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# Pragensia

# Litteraria Pragensia

## Studies in Literature and Culture

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*Drawing on the cover by Josef Šima (an illustration to the collection of poems  
Píseň o růži by Ivo Fleischmann, 1948). Courtesy of Ivo Fleischmann)*

In this essay I have attempted to provide some clues to the circular labyrinth of *The Third Policeman*. Nevertheless, any interpretative journey is of a similarly circular nature. This claim can be seen as an outcome of at least two theoretical perspectives. One of them can be exemplified by the work of Paul de Man, who claims in his essay entitled *Form and Intent in the American New Criticism* that it is because of its temporal structure that the act of interpretation is always a process on the way to its totalization, which it can only approximate to a greater or lesser degree. According to de Man, the text works as the Heideggerian *Vorhabe*, foreknowledge, that the critic can only strive to unravel in its entirety, while he or she necessarily has to return to it again and again in order to discover new sets of relations that are already present in the text.<sup>9</sup>

Another perspective that points out the circularity of the critical enterprise is the one of Stephen Greenblatt<sup>10</sup>, who stresses the fact that a lot of the relevant information about the original context of the work is always missing, while any critic is, moreover, always biased by his/her interests, education, the books he/she has read, etc., which inevitably prevents any "final", objective interpretation from emerging. For all these reasons, the critic is then forced to enter the circle of interpretation over and over again.

When facing the above mentioned evidence, the critic appears to be in a situation which is rather similar to the one of the artist as viewed by Lyotard: there seems to be a choice between nostalgia and experiment. If this essay is to avoid the former, it must be aware of the fact that its interpretation of *The Third Policeman* is going to remain open, no matter how much it may desire to present a reading that would be all-encompassing. To paraphrase Policeman Mac Cruiskeen (p.74): although we may seem to have arrived in the parish of cyclists on no bicycle, that does not say that we know of everything.

<sup>9</sup> In *Blindness and Insight*, Methuen, London 1983 (second edition). See especially pp.29-32.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988, Ch. 1.

## "BAD IS THE WORLD, AND ALL WILL COME TO NOUGHT": HISTORY AND MORALITY IN MORE'S AND SHAKESPEARE'S *RICHARD III*

Jens Martin Gurr

The aim of this essay is to assess the relationship between More's *History of King Richard III*<sup>1</sup> and Shakespeare's *Richard III*.<sup>2</sup> In particular it is concerned with the ways in which the two works depict the political situation of the times and with their understanding of history; the underlying question being 'Is there a "Tudor myth" behind *Richard III*?'<sup>3</sup>

The study originated in a review of research on pre-Shakespearean renderings of the history of Richard III in chronicles such as Hall or Holinshed (as studied by Churchill,<sup>4</sup> Bullough,<sup>5</sup> Hanham<sup>6</sup> ...).

Summing up the state of research and general opinion Hammond writes:

Shakespeare's 'source' was the account of Richard which not only supplied him with the bulk of his information, but which fixed in his mind a tone, a general approach, towards the subject. This source was Sir Thomas More's *History*. [...] In this book we find the Richard of the play: a witty villain, described in ironical terms by the author. [...] [Shakespeare] is true to the tone of the book: his emphases are More's, though they are modified by the technique of dramatization. [...] He thereby remains true both to the drama and to the concept of history as he and More understood it.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> References are to the Yale Edition of the *Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. II, *The History of King Richard III*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester, (New Haven and London, 1963), introduction referred to as 'Sylvester'.

<sup>2</sup> References are to The Arden Edition of *King Richard III*, ed. Antony Hammond, (London and New York, 1981), references to acts, scenes and lines are given in brackets in the text, introduction referred to as 'Hammond'.

<sup>3</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, (London, 1944).

<sup>4</sup> G. B. Churchill, *Richard III up to Shakespeare*, (Berlin, 1900).

<sup>5</sup> G. Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. III, (1958).

<sup>6</sup> A. Hanham, *Richard III and his Early Historians 1483-1535*, (Oxford, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> Hammond, p. 75. In his annotations, Hammond repeatedly confuses More with the later chroniclers, assigning information to More which first appears in Hall; cf. p. 228, n. 109; p. 296, n. 431.

As the result of a close collation of both works, which forms the basis of this analysis, I will point out some considerable differences in the concept of history expressed in both works.

I will proceed as follows: first I would like to come to an understanding of More's work, including an analysis of his concept of history by showing how he depicts Edward IV, how he sees Richard's role, and whether he believes in Richard's death as the end of tyranny and insecurity.<sup>8</sup> This, I believe, will allow us to deduce a new plausible explanation why More did not complete his *History*.

Secondly, I will point out some of the differences derived from the comparison of Shakespeare's and More's *Richard III*. This, in its turn, will lead us to a reading of Shakespeare's view of history in *Richard III* which, as I will try to prove, decidedly differs from that expressed by More. Here, the figure of Richmond/Henry VII will be of particular interest.

#### THE UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY AND THE PORTRAYAL OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN MORE'S WORK

In his *History*, More directly judges and comments upon the characters, their actions, and the events he describes: There can be no doubt that he unequivocally praises Edward IV;<sup>9</sup> he is 'pro-Edward IV',<sup>10</sup> Hanham, whose interpretation of More's *History* as a 'medieval comedy'<sup>11</sup> and whose terminology of drama have both sufficiently been proven to be untenable,<sup>12</sup> claims More to give two contradicting descriptions of Edward IV, to which she assigns equal authority and credibility.<sup>13</sup> The first of these descriptions, however, is an authorial *laudatio*, given in More's function as the narrative and moralizing authority:

He was a goodly parsonage, and very Princely to behold, of hearte  
courageous, politique in counsaile, in aduersitie nothinge abashed, in  
prosperitie rather ioyfull then prowde, in peace iust and mercifull, in

<sup>8</sup> Although the chronological account ends before Richard's death, More foreshadows his fate and clearly refers to his death, cf. More, p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> More, pp. 7 ff.; for a detailed interpretation of Edward's role cf. Hans Peter Heinrich, *Sir Thomas Mores' Geschichte König Richards III*, (Paderborn, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Sylvester, p. lxxv.

<sup>11</sup> Hanham, p. 188: 'It is, by the medieval definition of the word, a comedy, because it ends happily for the central figure.' She states this twenty lines after quoting More: 'King Richarde ... [was] slain in the fiede, hacked and hewed of his enemies handes, haryed on horsebacke dead, his here in despite torn and togged lyke a cur dogge.' The classification of the *History* as a 'medieval comedy' is absurd. More sets out to show 'what wretched end ensueth such despiteous cruelty'.

<sup>12</sup> Heinrich, p. 32, quotes various studies refuting her theses.

<sup>13</sup> Hanham, pp. 159-160.

warre, sharpe and fyerce, bolde and hardye, and nathelesse no farther then wysedome woulde, aduenturouse.[...] In whych time of his latter daies, thys Realm was in quyet and prosperous estate: no feare of outewarde enemyes, no warre in hande, nor none towarde, but such as no manne looked for the people towarde the Prynce, not in a constrayned feare, but in a wyllynge and louyng obedyence: amonge them selfe, the commons in good peace.<sup>14</sup>

(There is no reason to believe that the commenting persona is not identical with More, nor that these comments are 'ostensibly' More's). The second description is a *vituperatio* of Edward expressed in Buckingham's infamous propaganda speech:

So that no time was ther in which rich men for their mony, & gret men for their landes or some other for some fere or some displeure were not out of peryl. For whome trusted he y<sup>t</sup> mistrusted his own brother? or whom spared he y<sup>t</sup> killed his own brother? or who could parfityly loue him, if hys owne brother could not?<sup>15</sup>

More's summary of Buckingham's oration is explicit:

And by and by somewhat louder, he rehersed them the same matter . againe in other order and other wordes, so well and ornately, & natheles so euidently and plaine, with voice gesture and countenance so cumly and so conuenient, that euery man meruailed that herd him, and thought that they neuer had in their liues heard so euill a tale so well tolde.<sup>16</sup>

He makes it perfectly clear that the people saw through this tissue of lies, this 'euill tale'.

