling in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of the Angell, 1602.

[92] p.; 4o

Richard III, Fourth Quarto, 1605

Newly augmented, by William Shake-speare.

London: printed by Thomas Creede, and are to be sold by Mathew Lawe, dwelling in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of the Foxe, neare S. Austins gate, 1605.

[92] p.; 4o

Richard III, Fifth Quarto, 1612

As it hath beene lately acted by the Kings Maiesties seruants.

Newly augmented, by William Shake-speare.

London: printed by Thomas Creede, and are to be sold by Mathew Lawe, dwelling in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of the Foxe, neare S. Austins gate, 1612.

[92] p.; 4o

Richard III, Sixth Quarto, 1622

London: printed by Thomas Purfoot, and are to be sold by Mathew Law, dwelling in Pauls Church-yard, at the signe of the Foxe, neere S. Austines gate, 1622.

[92] p.; 4o

Richard III, Seventh Quarto, 1629

London: printed by Iohn Norton, and are to be sold by Mathew Law, dwelling in Pauls Church-yard, at the signe of the Foxe, neere St. Austines gate, 1629.

[92] p.; 4o

Richard III, Eighth Quarto, 1634

Written by William Shake-speare.

London: printed by Iohn Norton, 1634.

[92] p.; 4o

APPENDIX 2



Enter Richard Duke of Gloucester solus.

Now is the winter of our discontent,
Made glorious summer by this sonne of Yorke:
And all the cloudes that lowrd vpon our house,
In the deepe bosome of the Ocean buried.
Now are our browes bound with victorious wreathes,
Our bruised armes hung vp for monuments,
Our sterne alarmes changd to merry meetings,
Our dreadfull marches to delightfull measures.
Grim-visagde warre, hath smoothe his wrinkled front,
And now in steed of mounting barbed steedes,
To fright the soules of fearefull aduersaries,
He capers nimbly in a Ladies chamber,
To the lasciuious pleasing of a loue.
But I that am not shapte for sportiue trickes,
Nor made to court an amorous looking glasse,
I that am rudely stampd and want loues maiesty,
To strut before a wanton ambling Nymph:
I that am cottaild of this faire proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, vnfinisht, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce halfe made vp,
And that so lamely and vnfashionable,
That dogs barke at me as I halt by them:
Why I in this weake piping time of peace
Haue no delight to passe away the time,
Vnlesse to spie my shadow in the sunne,
And descant on mine owne deformity:
And therefore since I cannot prooue a louer
To entertaine these faire well spoken daies,

A 2

I am



The Tragedy of Richard the Third: with the Landing of Earle Richmond, and the Battell at Bosworth Field.

Actus Primus. Scena Prima.

Enter Richard Duke of Gloucestre.

On is the Winter of our Discontent,
 Made glorious Summer by this Son of Yeste:
 And all the clouds that low'd upon our house
 In the deepe bosome of the Ocean buried,
 Our dead are bound with Victorious Wreathes,
 Our bloudie titles hung up for Monuments;
 Our dead Armours chang'd to merry Meetings;
 Our dead Marches, to delightfull Measures.
 Our King's Wars, hath smooch'd his wrinkled Front:
 Instead of mounting Barbed Seeds,
 He lights the Soules of fearful Adversaries,
 Heeeres cloibly in a Ladies Chamber,
 In his delicious pleasing of a Lure.
 And that more than I'd for sport or tickle,
 Hee makes count on a glorious Looking-glasse:
 Hee is a Luddy stamp, and want looses Maistly,
 Hee is before a wootton ambling Nymph:
 Hee is a rittall'd of his faire Proportions,
 A crowd of Femors by dissembling Nature,
 Hee is a waspish'd, seen before my time
 In this braching World, for his haile made up,
 Hee is a lamely and vasahtuable,
 Hee drops like me, as I halt by them.
 Hee is in this meale of piping time of Peace,
 Hee is a delight to passe away the time,
 Hee is so for my Shadow in the Sunne,
 Hee is a disease on mine owne Deformity.
 Hee is a disease, since I cannot see a Lover,
 Hee is a disease, these faire well spoken dayes,
 Hee is a disease, to praise a Villaine,
 Hee is a disease, the lisse pleasures of these dayes,
 Hee is a disease, I hate, indignations dangerous,
 Hee is a disease, Prophesies, Libels, and Dreames,
 Hee is a disease, my Brother Clarence and the King
 Hee is a disease, the one against the other:
 Hee is a disease, King Edward be at true and iust,
 Hee is a disease, I am Noble, Folic, and Treacherous,
 Hee is a disease, should Clarence closely be enc'd up
 Hee is a disease, a Prophesie, which says that G.
 Hee is a disease, hee is the murderer shall be.
 Hee is a disease, the night downe to my soule, here Clarence comes.

