

Directing *Richard III*

A plot in two dimensions

Richard III tells the tale of the rise and fall of an ambitious soldier and statesman, struggling for power and survival in fragmented and dangerous times. Through a dense and powerfully pitched dramatic structure, Shakespeare depicts the Machiavellian machinations that Richard exercises in his drive for power over a dissolute state. During his quest for power, Richard owns the stage, conquering all with his scheming quick wit. His desire for power is arbitrary, however – once he has achieved it, he starts looking about for other objectives instead of relaxing in his achievements, and as he cannot find them, his world and his self begins to unravel.

The play traces both a simple rise-and-fall pattern and a much more involved and involving series of episodes, as each scene presents its own variable moment of drama; Richard's appeal plays itself out scene by scene; his downfall comes out in the aggregate.

A fascinating villain

Richard defies us, because we are bound by conscience to loathe him yet cannot resist his panache. His monstrous acts are carried off with a style and a humour which is fundamentally appealing – his moral irresponsibility tempts us in spite of his dangerous nature and repulsive actions. He can “undertake the death of all the world”, as he says, and we don't mind because he seems so casual about it.

Yet even as we are being run away with, Shakespeare reels the character in. Richard's sensational achievements have no objective, no rationale, except to prove to us and himself how good he is at bending other people to his will and making them believe that they are enacting their own. Forced to operate his puppet-master's games in a real world, he eventually succumbs to it, and his actions get uglier, his own appeal more stunted, as he becomes increasingly and inevitably mired in the consequences of his own actions.

Two sides of the coin

Whilst in Shakespeare one might find other hypocrites, there is none quite like Richard. One finds the same duality of self-representation in Iago, for instance, but for him it is not constant. Richard is a true puppeteer : he knows what he has to do, he tells the audience what he is going to do, and he does it. By his own admission, his words and postures go quite against his thoughts and actions : ‘And seem a saint when most I play the devil’. In dramatic terms, this double discourse, addressed to two different parties that cannot communicate — audience and characters — cannot but emphasize Richard's capacity for flipping at leisure between one persona and another.

Building a stage for destruction

Richard stands outside and above the other protagonists of his play. I say his play, because whilst the protagonists are limited in their actions and delineated by the roles assigned to them in the turbulent political scene of the time, Richard works his way into a position where he is dictating their fates. Thus Richard is the director and the puppeteer, as well as author and actor of his own drama. This vision of the character is vital to my definition of his relationships with the audience and the other protagonists.

I say that Richard stands above the latter because whilst they are portrayed as people, free agents in their own right, they ultimately appear to the audience as Richard's marionettes. Their tragic destinies are actually perverse, artificial destinies, appointed by a self-willed hunchbacked god-figure. They are confined by their relationship to Richard, their state is never stable, they move from life to death, friendship to hatred, according to his whim. Because Richard exploits everyone around him, once he has killed or been abandoned by all his allies he is left in a void with no one to defend him. Forced into this situation, he is forced to turn to himself entirely, and he finds that he cannot bear to examine himself – left alone, Richard turns *on* himself.

Gérald Garutti

Synopsis

After years of civil unrest between the royal houses of York and Lancaster, Edward IV is undisputed king. However, his brother Richard Duke of Gloucester plots to seize the throne for himself, removing anybody in his path. He starts by having their other brother the Duke of Clarence arrested for treason and placed in the Tower of London.

Richard also decides he needs a wife and sets out to woo her the widow of Henry VI's heir, Lady Anne, whose husband and father-in-law he has murdered. Though she has every reason to hate him, Anne soon capitulates.

All is not placid in the English court, however. Edward has married beneath him, and his wife Elizabeth has brought with her a troupe of relatives who now occupy positions of great power, and who are widely loathed by the established nobility and the King's own family. Into a confrontation between these factions walks the old Queen, Margaret, the widow of Henry VI, cursing everyone in sight and wishing terrible misfortunes on them to match the wrongs done to her, Richard being singled out for the worst of these.

In the meantime, Richard expedites Edward's orders for the death of Clarence, which is duly undertaken by two murderers.

King Edward, who is sick, tries to force his Queen's family to become friends with his noblemen. Richard enters the room and immediately destroys this tranquil scene by telling them that Clarence is dead. On hearing of his death, Edward IV is taken even more ill and dies, leaving his son Prince Edward to inherit the throne.

In his new role as Lord Protector, Richard travels to where Prince Edward is staying, and helps the boy come back to London. He has Edward's heirs confined in the tower, supposedly for safe-keeping and to await the coronation. He also calls for two councils, one of which is public and meant to put Edward on the throne, and one of which is private and meant to put Richard on the throne. Edward IV's widow, Elizabeth, mistrusts Richard and is proved right when he has her brothers, Rivers and Grey, arrested and executed.

The Duke of Buckingham becomes Richard's chief advisor and together they plot Richard's accession to the throne. Richard quickly puts Lord Hastings to death, because this Lord Chamberlain was unwilling to support Richard's attempt to seize the crown of England. With Buckingham helping him, Richard then orchestrates a neat scene in which he argues that Prince Edward is not in fact the legitimate heir. That would make Richard the next in line to the throne. The Lord Mayor of London agrees to this, and urges Richard to accept his duty. Richard feigns his reluctance and accepts

King Richard III moves quickly to destroy anyone he suspects as being dangerous. His first act is to hire a murderer and kill the two children, Prince Edward and his brother York. Though he had promised Buckingham an earldom for his help, he refuses to grant it when Buckingham refuses to kill the princes held in the Tower. A new killer, Tyrrel, is hired for this job, while Richard attempts to marry the daughter of Queen Elizabeth and of Edward IV to prevent his enemy Richmond doing so and thereby strengthening his claim to the throne.