Although More is certainly more witty and ironic than some critics and historians<sup>17</sup> have believed him to be, 'Hanham overstates badly the comic

<sup>14</sup> More, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> More, p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> More, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. for example J. Gairdner, *History of the Life and Reign of King Richard III*, London, 1898).

After the ingeniously staged scene of Richard's acceptance of the crown at Baynard's Castle, More describes the reactions of the citizens:

'But muche they talked and marueiled of the maner of this dealing, that the matter was on both partes made so straunge, as though neither had euer communed with the other thereof before, when that themself wel wist there was no man so dul that heard them, but he perceiued wel inough, y<sup>t</sup> all the matter was made betwene them.

and what she calls theatrical content of More's *History*.<sup>18</sup> More's description of Edward as a noble prince endowed with all physical, intellectual and spiritual qualities becoming a Christian king<sup>19</sup> who, in his later years, ruled a realm of peace and prosperity,<sup>20</sup> serves as a foil against which the tyrannous usurper Richard III is contrasted. This function sufficiently explains the obvious exaggerations.

Just as he has praised Edward IV, More openly and directly debases Richard. Richard arrives late when Shaa preaches in favour of him:

Nowe was it before deuised, that in y<sup>e</sup> speaking of these wordes, the protector should haue comen in among y<sup>e</sup> people to y<sup>e</sup> sermonwarde, to thend y<sup>t</sup> those words meting w<sup>t</sup> his presence, might haue been taken among those hearers, as though y<sup>e</sup> holye ghost had put them in the preachers mouth, & should haue moued the people euen ther, to crie king Richard king Richard, y<sup>t</sup> it might haue bene after said, y<sup>t</sup> he was specially chosen by god and in maner by miracle. But this deuise quailed either by y<sup>e</sup> protectors negligence, or by the preachers ouermuche diligence. [...] the people wer so farre fro crying king

Howbeit somme excused that agayne, and sayde all must be done in good order though. And menne must sometime for the manner sake not be a knowen what they knowe. For at the consecracion of a bishop, euery man woteth well by the paying for his bulles, y<sup>t</sup> he purposeth to be one, & though he paye for nothing elles. And yet must he bee twice asked whyther he wil be bishop or no, and he must twyse say naye, and at the third tyme take it as compelled ther vnto by his owne wyll. And in a stage play all the people know right wel, that he that playeth the sowdayne is percase a sowter. Yet if one should can so lyttle good, to shewe out of seasonne what acquaintance he hath with him, and calle him by his owne name whyle he standeth in his magestie, one of his tormentors might hap to breake his head, and worthy for marring of the play. And so they said that these matters bee Kynges games, as it were stage playes, and for the more part plaied vpon scaffoldes. In which pore men be but y<sup>e</sup> lokers on. And thei y<sup>t</sup> wise be, wil medle no farther. For they that sometye step vp and playe w<sup>t</sup> them, when they cannot play their partes, they disorder the play & and do themself no good.' (More, p. 81).

More here brilliantly puns on the meanings of 'game', 'play' and especially 'scaffold': in the episode about Shore's wife, whom Richard forces to publicly do penance, More ironically refers to Richard as 'a goodly continent prince clene and faultles of himself, sent oute of heauen into this vicious world for the amendement of mens maners', (More, p. 54), among other instances. Puns and ironies such as these make it impossible to see More as the straight-faced, accurate historian Gairdner (among others) claims him to be. Any forced classification of More's *History* either as a work of historiography or as a work of literature fails to take into account the basic approach of humanist historiography, which aims at a combination of literature and historiography; cf. Heinrich's study of the *History* as a work of humanist historiography.

<sup>18</sup> Hammond, p. 77.

<sup>19</sup> Heinrich, p. 95.

<sup>20</sup> More, p. 4.

Richard, y<sup>t</sup> thei stode as thei had bene turned into stones, for wonder of this shamefull sermon.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, he ridicules Richard by being ironic about him: he refers to Richard as 'a goodly and continent prince clene and faultles of himself, sent oute of heauen into this vicious world for the amendement of mens maners'.<sup>22</sup>

When the Mayor and the citizens come to Baynards Castle to ask Richard to become King, the entire proceedings have been planned by Richard and Buckingham, but More ironically claims Richard to have known nothing about these plots: 'These wordes muche moued the protectoure, whiche els as euery manne may witte, would neuer of likelyhoode haue inclyned therunto' [i.e. accepting the crown].<sup>23</sup>

More moralizes about his cruelties and unambiguously condemns Richard:

Now fell ther mischieues thick. And as the thinge euill gotten is neuer well kept: through all the time of his reygne, never ceased there cruel death & slaughter, till his owne destruccion ended it.<sup>24</sup>

More makes very little of the background of the War of the Roses; Richard's murder of King Henry VI is merely given as a rumour, Queen Margaret is not mentioned at all, and the only references to the conflicts between Henry VI and Edward IV are: 'He depriued king Henrie and attained the crown', and the Warwick-episode in the retrospect on Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Grey.<sup>25</sup>

Details of the War of the Roses are irrelevant to More's didactic purpose. It suffices him to show a kingdom enjoying peace and prosperity in which, on the death of the king, a cruel tyrant eliminates all opposition and usurps the throne.<sup>26</sup> The general impression is that of an episode of anarchy and tyranny (ending in 'y<sup>e</sup> beste death, and y<sup>e</sup> most righteous'<sup>27</sup>), brought about by a usurper presented with no sympathy whatsoever. Richard is constantly maligned by contrasting him against a foil of morally upright and virtuous opponents; two figures may be employed to illustrate the portrayal of these antagonists: when, after a long discussion with Richard and Buckingham,

<sup>21</sup> More, pp. 67-68.

<sup>22</sup> More, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> More, p. 79.

<sup>24</sup> More, p. 82.

<sup>25</sup> More, pp. 6, 65.

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of the *History* as humanist historiography cf. Heinrich's study, which stresses the moral and didactic elements of More's work.

<sup>27</sup> More, p. 82.

the Cardinal finally agrees to fetch young York from the sanctuary, Elizabeth is seen to forcefully argue with him:

And in good faith me thinketh it were as great commoditie to them both as for yet a while, to be in the custody of their mother, the tender age consyred of the elder of them both, but speciall the younger, which besides his infancie that also nedeth good loking to, hath a while ben so sore diseased whith sicknes, and is so newly rather a lyttle amended then well recouered, that I dare put no parson erthly in trust with his keping but my selfe onely, [...] And albeit there might be founden other, that would happely doe theyr best vnto him: yet is there none y<sup>t</sup> either knoweth better how to order him, then I that so long haue kept him: or is more tenderly like to cherishe him, then hys own mother that bare him.<sup>28</sup>

Elizabeth's motherly feelings are emphasized, she is deeply concerned for the best of her children.