Enter Clarence, and Draboway guards.
Clarence. Good day: What means this armed guard

That waits upon your Grace?

Cl. His Maistly tendering my persons safety,
Hath appointed this Condukt, to convey me to the Tower.

Rich. Upon what cause?

Cl. Because my name is George.

Rich. Alacke my Lord, that fault is none of yours.

He should for that commit your Godfathers.

O be like, his Maistly hath some intent,

That you should be new Obseid in the Tower.

But what's the matter Clarence, may I know?

Cl. Yes Richard, when I know: but I protest

As yet I do not: But as I can learne,

Hee hearkens after Prophesies and Dycemes,

And from the Croffe, hee pluckes the letter G:

And sayes, a Wizard told him, that by G,

His issue disinherited should be.

And for my name of George begins with G,

It follows in his thought, that I am he.

These (as I heare) and such like toys as these,

Hath mou'd his Highnesse to commit me now.

Rich. Why this it is, when men see us'd by Women:

'Tis not the King that sends you to the Tower,

My Lady Gevill his Wife, Clarence's sisler.

That carries him to this haeris Extremity.

Was it not shee, and that good man of Woodsp,

Anthony Woodville her Brother there,

That made him send Lord *Hastings* to the Tower?

From whence this present day he is deliuered?

We are not safe Clarence, we are not safe.

Cl. By heauen, I thinke there is no man sweeter

But the Queenes Kindred, and night-walking Heralds,

That treade betwixt the King, and Milles *Sons*.

Heard you not what an humble Suppliant

Lord *Hastings* was, for her deliuey?

Rich. Hum, My complaining to her Deistle,

Got my Lord Chamberlaine his libertie.

He tell you what, I thinke it is our way,

If we will keepe in fauour with the King,

To be her men, and weare her Lincry.

The iralous one, worse Widdow, and her sisler,

Since that our Brother dub'd them Gentlewomen,

Are mighty Gosips in our Monarchy.

