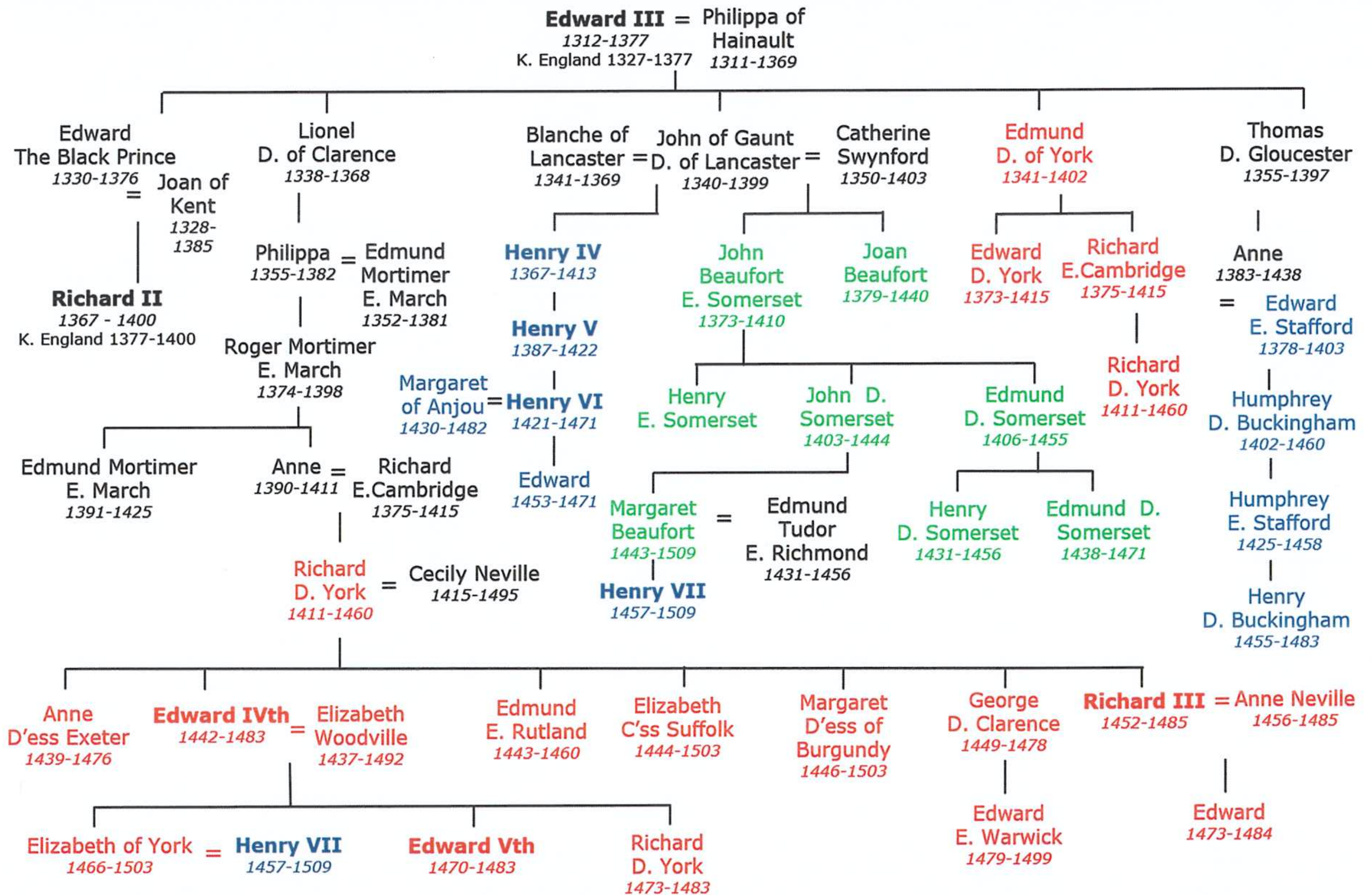
The History of England Podcast Family Trees

The Wars of the Roses: Descendants of Edward III *(simplified)*



seems happily settled: "For here I hope begins our lasting joy" (5.7.46). Yet at the close of Shakespeare's Wars of the Roses trilogy, the audience knows that the joy will be anything but lasting. Edward largely owed his party's victory and, hence, his kingship to his stalwart brothers, George, Duke of Clarence, and Richard, Duke of Gloucester. George, to be sure, wavered at one point in the civil war, siding briefly with the Lancastrians, but he came back to fight for the Yorkist cause. Richard never wavered, and it was he who murdered Henry VI. But with the king bleeding to death at his feet, Richard had quietly made it clear that his only allegiance was to himself. "I have no brother," he declared. "I am myself alone" (5.6.80–83). A new tyrant is waiting in the wings.