Bishop Morton is portrayed as the ideal politician combining moral conviction and political efficiency: 'The bishop was a man of gret natural wit, very well lerned, & honorable in behaueor, lacking no wise waies to win fauor.'<sup>29</sup>

More then describes how Morton ingenuously tempts Buckingham to stage a rebellion against Richard:

Thys man therefore as I was about to tell you, by y<sup>e</sup> long & often alternate prooffe, aswel of prosperitie as aduers fortune, had gotten by great experience y<sup>e</sup> verye mother & maistres of wisdom, a depe insighte in politike worldli driftes. Wherby perceiuing now this duke glad to comen w<sup>t</sup> him, fed him wt faire wordes and many pleasaunt praises. And parceiuing by y<sup>e</sup> processe of their comunicacions, the dukes pride now & then balke oute a lytle breide of enuy toward y<sup>e</sup> glory of y<sup>e</sup> king, & therby feling him ethe to fal out yf the matter were well handled: he craftelye sought y<sup>e</sup> waies to pricke him forwarde taking alwaies thocasion of his comming & so keping himself close w<sup>in</sup> his bondes, that he rather semed to folow hym then to lead him.<sup>30</sup>

We are made to see Richard's opponents in the most favourable light, Elizabeth and Bishop Morton merely being the most clear-cut examples.

<sup>28</sup> More, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> More, p. 90.

<sup>30</sup> More, pp. 91-92.

This affords a view of More's essentially optimistic<sup>31</sup> view of history; the usurper is finally overthrown. Although his work breaks off before the chronological account reaches the Battle of Bosworth, More is unambiguous about Richard's fate:

King Richarde himselfe as ye shall hereafter here, slain in the field, hacked and hewed of his enemies handes, haryed on horsebacke dead, his here in despite torn and togged lyke a cur dogge.<sup>32</sup>

#### MORE'S VIEW OF HENRY VII AND THE INCOMPLETE *HISTORY*

Let us first consider some of the reasons that have been adduced to account for the incomplete state of *More's History*:

Heinrich, in his introductory review of research on *More's History*, quotes Fox, who believes:

Possibly the judicial murder of the third Duke of Buckingham in 1521 shocked More into recognizing that the history of King Richard III was beginning to be rewritten in his own time, and also forced him to confront the severe effects on his own moral being of having decided to enact Morus' advice in *Utopia*. The result was a retreat to the dualities and *contemptus mundi* of his earlier English Poems.

Fox gives a second reason:

It is possible that More failed to complete the *History* because a more urgent preoccupation intervened, in this case perhaps the need to answer Luther's *Contra Henricum* in 1522.<sup>33</sup>

This does not explain why More did not complete his work later. Both reasons bring about a need to argue for a later time of composition than is generally alleged. Sylvester persuasively argues for the period of 1514 to 1518, both because of Rastell's remark that 'More wrote it about the yere of our Lorde 1513' and his preceding remark about the time of composition while 'More was one of the undersherrifs of London' (1510 to 1518).<sup>34</sup>

There appears to be no substantial reason to disbelieve Rastell (who, as More's nephew, was familiar with the life and works of his uncle), or to

<sup>31</sup> Heinrich, p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> More, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> Fox, p. 105, quoted in Heinrich.

<sup>34</sup> Sylvester, pp. lxiii ff.

disregard Sylvester's dating. Extending the supposed time of composition until 1521/22 seems to stretch the evidence a little.

Hanham also suggests possible reasons; the one she apparently believes to be most plausible also relates to Henry VII. She asks:

Could the father of the present king be readily worked, with fitting dignity, into a book that had been turning into something approaching comic history, with a buffoon for his opponent?<sup>35</sup>

Hanham's overstatement of Richard's comic traits has been mentioned above; thus, the 'fitting dignity' can be ruled out as a problem for More; her argument that Richmond was the father of the present king, Henry VIII, and would therefore have to be treated with consideration is not convincing: in More's Latin epigrams on the coronation of Henry VIII, the reign of his father Henry VII is described as a period of 'slavery' and 'sadness', with 'laws heretofore powerless - yes, even laws put to unjust ends'.<sup>36</sup>

Here, More hardly shows consideration or any fear of offending Henry VIII by criticizing his father. In their annotations Bradner and Lynch point out: 'The new monarch, however, indicated by his impeachment and execution of his father's principal agents, Empson and Dudley, that he would not resent such comments'.<sup>37</sup>

A further revealing view of More's attitude towards Henry VII is afforded by the story of More's opposition to Henry's demand that parliament should grant him £90,000 for the marriage of his daughter Margaret to James IV of Scotland (1504). More successfully argued against this claim on the grounds that it was an unbearable sum for the citizens to pay. When Henry learned that 'a beardless boy' had opposed his plans, he is said to have arrested and incarcerated More's father.<sup>38</sup>

The authenticity of this anecdote given by William Roper<sup>39</sup> is not entirely certain, but it is quoted by various scholars without substantial doubt; there appears to be no reason to disbelieve More's son-in-law.

<sup>35</sup> Hanham, p. 188.

<sup>36</sup> *The Latin Epigrams of Thomas More*, eds. L. Bradner and Ch. D. Lynch (with translations and notes), (Chicago, 1953), p. 16:

'Meta haec seruitii est' (l. 5),

'Tristitiae finis' (l. 6),

'Leges inualidae prius, imo nocere coactae' (l. 25).

<sup>37</sup> Bradner, Lynch, p. 143.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in: Thomas Morus, *Die Geschichte König Richards III.*, ed. H.P. Heinrich, (München, 1984), pp. 18ff.

<sup>39</sup> W. Roper, *The Life of Sir Thomas More, Knight*, (1557), ed. E. D. Hitchcock, London, 1935), p. 9.

More's personal opposition to Henry VII and the devastating critique of his reign in the epigrams (the charges against Henry closely resemble those against Richard in the *History*, just as we know Henry to have been hardly less ruthless in the elimination of opponents) may explain why More failed to complete the *History*.

It is interesting to note that More does not mention Richmond as the noble prince rightfully ending Richard's tyrannous reign or refer to him as the military leader who won the decisive battle against Richard; he merely speaks of 'his enemies'. In a different context, however, a reference to Henry VII does occur:

Howbeit concerning y<sup>e</sup> opinion, with the occasions mouing either partie, we shal haue place more at large to entreate, yf we hereafter happen to write the time of the late noble prince of famous memory king Henry y<sup>e</sup> seuenth.<sup>40</sup>

In the light of More's view of Henry VII outlined above, this remark is ambiguous and most likely ironic, especially since *famous* in More's days is recorded to have meant something like 'notorious, ill-famed'.<sup>41</sup>

We have seen that his concept of history as expressed in the *History* is essentially optimistic; the usurper who unlawfully 'breaks into' an era of peace and prosperity is rightly disposed of. If More had completed his work, an explicit reference to Henry VII as his successor would have been inevitable; to have the tyrant vanquished and succeeded by a king hardly better than Richard would not have been conducive to More's didactic intentions. It would in fact have destroyed the carefully elaborated structure of the work which contrasts the evil tyrant Richard against the 'ideal king' Edward IV, against Queen Elizabeth as the motherly protector of her children and against Morton as the archetype of an ideal politician<sup>42</sup> (cf. above). More exemplifies political positions and different 'types of politicians'. With Edward IV as the figure More uses to illustrate the connection between the *ethos* of the king and the *weal* of the country, with Richard as the archetypal tyrant, and with Morton as the ideal politician etc.,<sup>43</sup> there was simply no room for a further tyrant. It seems likely that the 'incompatibility' of Henry VII with the contrastive approach of his *History*

<sup>40</sup> More, pp. 82-83.

<sup>41</sup> *OED*, entry 3, b.