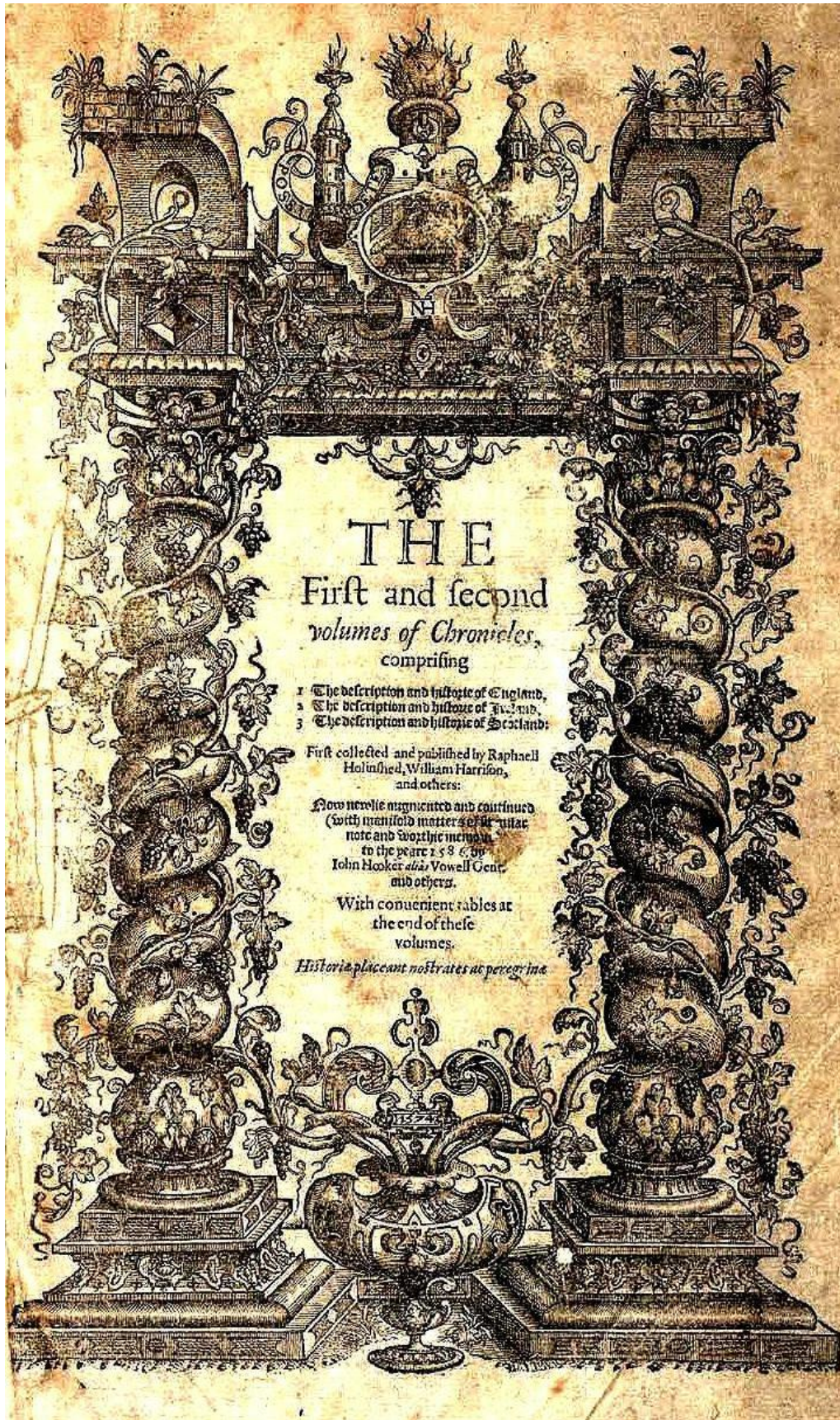
Cl. I beseech your Graces both to pardon me,

His Maistly hath straightly given in charge,

That no man shall haue priuice Conference

(Of what degree soeuer) with your Brother,

Rich.



FIRST PAGE OF "THE CHRONICLES OF ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, AND IRELAND."

2-15-7
J. Sangua Explorator. 62

THOMÆ MORI
ANGLI, VIRI ERVDI-
TIONIS PARITER AC VIR-
TVTIS NOMINE CLARISS-
MI, ANGLIÆQVE OLIM
CANCELLARI,

Omnia, quæ hucusque ad manus nostras peruenerunt, Latina Opera:
quorum aliqua nunc primum in lucem prodeunt, reliqua
verò multo quàm antea casti-
gatiōra.

HORVM OMNIVM ELENCHVM

Pagina duodecima commōstrabit.



Sum. Ben. Jonsoni Libr.

*Amici pino. et eruditi pino
viri Guil. Dabius
J. J. J.
J. J. J.*

LOVANIÏ,
Apud Ioannem Bogardum sub Biblijs
Aureis, Anno 1566.

*Joanni Blumfeldt doctiss. amicis
dono dedit amoris causa hunc librum
Guilielmus Dabius.*

TITLEPAGE OF THE 1566 LOUVAIN EDITION OF THOMAS MORE'S WORKS; PICTURE TAKEN FROM THE COPY OWNED BY THE ENGLISH PLAYWRIGHT BEN JONSON.