Fearing for his safety, Buckingham flees to join the last Lancastrian heir Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, who is leading an army from France against Richard. Richard manages to capture Buckingham, and executes him for treason. Meanwhile, many of the remaining lieutenants defect to Richmond, who then sails from Brittany towards England with an army. The two armies encamp at Bosworth Field. The night before the battle, the ghosts of his victims torment Richard in his dreams. The next day Richard is killed in battle and Richmond claims the crown as Henry VII. He announces he will marry Elizabeth of York and finally unite the two warring factions.

A history play true to history?

The facts

Richard Plantagenet was born at Fotheringhay on 2nd October 1452, the youngest son of the Duke of York. He was raised in the household of the Earl of Warwick with his brother George, Duke of Clarence, and Warwick's two daughters, Anne & Isobel, whom Richard and George later married. Unlike his brother George, Richard remained loyal to his brother Edward IV throughout his reign.

From 1471 Richard spent eleven years as Edward's lieutenant in the north, where he gained popularity and a reputation for fair dealing, basing himself at Middleham in North Yorkshire.

After the premature death of Edward IV on 9 April 1483, Richard ruled England for two years, initially as Lord Protector and soon as king in his own right, after Edward's sons were declared bastards. Richard was crowned king on 6 July 1483. He died just over two years later on 22 August 1485 at Bosworth Field.

The dark legend

At the time Shakespeare was writing, there was little difference between history and story and the two terms were interchangeable. Shakespeare's history telescopes, changes and merges the chronology of events in his play, as well as misplacing and resurrecting characters and misinterpreting causes and motives.

Over the years, Richard III has been seen as the consummate expression of what EMW Tillyard called the Tudor myth bolstering the Tudor dynasty, justifying their claims to royalty and traducing the regime which came before. Shakespeare took his information and his views from a range of writers including Polydore Vergil, Thomas More, Ralph Holinshed and Edmund Hall who had between them and 'successively from age to age' created the image of Richard III that we have in Shakespeare's play: what Paul Murray Kendall calls, the 'monster of dissimulation whose raven wings shadow all the world'. Thomas More, upon whose History of King Richard III subsequent writers based their versions, lived in the household of John Morton. Morton, the Bishop of Ely in Shakespeare's play, was one of Buckingham's co-conspirators and later joined Henry Tudor against Richard III.

Henry VII began his defamation of Richard III as soon as the battle at Bosworth Field (22 August) was over by dating his reign from the day before (21 August) and therefore branding all Richard's nobles as traitors. In that way, he attainted Richard's supporters and was able to confiscate their lands with impunity, thereby augmenting his treasury, asserting his right to rule and assuring little if any objection to his supercession. Just as importantly, he also repealed Titulus Regius, the parliamentary petition to Richard laying out his right to the throne, and demanded the destruction unread of all copies.

Unfortunately for Richard, history is always written by the winners.

The bloodiest murder?

When history denounces Richard, focus tends to be on the fate of his two nephews, Edward V and Richard of York. However, Richard's downfall was probably due just as much to his unfortunate habit of leniency towards his proven and suspected enemies. In a ruthless and bloody age, the archetypal tyrant may in fact have been too soft on crime.

Richard's nephews were last seen in public in October 1483 and rumour swiftly began to blame him for their disappearance, helped by foreign commentators such as Dominic Mancini and Henry Tudor's own advance spin-doctors. There is no safe and certain answer to the question of their ultimate fate and numerous theories have been proposed over the years, none of which is conclusive. In Richard's defence, their deaths were of no political use to him unless their death was proved and accepted as fact beyond a shadow of a doubt, thereby removing any hope of rebellion in their name.

A rehabilitation?

Just as there has been no shortage of detractors for Richard III, there are also many defenders: from George Buck in 1646 via Horace Walpole in 1768, and through to the 20th century novels of Josephine Tey and Sharon Penman to name but a few. This revisionist view of Richard even has a society dedicated to 'promote, in every possible way, research into the life and times of Richard III'. When Henry VII began his campaign to rubbish the reputation of his predecessor, little did he realise that it would be Richard and not Henry that would continue to fascinate hundreds of years later.

We will probably never know for certain the truth about Richard's character, the intimate politics of his reign or the ultimate fate of his nephews, but it is safe to say that he was neither as black as More, Shakespeare et al painted him, nor as white as the revisionist crusaders would have us believe.

Cast and Crew

Richard III

by William Shakespeare

directed by Gerald Garutti

Cast (in order of appearance)

Sam Kitchener	Richard, Duke of Gloucester, afterwards King Richard III
Arthur House	George, Duke of Clarence, his brother / King Edward IV
Henry, Earl of Richmond,	afterwards King Henry VII
Mayor of London/Archbishop of Canterbury	
Seb Robins	Brakenbury, Lieutenant of the Tower/ Lord Rivers / Ratcliff
Jonny Pearson	Hastings/ First Murderer/ Tyrrel / Brandon
Nina Bowden	Lady Anne /Edward, Prince of Wales
Abi Sharma	Queen Elizabeth, wife to King Edward / Duke of York
Ben Hadley	Stanley / Grey
George Igler	Duke of Buckingham
Noah Moxham	Dorset / Messenger
Oli Robinson	Catesby / Second Murderer
Laura Ashe	Queen Margaret, wife to the dead King Henry VI
Alice Harper	Duchess of York, mother to Richard, Edward and Clarence
Messenger	Mistress Shore /

Crew

Assistant Director	Noah Moxham
Set Designer	Sabin Anca
Lighting Designer	Tom White
Costumes Designer	Manon Awst-Williams
Sound Designer	Andrew Thomas
Technical Director	Pete Davies
Choreographer	Denise Van-der-Kamp