<sup>42</sup> Heinrich, p. 105.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed analysis of More's use of figures as paradigms of basic political positions cf. Heinrich pp. 94ff.

occurred to More only in the process of writing; the way it was begun, the work could not be finished without great incongruities.<sup>44</sup>

Towards the end of his account,<sup>45</sup> More points to his intentions:

Which thinges on euery part wel pondered: god neuer gaue this world a more notable example, neither in what vnsuretie standeth this worldly wel, or what mischief worketh the prowde enterprise of a hyghe heart, or finally what wretched end ensueth such dispiteous crueltie.

His account is meant to elaborate three 'teachings':

- (1) in what vnsuretie standeth this worldly wel [most elaborately exemplified in Hastings],
- (2) what mischief worketh the prowde enterprise of a hyghe heart [all the evil committed during Richard's reign],
- (3) what wretched end ensueth such dispiteous crueltie [This points to Richard's fate a few lines later.]

All the three teachings have sufficiently been dealt with up to this point in the *History*; a continuation of More's account could have added names, dates, events etc., but could hardly have added anything to his purpose.

#### GENERAL OPINION ON 'SHAKESPEARE'S DEBT TO MORE'

With this understanding of More's view of history, let us turn to a comparison of More's account with Shakespeare's play.

A fair comparison of the understanding of history, of the moral concepts and of the view of Richard expressed in both works is possible, because More clearly refers to Richard's death, although his chronological account ends after Buckingham's flight to Brecknock and breaks off in the midst of his discussion with Morton.

Let us reconsider what Hammond writes about the general opinion on Shakespeare's debt to More:

Shakespeare's 'source' was the account of Richard which not only supplied him with the bulk of his information, but which fixed in his

<sup>44</sup> The phenomenon of a work proving to be 'unfinishable' the way it was begun to be written is not unheard-of in political and historical writings; for an analysis of an 18th-century parallel cf. Michael Gassenmeier, 'Gottfried August Bürgers Aufsatz "Die Republik England"', *Gottfried August Bürger (1747-1794)*, eds. Wolfgang Beutin, Thomas Bütow (Bremer Beiträge zur Literatur- und Ideengeschichte, 13), (Frankfurt/M., 1994).

<sup>45</sup> More, p. 86.

mind a tone, a general approach, towards the subject. This source was Sir Thomas More's *History*. [...] In this book we find the Richard of the play: a witty villain, described in ironical terms by the author. [...] [Shakespeare] is true to the tone of the book: his emphases are More's, though they are modified by the technique of dramatization. [...] He thereby remains both true to the drama and to the concept of history as he and More understood it.<sup>46</sup>

Hanham's explanation of the differences is not convincing: 'Brilliant artists on the threshold of a career commonly strive for originality at all costs.'<sup>47</sup> Why, then, should Shakespeare closely follow More in some scenes? In the scene describing the council in the tower and Hastings' arrest the similarities are striking and even extend to verbal echoes:

Then said the protectour: ye shal al se in what wise that sorceres and that other witch of her counsel shoris wife w<sup>d</sup> their affynitie, have by their sorcery & witchcraft wasted my body. And therw<sup>t</sup> he plucked vp his doublet sleue to his elbow vpon his left arme, where he shewed a werish *withered* arme and small.<sup>48</sup>

Then be your eyes the witness of their evil.  
See how I am bewitch'd! 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.<sup>49</sup>

(3.4.67-72. my italics)

I agree that More supplied Shakespeare 'with the bulk of his information', but I will try to prove that the differences between the two works, which are generally belittled, are in fact substantial.

#### THE LACK OF A NARRATIVE AND MORAL AUTHORITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S *RICHARD III*

<sup>46</sup> Hammond, pp. 75-76; Hammond here sums up views expressed by Churchill, p. 119; Bullough, p. 224; Hanham, p. 189, and others.

<sup>47</sup> Hanham, p. 189.

<sup>48</sup> More, p. 48 (my italics).

<sup>49</sup> The entire scene closely follows More as far as the sequence of events is concerned; verbal correspondences occur throughout the play.



It is a truism to say that More's work is narrative, whereas Shakespeare's is dramatic, but the one great difference this entails has hardly been remarked upon: in More, we have a narrative authority, commenting upon and moralizing the events and characters; More repeatedly ridicules Richard, either by being ironic about him, as in the Shore episode (he refers to Richard as 'a goodly continent prince clene and faultles of himself', cf. above), or by pointing out how plots fail because Richard embarrassingly 'bungles' (Richard arrives late for Shaa's sermon).

There is no such authority outside the events in Shakespeare; the 'choric figure' Margaret does not qualify, she is just as egotistical and guilty as the others and by no means 'above or beyond it all'. She was an extremely cruel figure in the War of the Roses:

RICHARD The curse my noble father laid on thee  
When thou didst crown his warlike brows with paper,  
And with thy scorns drew'st rivers from his eyes,  
And then to dry them, gav'st the Duke a clout  
Steeped in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland -  
(1.3.174-178)

This passage refers to the murder of Richard's youngest brother Rutland, which occurs in the third part of *Henry VI*. Furthermore, Margaret's hateful litany of curses reveal her to be deeply involved in the tissue of guilt and hatred.

Shakespeare did not choose to introduce a choric figure or a prologue as, for instance, in *Henry V*, where the chorus unequivocally praises Henry.<sup>50</sup> The lack of an authoritative voice in the play adds to the effect of that 'total and terrible uncertainty'<sup>51</sup> which informs the work.

#### MORALITY AND CHARACTER IN *RICHARD III*

Contrary to More's *History*, Shakespeare's play lacks an 'ideal King Edward IV'; as the account of the later years of his reign does not appear in Shakespeare, the glimpse of the weak and self-pitying Edward on his death-bed is the only impression we get, his overtly naive and pathetic attempt to reconcile the nobles is bound to fail (as it is in More), but we are given no positive impression of Edward to counterbalance this view.

<sup>50</sup> *Henry V*, cf. especially Prologues to Acts IV and V.

<sup>51</sup> A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns*, ed. G. Storey, (London, 1961).

Rather, the 'weakness and gullibility of Edward serve as a foil for the quick and subtle mind of Richard.'<sup>52</sup> One of his most brilliant scenes is Act I, Scene III:

RICHARD I do the wrong, and first begin to brawl:  
The secret mischief that I set abroad  
I lay unto the grievous charge of others,  
Clarence, whom I, indeed, have cast in darkness,  
I do bewep to many simple gulls,  
Namely to Derby, Hastings, Buckingham;  
And tell them 'tis the Queen and her allies  
That stir the King against the Duke my brother.  
Now they believe it, and withall whet me  
To be reveng'd on Rivers, Dorset, Grey.  
But then I sigh, and, with a piece of Scripture,  
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil:  
And thus I clothe my naked villainy  
With odd old ends stol'n forth of Holy Writ,  
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil.  
(1.3.324-338)

This is Richard's summary of a long argument with Hastings, Margaret, Elizabeth and her relatives, in which he brilliantly manipulates the others; at first, he accuses Elizabeth of having ennobled her unworthy relatives, on Margaret's arrival he isolates her and secures Elizabeth on his side; finally, he pretends to repent his cruelties against Margaret and reconciles Rivers and Grey by 'praying' for Clarence's enemies. Richard comments on this in an aside: 'For had I curs'd now, I had curs'd myself'; as Richard had plotted against Clarence himself and had also hired the murderers; he has just blessed *himself* in his hypocritical prayer for the souls of Clarence's enemies!

Shakespeare radically denies us any detached or impartial standard, any yardstick of judgement, thus allowing us to admire Richard 'even while our better natures know perfectly well that what he is doing is monstrous'.<sup>53</sup> 'Like most ironists, Richard secures the audience on his side.'<sup>54</sup> He is, in the words of Rossiter<sup>55</sup> 'a huge, triumphant stage-personality'.