"TYRANT: SHAKESPEARE ON Politics"
Stephen Greenblatt
(2018)

RICHARD III

Four

A MATTER OF CHARACTER

SHAKESPEARE'S *RICHARD III* brilliantly develops the personality features of the aspiring tyrant already sketched in the *Henry VI* trilogy: the limitless self-regard, the lawbreaking, the pleasure in inflicting pain, the compulsive desire to dominate. He is pathologically narcissistic and supremely arrogant. He has a grotesque sense of entitlement, never doubting that he can do whatever he chooses. He loves to bark orders and to watch underlings scurry to carry them out. He expects absolute loyalty, but he is incapable of gratitude. The feelings of others mean nothing to him. He has no natural grace, no sense of shared humanity, no decency.

He is not merely indifferent to the law; he hates it and takes pleasure in breaking it. He hates it because it gets in his way and because it stands for a notion of the public good that he holds in contempt. He divides the world into winners

and losers. The winners arouse his regard insofar as he can use them for his own ends; the losers arouse only his scorn. The public good is something only losers like to talk about. What he likes to talk about is winning.

He has always had wealth; he was born into it and makes ample use of it. But though he enjoys having what money can get him, it is not what most excites him. What excites him is the joy of domination. He is a bully. Easily enraged, he strikes out at anyone who stands in his way. He enjoys seeing others cringe, tremble, or wince with pain. He is gifted at detecting weakness and deft at mockery and insult. These skills attract followers who are drawn to the same cruel delight, even if they cannot have it to his unmatched degree. Though they know that he is dangerous, the followers help him advance to his goal, which is the possession of supreme power.

His possession of power includes the domination of women, but he despises them far more than desires them. Sexual conquest excites him, but only for the endlessly reiterated proof that he can have anything he likes. He knows that those he grabs hate him. For that matter, once he has succeeded in seizing the control that so attracts him, in politics as in sex, he knows that virtually everyone hates him. At first that knowledge energizes him, making him feverishly alert to rivals and conspiracies. But it soon begins to eat away at him and exhaust him.

Sooner or later, he is brought down. He dies unloved and unlamented. He leaves behind only wreckage. It would have been better had Richard III never been born.

SHAKESPEARE BASED HIS portrait of Richard on a highly tendentious, partisan account written by Thomas More and reiterated by the Tudor chroniclers. But where, the playwright wondered, did his psychopathology come from? How was it formed? The tyrant, as Shakespeare conceived him, was inwardly tormented by a sense of his own ugliness, the consequence of a misshapen body that from the moment he was born made people recoil in disgust or horror. "The midwife wondered, and the women cried/'O Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!" (*3 Henry VI* 5.6.74–75). "And so I was," he reflects, "which plainly signified/That I should snarl and bite and play the dog."

Richard's neonatal teeth are a symbolically charged feature that he has incorporated into his account of himself and that has evidently been elaborated by others. "They say my uncle grew so fast," his little nephew York prattles, "That he could gnaw a crust at two hours old" (*Richard III* 2.4.27–28). "Who told thee so?" asks his grandmother, the Duchess of York, who is Richard's mother. "His nurse," the boy replies, but the duchess contradicts him: "His nurse? Why she was dead ere thou wert born" (2.4.33). "If 'twere not she," he says, "I cannot tell who told me" (2.4.34). Richard's infancy has become the stuff of legend.

Richard mentions the reaction of the midwife and the attending women, but it is easy to surmise that the account of his ill-omened arrival derives principally from his mother. The Duchess of York has evidently regaled her son and every-

one else with stories of his difficult birth and the repellent signs on his body. Her recurrent theme is what she calls the "anguish, pain, and agony" (*Richard III* [Quarto] 4.4.156) she experienced in bringing him into the world, and that theme serves as a reproach leveled against him by those imprudent or desperate enough to speak their minds. "Thy mother felt more than a mother's pain," the unfortunate Henry VI reminds his captor Richard, "And yet brought forth less than a mother's hope—/To wit, an undigested and deformèd lump" (*3 Henry VI* 5.7.49–51). When the captive king goes on to bring up those teeth—"Teeth thou had in thy head when thou wast born/To signify thou cam'st to bite the world"—Richard has had enough. Shouting "I'll hear no more!" he stabs his royal prisoner to death (5.7.53–57).

As those around him come to perceive, something is seriously wrong with Richard's mind; even he acknowledges his inner turmoil, if only to himself. To account for his moral and psychological deformity, his contemporaries point to his physical deformity: the twisted spine they call a hunchback (and we would diagnose as severe kyphosis). For them, it is as if the universe marked him outwardly to signify his inner condition. And Richard concurs: "Then, since the heavens have shaped my body so," he says, "Let hell make crooked my mind to answer it" (5.6.78–79). Feeling in himself none of the ordinary human emotions—I have, he says, "neither pity, love, nor fear" (5.6.68)—he actively wills his mind to match the stigmatized crookedness of his body.