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Michalove, *The Reinvention of Richard III*, presentation from the conference “*Reinventing the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Construction of the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*”, excerpted from *The Ricardian*, September 1995.

<http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/sharon-d-michalove-the-reinvention-of-richard-iii/> [accessed on 16.11.2013]

Open Source Shakespeare attempts to be the best free Web site containing Shakespeare's complete works. It is intended for scholars, thespians, and Shakespeare lovers of every kind. OSS includes the 1864 Globe Edition of the complete works, which was the definitive single-volume Shakespeare edition for over a half-century.

<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org> [accessed on 14.11.2013]

A website containing a number of references and historical analysis to discover information on Shakespeare and his unique connection to history.

<http://www.shakespeareandhistory.com> [accessed on 01.01.2014]

The British Library website contains comprehensive information about the Library, the scope of its collections, and how to use its services. There is also a range of catalogues and digital content.

<http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/richard3.html> [accessed on 19.11.2013]

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<http://www.shakespearestudyguide.com/Folio.html> [accessed on 01.11.2013]

The Internet Shakespeare Editions publishes only high quality materials. Their aim is to provide their worldwide audience with the best in Shakespeare scholarship and performance on a site that is freely available. The ISE is a non-profit corporation affiliated with the University of Victoria, British Columbia.

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“*William Shakespeare's Richard III: Brilliant Schemer, Entertaining Villain*” essay by PhD Katherine Blakeney at University of Edinburgh in Edinburgh, United Kingdom.

<http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/118/william-shakespeares-richard-iii-brilliant-schemer-entertaining-villain> [accessed on 15.11.2013]

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In 1999, Amanda launched Shakespeare Online with hopes of providing free, original, and accurate information on Shakespeare to students, teachers, and Shakespeare enthusiasts.

<http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sources/R3sources.html> [accessed on 15.11.2013]

The Holinshed Project hopes, should funding be made available, to coordinate a new fifteen-volume edition of the *Chronicles* to be published by Oxford University Press. In the meantime, they have developed a parallel text edition of the two versions of the *Chronicles* published in 1577 and 1587. This enables all interested in the *Chronicles* to make comparisons between the two texts, and provide an essential tool for the later full edition.

<http://www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/> [accessed on 24.10.2013]

Online blog of the famous historical novel writer Susan Higginbotham.

<http://susandhigginbotham.blogspot.it/> [accessed on 09.12.2013]

The website of the Richard III Society. They have been working since 1924 to secure a more balanced assessment of the king and to support research into his life and times. The recent Greyfriars excavation has raised the king's profile and provided them with new opportunities to make the case for '*Good King Richard*'.

<http://www.richardiii.net/> [accessed on 20.10.2013]

The American Branch of the Richard III Society was organized in December 1968 to “promote in every possible way historical research into the life and times of King Richard III of England” and “to secure a reassessment of the historical material relating to this period and of the life and history of this monarch”.

<http://www.r3.org/> [accessed on 20.10.2013]

The official web site of the British Monarchy. Written and managed by the Royal Household at Buckingham Palace, the site aims to provide an authoritative resource of information about the Monarchy and Royal Family, past and present.

<http://www.royal.gov.uk/historyofthemonarchy/kingsandqueensofengland/thelancastrians/henryvideposed.aspx> [accessed on 03.12.2013]

Built by the Institute of Historical Research and the History of Parliament Trust, British History Online is the digital library containing some of the core printed primary and secondary sources for the medieval and modern history of the British Isles.

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=92257> [accessed on 03.12.2013]

The Foundation seeks to challenge the popular view of King Richard III by demonstrating through rigorous scholarship that the facts of Richard's life and reign are in stark contrast to the Shakespearian caricature.

<http://www.richard111.com> [accessed on 18.11.2013]

The Telegraph Online.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/archaeology/10031896/King-Richard-IIIs-teeth-and-jaw-reveal-monarchs-anxious-life-and-violent-death.html> [accessed on 27 November 2013]