His superiority and our fascination are partly due to his brilliance and marvellous rhetoric:

<sup>52</sup> F. M. Nugent, *William Shakespeare's Richard III*, (New York, 1964).

<sup>53</sup> Hammond, p. 105.

<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Brooke, 'Reflecting Gems and Dead Bones', *Critical Quarterly* 7 (1965), p. 130.

<sup>55</sup> Rossiter, p. 2.

Go, tread the path that thou shalt ne'er return;  
 Simple, plain Clarence, I do love thee so  
 That I will shortly send thy soul to Heaven -  
 If Heaven will take the present at our hands.

(1.1.117-120)

Our reluctant identification with Richard and our understanding for him are partly due to psychological insights Richard allows us in his opening soliloquy. In the War of the Roses, Richard distinguished himself as an outstanding soldier and military leader; now, 'Grim-visag'd War hath smooth'd his wrinkled front' (1.1.9) and 'He capers nimbly in a ladies chamber,/To the lascivious pleasing of a lute' (1.1.12-13).

Richard, however, feels unable to court women; this 'weak piping time of peace' makes him feel inferior and 'cheated ... by nature', the motivation for his crimes is psychologically sound:

But I, that am not shap'd 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 curtail'd of this fair proportion,  
 Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,  
 Deform'd, unfinish'd, 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 -  
 Why, I, in this weak time of peace,  
 Have no delight to pass away the time,  
 Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,  
 And descant on mine own deformity.  
 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.

(1.1.14-31)

Although Richard's physical deformity as the cause of his moral monstrosity (the inversion of the *kalokagathia*-ideal has often been remarked upon) must not be overstated, this 'psychologizing' nonetheless makes Richard's crimes more plausible and adds to our understanding of his character.

But his dramatic success is also due to the fact that 'his opponents are a tedious lot'.<sup>56</sup> In order to spare us a tedious list of all the tedious lot, a few figures may be dealt with in groups, others can serve as examples of the process of discrediting Richard's opponents.

Shakespeare not only avoids scenes of physical cruelty (apart from Clarence's being stabbed and Richard's own end no act of violence occurs on stage), but also tender scenes.

Nothing is made of Elizabeth's motherly feelings and the defence of her son in sanctuary (cf. above). During the scene in the Star Chamber when the young King is welcomed by Richard and the Mayor, the Cardinal merely leaves with Hastings and returns with the young Duke shortly afterwards; the long and touching discussion between Elizabeth and the Cardinal, which occupies eight (!) pages in More's *History* does not appear at all.

The 'wailing scenes', in which Margaret, Elizabeth and the Duchess of York lament the deaths of Edward IV, Clarence and later the young king and his brother do not portray the women as mourners credibly expressing their grief; they hardly evoke sympathy or pity:

DUCHESS Thou art a widow - yet thou art a mother,  
 And hast the comfort of thy children left;  
 But death has snatch'd my husband from mine arms  
 And pluck'd two crutches from my feeble hands.  
 Clarence and Edward: O, what cause have I,  
 Thine being but a moiety of my moan,  
 To overgo thy woes and drown thy cries.

(2.2.55-61)

[...]

DUCHESS Alas, I am the mother of these griefs:  
 Their woes are parcell'd, mine is general.  
 She for an Edward weeps, and so do I;  
 I for Clarence weep, so not doeth she;  
 These babes for Clarence weep, and so do I;  
 I for an Edward weep, so not do they.

(2.2.80-85)

[...]

MARGARET [*aside*] Plantagenet doth quit Plantagenet:  
 Edward for Edward pays a dying debt.

(4.4.20-21)

<sup>56</sup> Hammond, p. 112.

As W. Clemen<sup>57</sup> rightly points out, these are not 'utterances of pain humanly believable, but rather loud and obtrusive lamentations confidently and almost triumphantly displaying pain.' There is no room for spontaneous and heartfelt pain, we rather witness a *lamentation contest* where the value of a loss is mathematically worked out:

MARGARET 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  
Match'd not the high perfection of my loss.  
(4.4.61-66)

This is addressed to Elizabeth, whose husband Edward IV (paraphrasing Margaret) does not equal Margaret's son Edward, Prince of Wales (killed by Edward IV and Richard), so that young Edward V had to be 'thrown in' for compensation ('boot').

'This collection of bereft females', of 'historical Mrs Gummidges' as Rossiter<sup>58</sup> wittily (and appropriately) calls them, excites no pity or sympathy whatsoever; their 'dismal catalogue of *Who was Who* and *Who has lost Whom*'<sup>59</sup> and their cynical 'setting-off' one death against another is merely appalling.

Nor is Elizabeth by any means the positive figure she is in More's work (Margaret and the Duchess do not appear in More's account). The 'jack-argument' Richard brings forth to discredit Elizabeth's relatives (Grey, Rivers) as recently ennobled *homines novi*, upstarts or, quite simply 'jacks', also carries some conviction:

RICHARD Myself disgrac'd, and the nobility  
Held in contempt, while great promotions  
Are daily given to *ennoble* those  
That scarce some two days since were worth a *noble*.<sup>60</sup>  
(1.3.79-82, my italics)

<sup>57</sup> W. Clemen, *Kommentar zu Shakespeares Richard III*, 2nd rev. edition, (Göttingen, 1969), pp. 146ff.; translations from works in German are mine.

<sup>58</sup> Rossiter, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Rossiter, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Richard here wittily puns on the homophony of 'to ennobel' and 'a noble', which in Shakespeare's days were most likely both pronounced [ə'no:bl], (as Renaissance English in the pronunciation of words of French etymology was closer to the original French pronunciation than present-day English), a noble being a small coin of little value; Elizabeth's relatives are claimed to be unworthy of their 'promotion'.

[...]  
Let me put in your minds, if you forget,  
What you have been ere this, and what you are;  
Withall, what I have been, and what I am.  
(1.3.131-133)

[...]  
I cannot tell; the world is grown so bad  
That wrens make prey where eagles dare not perch.  
Since every Jack becomes a gentleman  
There's many a gentle person made a jack.  
(1.3.70-73)

This reproach is justified: Elizabeth, her first husband and her brother, now Lord Grey, 'were factious for the house of Lancaster' (1.3.128). When, on the death of her husband, Elizabeth married Edward IV, she saw to it that her entire family was ennobled.

Even the clergy is discredited: when Richard's accomplice Buckingham tries to persuade the Cardinal to fetch young York from the sanctuary, where Elizabeth has taken refuge with her children, fearing for them because she does not trust Richard, the following discussion ensues:

BUCKINGHAM 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.

CARDINAL My Lord of Buckingham, if my weak oratory  
Can from his mother win the Duke of York,  
Anon, expect him here; but if she be obdurate  
To mild entreaties, God in Heaven forbid  
We should infringe the holy privilege  
Of blessed sanctuary! Not for all this land  
Would I be guilty of so deep a sin.

BUCKINGHAM You are to 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 deserv'd the place,  
And those who have the wit to claim the place.  
This prince has neither claim'd it nor deserv'd 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.  
 CARDINAL My Lord, you shall o'er-rule my mind for once.  
 Come on, Lord Hastings, will you go with me?  
 (3.1.32-58)

The Cardinal is easily persuaded; Buckingham's argument is appalling: York is innocent, the sanctuary rights are only granted to those who deserve them; as York is too young to appeal for these rights, the law is not invalidated if he is taken from his mother by force.