Shakespeare does not repudiate his culture's belief that

bodily deformity signified moral deformity; he allows his audience to credit the notion that a higher power, whether nature or God, has provided a visible sign of the villain's wickedness. Richard's physical deformity is a kind of preternatural portent or emblem of his viciousness. But, against the dominant current of his culture, Shakespeare insists that the inverse is also true: Richard's deformity—or, rather, his society's reaction to his deformity—is the root condition of his psychopathology. There is nothing automatic in this conditioning; certainly, no suggestion that all people with twisted spines become cunning murderers. Shakespeare does, however, suggest that a child unloved by his mother, ridiculed by his peers, and forced to regard himself as a monster will develop certain compensatory psychological strategies, some of them both destructive and self-destructive.

Richard observes his brother Edward wooing an attractive woman. It is evidently something he has watched before—his brother is a notorious ladies' man—and it arouses bitter reflections. "Love forswore me in my mother's womb," he broods, and to make sure that this abandonment would be permanent, the goddess connived with Nature

> To shrink mine arm up like a withered shrub,
> To make an envious mountain on my back,
> Where sits deformity to mock my body;
> To shape my legs of an unequal size,
> To disproportion me in every part.
> (*3 Henry VI* 3.2.153–60)

It would be grotesque for him, he thinks, to imagine that he could have any erotic success; no one could ever love that body of his. Whatever pleasure he could seize from life thus could not possibly come from making his "heaven in a lady's lap" (3.2.148). But there is a way he can compensate for the painful loss: he can devote himself to bullying those who possess the natural endowments he lacks.

The youngest son of the Duke of York and the brother to the reigning king, Edward IV, Richard is near the top of the social hierarchy. He knows that people make cruel jokes about him when he is not in earshot, calling him the "toad" and the "boar," but he knows, too, that his high birth confers upon him almost limitless authority over those beneath him. To this authority he conjoins arrogance, a penchant for violence, and a sense of aristocratic impunity. When he gives an order, he expects it to be instantly obeyed. Encountering the procession bearing the hearse of the king he has killed, Richard peremptorily commands the gentlemen bearers and their armed attendants to stop and set it down. When they at first refuse, he showers insults upon them—"villains," "unmannered dog," "beggar"—and threatens to kill them (*Richard III* 1.2.36–42). Such is the force of his social position and the confidence with which he wields it that they tremble before him and obey.

Dominating others serves to shore up lonely Richard's damaged self-image, to ward off the pain of rejection, to keep him upright. It is for him as if his body were constantly mocking itself, as well as being mocked by others. Physically unbalanced, his body, he says, is "like to a chaos" (*3 Henry VI*

3.2.161). Exercising power, particularly the kind of power that throws people off balance, reduces his own sense of chaotic disproportionateness, or so at least he hopes. It is not simply a matter of commanding people to do what he wants them to do, though that is agreeable; it is also peculiar pleasure of making them tremble or totter or fall.

As Shakespeare's play depicts him, Richard is chillingly clear about the links that bind together his physical deformity, his psychological disposition, and his overarching political goal:

> since this earth affords no joy to me
> But to command, to check, to o'erbear such
> As are of better person [i.e., appearance] than myself,
> I'll make my heaven to dream upon the crown.
> (3.2.165–68)

In his own nasty way, he is a man who has achieved an unusual clarity about himself. He knows what he feels, what he lacks, and what he needs to have (or at least longs to have) in order to experience joy. Absolute power—the power to command everyone—is the extreme form of this joy; indeed, nothing less than this taste of heaven will serve to satisfy him. He will, he declares, "account this world but hell/Until my misshaped trunk that bears this head/Be round impaled with a glorious crown" (3.2.169–71).

Richard is well aware that he is trafficking in mere wish-fulfillment fantasy. His brother King Edward has two small sons who are the lineal heirs to the throne; and should nei-

ther of them chance to survive, there is also his older brother George, Duke of Clarence. There is a vast gulf between Richard and the crown he craves. "Why, then," he says,

> I do but dream on sovereignty
> Like one that stands upon a promontory
> And spies a far-off shore where he would tread,
> Wishing his foot were equal with his eye,
> And chides the sea that sunders him from thence,
> Saying he'll lade it dry to have his way.
> (*3 Henry VI* 3.2.134–39)

There is something desperate and almost pathetic about this twisted man dreaming that he will one day have the power to push everyone around and, in doing so, compensate for his unloved, unbalanced body. He is, he ruefully acknowledges, like someone "lost in a thorny wood," tearing himself on the thorns and struggling in torment to find the open air.