No less corrupt are the preachers, Shaa and Penker, who accompany Richard at Baynard's Castle, where Richard pretends to be absorbed in prayer with them in order to impress the citizens and convince them of his piety. They are mere hypocrites; contrary to More's account<sup>61</sup> of their involvement in Richard's plot, there is no mention of pangs of conscience or guilt in them.

Stanley is a 'dodgy opportunist', his 'unattractive trimming enables him to weather the storms successfully'.<sup>62</sup>

Hastings is not in the least likeable; he gleefully rejoices at the news of the announced execution of Rivers, Grey and Vaughan:

Catesby (the morning before Hastings' death) informs him of their imminent execution:

CATESBY And thereupon he [Richard] sends you this good news  
 That this same very day your enemies,  
 The kindred of the Queen, must die at Pomfret.  
 HASTINGS Indeed, I am no mourner for that news,  
 Because they have been still my adversaries: [...]

But I shall laugh at this a twelve-month hence,  
 That they which brought me in my master's hate,  
 I live to look upon their tragedy.  
 Well, Catesby, ere a fortnight make me older  
 I'll send some packing that yet think not on't.  
 (3.2.47-51, 56-60)

He is exasperatingly naive in his hubris:

HASTINGS I tell thee, man, 'tis better with me now  
 Than when I met thee last, where we now meet:

<sup>61</sup> More, p. 68.

<sup>62</sup> Hammond, p. 111.

Then was I going prisoner to the Tower,  
 By the suggestion of the Queen's allies:  
 But now I tell thee - Keep it to thyself -  
 This day those enemies are put to death,  
 And I in better state than e'er I was.

(3.2.96-103, my italics)

Although he has been warned by Lord Stanley, he still believes Richard loves him, and rejoices at the death of his enemies; these lines are addressed at 'Hastings, a pursuivant', a man he meets on his way to the Tower.

It has repeatedly been remarked that all of Richard's victims (except for Anne and the princes) are also guilty of one crime or the other.<sup>63</sup> But even Anne, by the coffin of her father-in-law Henry VI, who was slain by Richard, falls for him:

ANNE I would I knew thy heart.  
 RICHARD 'Tis figur'd in my tongue.  
 ANNE I fear me both are false.  
 RICHARD Then never man was true.  
 ANNE Well, well, put up thy sword.  
 RICHARD Say then my peace is made.  
 ANNE That shalt thou know hereafter.  
 RICHARD But I shall live in hope?  
 ANNE All men, I hope, live so.  
 RICHARD Vouchsafe to wear this ring.  
 ANNE To take is not to give.  
 RICHARD Look how my ring encompasseth thy finger:  
 Even so thy breast encloseth my poor heart;  
 Wear both of them, for both of them are thine.  
 And if thy poor devoted servant may  
 But beg one favour at thy gracious hand,  
 Thou dost confirm his happiness for ever.  
 ANNE What is it?  
 RICHARD That it may please you leave these sad designs  
 To him that hath most cause to be a mourner,  
 And presently repair to Crosby Place  
 Where, after I have solemnly interr'd  
 At Chertsey Monastery this noble King,  
 And wet his grave with my repentant tears,  
 I will with all expedient duty see you.  
 Grant me this boon.

<sup>63</sup> Hammond, p. 110.

ANNE With all my heart, and much it joys me too,  
To see you are become so penitent.  
(1.2.196-224)

Richard succeeds partly because of his brilliance, but, as Hammond rightly says, Anne would not have fallen for him 'if she too had not been corrupt'.<sup>64</sup> Richard is right in reproaching her that she knows 'no charity'.

But even such minor characters as Clarence's children are not attractive; they join the lamentation contest and do not feel real pain, but, calculating like Margaret, refuse to mourn with Elizabeth on the death of Edward IV:

BOY Ah, Aunt, you wept not for our father's death:  
How can we aid you with our kindred tears?  
GIRL Our fatherless distress was left unmoan'd:  
Your widow-dolour likewise be unwept.  
(2.2.62-65)

Hammond even calls young York 'a most thoroughly dislikeable brat'.<sup>65</sup>

Richard's henchmen (Catesby, Ratcliffe and Lovell) hardly need a remark; they can be neatly summed up under the well-known rhyme current at the time:

The Cat, the Rat,  
And Lovell our Dog  
Rulen all England  
Under a Hog.<sup>66</sup>

Although this refers to the historical figures, Shakespeare's triad beautifully fits that description:

CATESBY 'Tis a vile thing to die, my gracious Lord,  
When men are unprepar'd and look not for't.  
(3.2.61-62)

He is reproaching Hastings for rejoicing at the death of his enemies; these lines clearly reveal him to be a hypocrite, for a few lines later he says:

CATESBY The Princes both make high account of you -  
[aside] For they account your head upon the Bridge.

<sup>64</sup> Hammond, p. 110.

<sup>65</sup> Hammond, p. 111.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in *Geschichte König Richards III*, cf. note 38.

[...]  
RATCLIFFE [urging Hastings to his execution]:  
Come, come, dispatch: the Duke would be at dinner;  
Make a short thrift: he longs to see your head.  
[...]  
LOVELL *Enter Lovell and Ratcliffe with Hastings's head.* [...]  
Here is the head of that ignoble traitor,  
The dangerous and unsuspected Hastings.  
(3.2.68-69, 3.4.94-95, 3.5.18, 22-23)

These few lines for each of them are sufficient to show them for what they are: mere executioners, ruthlessly aiding Richard in his murderous plots.

As we have seen, Shakespeare carefully discredits and maligns one figure after the other; in the absence of a moralizing and commenting authority and confronted with a 'tedious lot', Richard, despite his appalling crimes, is the uncontested hero, the world is free for him 'to bustle in'.

To put it quite plainly, owing to Shakespeare's elaborate manipulation of sympathy and the complete lack of a positive foil against which Richard could be contrasted, we get an impression radically different from the one More conveys. But as 'critics have heaped attention on Richard at the expense of all other characters in the play',<sup>67</sup> this striking difference has hardly been remarked upon, as Richard himself in Shakespeare (here I agree) is not very different from More's. But contrary to More, Shakespeare allows, even forces us to admire Richard's wit, intelligence and versatility. (Compare, for example, the highly formalized and 'stuffy' rhetoric in the wailing scenes with Richard's great variety of registers or the ingenious manipulation in Act I, Scene III.)

There is no morality whatsoever, no positive foil against Richard. However, Shakespeare's depiction of the situation in England is not limited to Richard's reign. It also finds the direct cause of the crisis in Edward's weakness. This devastatingly pessimistic view can hardly be said to be 'true to More's book'.<sup>68</sup>

The overall impression Shakespeare creates is one of 'total and terrible uncertainty', of an England suffering from 'the curse of faction, civil dissension and fundamental anarchy'.<sup>69</sup> These 'Patterns of Decay', of dissolution and disintegration are most clearly elucidated in the scene of Clarence's murder with the absurd discussion of his murderers:

<sup>67</sup> Nugent, p. 77.

<sup>68</sup> Hammond, p. 75.

<sup>69</sup> Rossiter, p. 6.

The two murderers Richard hired to kill Clarence have obtained the keys to the Tower from the Lieutenant, they have entered the cell where Clarence is asleep:

SECOND MURDERER What, shall I stab him as he sleeps?

FIRST MURDERER No; he'll say 'twas cowardly done when he wakes.

SECOND MURDERER Why, he shall never wake until the great Judgement Day.

FIRST MURDERER Why, then he'll say we stabbed him sleeping.

[...]

SECOND MURDERER Some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me.

FIRST MURDERER Remember our reward, when the deed's done.

SECOND MURDERER Zounds, he dies! I had forgot the reward.

FIRST MURDERER Where is thy conscience now?

SECOND MURDERER Oh, in the Duke of Gloucester's purse.

[...]

FIRST MURDERER What if it come to thee again?

SECOND MURDERER I'll not meddle with it; it makes a man a coward. A man cannot steal but it accuseth him; a man cannot swear but it checks him; a man cannot lie with his neighbour's wife but it detects him.

[...]

FIRST MURDERER Zounds, 'tis even now at my elbow, persuading me not to kill the Duke.

[...]

SECOND MURDERER Come, shall we fail to work?

FIRST MURDERER Take him on the costard with the hilts of thy sword, and then throw him into the malmsey-butt in the next room.

SECOND MURDERER Oh excellent device! And make a sop of him.

(1.4.99-149)

The ensuing discussion with Clarence, who has woken up, is psychologically just as penetrating, but the repeated changing of roles (which cannot be attributed to a jumble in the Quartos or Folio) within these few lines is enough to reveal the dissolution of their personalities. I have treated this scene somewhat at length, because all distortions of the mind and soul characteristic of this play can be found in this scene: lack of

conviction, hypocrisy, allusions to the Bible or distortions of Christian teachings, cynical puns, etc.

#### A 'THEOLOGY OF REVENGE' IN *RICHARD III*, OR: SCOURGES, CURSES, PROPHECIES

The 'origin of evil' is an interesting problem, and is explained differently in both works: It is More's plain belief 'that nature chaunged her course in hys beginninge'<sup>70</sup> and that the cruelty and evil which befall the realm largely spring from Richard's evil personality. Shakespeare, however, portrays Richard as 'a product not only of nature but of the times', of the 'vicious and fiercely cruel world of strife into which he was born.'<sup>71</sup>

Richard is often seen as a 'Scourge of God', 'chastising and mortifying a sinful people',<sup>72</sup> sent as a redeemer to end the concatenation of murders committed in the struggle for supremacy in the War of the Roses, and finally being destroyed himself. But again, I believe Shakespeare's play to be far more modern and the *flagellum dei*-concept (or divine retribution) to be generally overstated. For Richard to be the ultimate 'Scourge of God' or point of culmination in the 'chronic curse that rests on England',<sup>73</sup> far more would have to be made of the background of the War of the Roses (or the links of *Richard III* to the first trilogy). But, as Rossiter remarks, the effect of 'total and terrible uncertainty [...] is there even if we know only a few bare essentials of what has gone before'.<sup>74</sup> He speaks of 'a half-dozen facts'. *Richard III* is, as Hammond<sup>75</sup> says, not a 'twig on the tree of Shakespeare's histories'; Brooke condemns the 'teleological fallacy'<sup>76</sup> of merely seeing it as a prelude to the later achievements.

In addition to the greater independence from the first trilogy argued above, which undermines the notion of 'divine retribution', a further argument against seeing this 'repulsive justice'<sup>77</sup> at work in *Richard III* may be added here: Margaret's curses, Margaret being the figure in the play who personifies this unchristian theology of revenge, do not come true because they are uttered and a supernatural authority sees to it that they come true. Under the prevalent conditions 'their fulfilment is entirely probable',<sup>78</sup> they

<sup>70</sup> More, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Moody B. Prior, *The Drama of Power*, (Evanston, 1973), p. 301.

<sup>72</sup> Hammond, p. 97.

<sup>73</sup> Rossiter, p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Rossiter, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Hammond, p. 97.

<sup>76</sup> Brooke, p. 130.

<sup>77</sup> Rossiter, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup> Hammond, p. 110, points this doubting way.

must come true! They are a hateful all-round attack blindly directed at anything around her:

MARGARET Can curses pierce the clouds of heaven?  
 Why then, give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses:  
 Though not by war, by surfeit die your King,  
 As ours by murder, to make him a king.  
 Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,  
 For Edward my son, that was Prince of Wales,  
 Die in his youth, by like untimely violence.  
 Thyself, a queen, for me that was a queen,  
 Outlive thy glory like my wretched self:  
 Long may'st thou live to wail thy children's death,  
 And see another, as I see thee now,  
 Deck'd in thy rights, as thou art stall'd in mine;  
 Long die thy happy days before thy death,  
 And after many lengthen'd hours of grief,  
 Die neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen.  
 (1.3.195-209)

As we shall see, not all of the curses are fulfilled. The young King Edward V does not die by murder because Margaret curses him; the usurper Richard quite pragmatically has him killed because 'he is in his way'. With the following lines from Richard's soliloquies and asides in the very first scene of the play, there can be no doubt about the final aim of his plots:

RICHARD 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.  
 (1.1.32-35)

[...]

He [Edward IV] cannot live, I hope, and must not die  
 Till George be pack'd with post-horse up to Heaven.  
 I'll in to urge his hatred more to Clarence,  
 With lies well steel'd with weighty arguments;  
 And if I fail not in my deep intent,  
 Clarence hath not another day to live:  
 Which done, God take King Edward to his mercy,  
 And leave the world for me to bustle in.  
 For then I'll marry Warwick's younger daughter -

[...]

The which will I, not all so much for love

As for another secret close intent,  
 By marrying her which I must reach unto.

(1.1.145-159)

This is the plan to be pursued in order to make Richard King; if the death of his nephews is not referred to here, we can nevertheless be sure that their death will become necessary at some stage in the plan. Richard will have to have them murdered; there is no need for Margaret's curses.

Hammond points out:

Many things happen in the play which are not foretold by her (she has no inkling of Richmond's importance) and some things which she prophesies do not come true (Elizabeth is not left childless).<sup>79</sup>

The notion of a theology of revenge, of this 'repulsive justice'<sup>80</sup> in the tradition of the vice- or mystery play is hardly tenable; Shakespeare's play is far more modern and beyond these crude concepts.

#### RICHMOND'S AMBIGUOUS ROLE IN AN INTERPRETATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY

Bearing in mind what we have observed about the portrayal of Richard's opponents throughout the play, let us turn to the interpretation of the end of Shakespeare's play. The view of Richmond which can be deduced from the last scenes of the play is of vital importance for the question whether Shakespeare's play serves the 'Tudor Myth' and for a final evaluation of the understanding of history (i.e. belief in a better future or historical pessimism).

In a plot full of intrigue, cruelty and slaughter set in an England of complete immorality, suffering, as we have seen, from 'the curse of faction, civil dissension and fundamental anarchy', thus in a 'world of absolute and hereditary moral ill',<sup>81</sup> Richmond is 'flown in' from France, gives an oration to his army, kills Richard, has one final (rather stuffy) speech and says: 'God say Amen'.

As Hammond writes, 'Richmond has regularly had a bad press, critics find him boring, stuffy, predictable and unbearably righteous'.<sup>82</sup>

He goes on to say that these objections are 'irrelevant on the ritualistic level'. Prior's explaining away his lack of attraction on the grounds that he is

<sup>79</sup> Hammond, p. 111.

<sup>80</sup> Rossiter, p. 20.

<sup>81</sup> Rossiter, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> Hammond, p. 111.

'presented in an apolitical light, purely as a saviour',<sup>83</sup> is not convincing. Shakespeare, a master of characterisation and manipulation of sympathy, chose to present Richmond in this unattractive light. Even more, he very subtly discredits him, just as he maligned all the other characters in the play. Not being too accurate with historical facts, inventing various scenes, adding figures not found in More (Margaret does not appear in More; she died in 1482), he could well have introduced Richmond earlier in the play rather than have him come as *deus ex machina*.

Let us now notice how Shakespeare allows us to see Richmond more critically. It is repeatedly stated (4.2.40, 5.3.318, 5.3.325, etc.) that he was exiled in France (even after the end of the Hundred Years War this makes him somewhat suspicious), the inexperience and lack of military training of this 'milksoop' (Richard's term) is insisted on:

RICHARD What said Northumberland as touching Richmond?  
 RATCLIFFE That he was never trained up in arms.  
 (5.3.272-273)

[...]

RICHARD And who doth lead them but a paltry fellow,  
 Long kept in Bretagne at our brother's cost?  
 A milksoop!  
 (5.3.324-326)

These denunciations may be contested as being uttered by Richard's faction in order to reassure and incite their soldiers against Richmond. Uncontestable, however, is Richard's exclamation in the midst of the battle: 'I think there be six Richmonds in the field:/Five have I slain today instead of him.' (5.4.11-12)

This does not mean (as F.M. Nugent<sup>84</sup> claims), that '[c]razed by the desire to kill Richmond, he declares he has already killed five men, mistaking each for Richmond.' On the contrary, it is a direct reference to a common stratagem<sup>85</sup> in battle, to disguise several other men to look just like the king (or whoever else the military leader may be) in order to protect him. This stratagem, however, is commonly associated with sly or cowardly leaders. Hammond<sup>86</sup> rather cautiously writes that 'this stratagem hardly seems appropriate in the heroic Richmond.'

<sup>83</sup> Prior, p. 45.

<sup>84</sup> Nugent, p. 66.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. for example *Henry IV, Part I*, V, iii.

<sup>86</sup> Hammond, p. 329n.

Rather, this very stratagem makes him an unheroic Richmond, contrasted against Richard, whose acts in this battle are described by Catesby:

The King enacts more wonders than a man,  
 Daring an opposite to any danger.  
 His horse is slain, and all on foot he fights,  
 Seeking for Richmond in the throat of death.  
 (5.4.2-5)

He is by no means 'broken in mind and body, with only a wisp of his indomitable will forcing him on, [...] a pathetic figure'.<sup>87</sup> Richard dies a hero; as Clemen<sup>88</sup> rightly points out, referring us to the later parallel in *Macbeth*.

Let us finally look at Richmond's coronation in the field:

STANLEY Courageous Richmond, well hast thou acquit thee!  
 [*Presenting the crown*]  
 Lo, here, this long-usurped royalty  
 From the dead temples of this bloody wretch  
 Have I pluck'd off to grace thy brows withal.  
 Wear it, enjoy it, and make much of it.

RICHMOND Great God of Heaven, say Amen to all!  
 But tell me, is young George Stanley living?  
 (5.5.3-9)

This is a rather odd blend of heroic language and casual catch-phrases, the overall effect being bathetic, which makes it difficult to take this seriously.

It is interesting to note that by striking verbal correspondences Richmond steps into Margaret's role: Margaret refers to Richard as 'A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death:/That *dog*, that had his teeth before his eyes,/To worry lambs, and lap their gentle blood.' (4.4.48-50, my italics). She *prays* 'That I may live and say "*The dog is dead*."' (4.4.78, my italics). Richmond, just before his coronation, also appeals to God: 'God, and your arms, be prais'd, victorious friends:/The day is ours; *the bloody dog is dead*' (5.5.1-2, my italics).

The correspondence (which occurs in all Quartos and the Folio) can hardly be overlooked; Margaret's exclamation is not likely to have been forgotten; Richmond's verbally 'taking over' Margaret's role and employing her hateful phraseology throws an interesting light on the 'Christian saviour'.

<sup>87</sup> Nugent, p. 67.

<sup>88</sup> Clemen, p. 321.



Finally, Richmond (in l. 30) refers to himself as the 'true succeder' of the House of Lancaster, which claim is a plain lie. The House of Lancaster had virtually ceased to exist, the last true heir having been Edward, Prince of Wales.

These remarks should be sufficient to cast doubt on the interpretation of Shakespeare unequivocally expressing a 'Tudor myth'. I am not saying that the play constitutes a complete rejection of the 'Tudor myth' or that the reading outlined above is the only possible one. Shakespeare is brilliantly ambiguous in that he allows us to see a convenient and reassuring end with the usurper rightfully disposed of, and the glorious saviour of a 'time out of joint' as the new king, (this may casually be called a 'lullaby', in the terminology of Greek drama a *satyr*-play, sending us home 'with peace of mind, all passion spent', without taking away anything of the meaning of the preceding 'tragedy'), but he also affords a devastatingly pessimistic view of history where the only intelligent, versatile, charismatic - even admirable figure is the cruel tyrant Richard.

As we have seen, Shakespeare's account of the life and times of Richard III does not so much differ from More's in the portrayal of Richard himself or in his view of Richmond. It differs, however, in the depiction of the general state of the country, which in Shakespeare's play suffers from all-pervading corruption. In accordance with his didactic purpose, More is careful to show the realm in prosperous estate under Edward IV. He contrasts Richard against a virtuous predecessor and opponents of moral integrity. In order to *maintain* this impression, he avoids mentioning Richmond/Henry VII as his successor. Shakespeare, not 'burdened' with ideological considerations, freely avails himself of the opportunities afforded by the historical ambiguity. He dramatises a vacuum of moral authority. In this context, the character of Richard undergoes a transformation into something rich and strange, entirely different from the simple, unequivocal renderings in all the preceding works.

## ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, VIRGIL, SPENSER AND 'JAMES THE GREAT, CAESAR AUGUSTUS'<sup>1</sup>

F.H.Mares

There are many interesting cross-references between *Antony and Cleopatra* and the *Aeneid*. The poem was much admired in Shakespeare's day, and 'every schoolboy' would have known some of it. English translations were available. Octavius Caesar Augustus is the hero as well as the patron of Virgil's poem, though he is not Shakespeare's hero.<sup>2</sup> It is towards Augustus and the grandeur of the Roman imperium that destiny tends. That future glory justifies the labours and trials of Aeneas. This is made explicit in Book Six, in which Aeneas visits the underworld, where he meets his father, Anchises, and is allowed a vision of what is to come. This culminates in the reign of Augustus, who will extend Rome's dominions to the ends of the earth.

Hunc geminas nunc flecte acies, hanc aspice gentem  
Romanosque tuos. Hic Caesar et omnis Iuli  
progenies magnum caeli ventura sub axem.  
Hic vir, hic est, tibi quem promitti saepius audis,  
Augusti Caesar, divi genus. [...]  
Huius in adventum iam nunc et Caspia regna  
responsis horrent divum et Maoetia tellus,  
et septemgemi turbant trepida ostia Nili.

[Now turn the sharp glance of your paired eyes this way, look at this tribe, the Romans of your own family. Here is Caesar and all the descendants of Iulus destined to come to the great wheel of heaven.<sup>3</sup> Here is the man, here he is, whom you have so often heard promised, Augustus Caesar, the son of the god. [...]] Now already, the

<sup>1</sup> This paper was a contribution to the Seminar 'Intertextuality' at the Twenty-seventh International Shakespeare Conference, Stratford-upon-Avon, August 18-25, 1996. The Seminar was expertly chaired by Robert Miola (who knows far more about Shakespeare and Latin literature than I do) and has benefited from discussion there.

<sup>2</sup> A recent study has suggested that the *Aeneid* itself is an ironical work that undermines the epic myth which it presents. A review of this work suggested that irony is usually in the eye of the beholder.

<sup>3</sup> Iulus, aka Ascanius, was the son of Aeneas by his Trojan wife Creusa, and the supposed ancestor of the 'Julian clan' to which both Julius Caesar and Octavius belonged. Romulus became a star and a god after his death; Julius Caesar was deified, as was Augustus -- and later emperors.