In these circumstances, the principal weapon Richard has is the very absurdity of his ambition. No one in his right mind would suspect that he seriously aspires to the throne. And he is confident in his possession of one particular and, in his case, essential skill. He is a gifted deceiver. "Why, I can smile and murder whiles I smile," he says, congratulating himself,

> And cry "Content!" to that which grieves my heart,
> And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
> And frame my face to all occasions. (3.2.182–85)

He has the special histrionic gifts of a confidence man.

In the spectacular opening soliloquy of *Richard III*, Richard reminds the audience where the trilogy had left off: "Now is the winter of our discontent/Made glorious summer by this son of York" (*Richard III* 1.1.1–2). Shakespeare then reopened the window into his character. England is at last at peace, but there is no peace for the twisted Duke of Gloucester. Everyone else can turn to the pursuit of pleasure:

> 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;
> Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
> Have no delight to pass away the time. (1.1.14–25)

"Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time/Into this breathing world scarce half made up," Richard will not attempt to be a lover but will instead pursue power by any means necessary.

Shakespeare did not suggest that a compensatory model—power as a substitute for sexual pleasure—could fully explain the psychology of a tyrant. But he held on to the core convic-

tion that there is a significant relationship between the lust for tyrannical power and a thwarted or damaged psychosexual life. And he held on as well to the conviction that traumatic and lasting damage to a person's self-image could be traced back to early experiences—to an adolescent's fear that he is ugly, or to the cruel mockery of other children, or, even earlier in life, to the responses of nurses and midwives. Above all, he thought, irreparable harm could come from a mother's failure or inability to love her child. Richard's bitter anger at the goddess Love, who forswore him, and at nature, who shrank his arm like a withered shrub, is a thin screen for his rage against his mother.

Richard III is among the few plays in Shakespeare to depict a mother-child relationship. Far more often the plots focus upon children and their fathers—Egeus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Henry IV in the two plays that bear his name, Leonato in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Brabantio in *Othello*, both Lear and Gloucester in *King Lear*, Prospero in *The Tempest*, to name only a few—with scarcely so much as a memory trace of the women who brought those children into the world. The *Henry VI* trilogy manages to feature York's four sons—Edward, George, Rutland, and Richard—without bothering to introduce their mother. The plays' emphasis is not on the individual or the family but on the whole realm's slide into civil war. When, however, Shakespeare focused on the character of the tyrant himself—the inward bitterness, disorder, and violence that drive him forward, to the ruin of his country—then he needed

to explore something amiss in the relation between mother and child.

Richard's mother, the Duchess of York, makes it clear from her first appearance in *Richard III* that she regards her son as a monster. She has ample reason to do so. She does not know the details, but she suspects that Richard, and not her ailing elder son Edward, was behind the murder of their brother George. Richard has expressed great sympathy and love for his niece and nephew, George's orphaned children, but the duchess warns them—"shallow innocents," as she calls them—not to believe a word he says. "Think you my uncle did dissemble, grandam?" asks one of the children. "Ay, boy," she curtly replies. She expresses some combination of two contradictory sentiments, disgrace and disavowal. "He is my son, ay, and therein my shame," she acknowledges, and then immediately abjures any responsibility: "Yet from my dugs he drew not this deceit" (*Richard III* 2.2.18, 29–30). When the word is brought that Edward has died, leaving Richard as the sole survivor of her four sons, the duchess's feeling of disgrace is only intensified. "I for comfort have but one false glass [i.e. mirror]," she says with bitterness, "That grieves me when I see my shame in him" (2.2.53–54).

Richard arrives and puts on a show of filial piety, kneeling down for his mother's blessing. She complies stiffly, but it is clear that she is sickened by what she has brought into the world. Later in the play, she urges the other women whose lives her child has blighted—old Margaret, the widow of

Henry VI; Elizabeth, the widow of Edward; and Richard's miserably unhappy wife, Anne—to give vent to their grief and anger. "In the breath of bitter words," she tells them, "let's smother/My damnèd son" (4.4.133–34). When he appears before them, she first thinks to call him the word that encapsulates the revulsion his appearance has always aroused: "Thou toad, thou toad." If she had only strangled him in her womb, she tells him, she could have prevented all of the misery he has brought to the world and into her life:

> Thou cam'st on earth to make the earth my hell.
> A grievous burden was thy birth to me;
> Tetchy and wayward was thy infancy;
> Thy school days frightful, desperate, wild, and furious;
> Thy prime of manhood daring, bold, and venturous;
> Thy age confirmed proud, subtle, sly, and bloody.
> (4.4.167–72)

Declaring that she will never speak to him again, she finishes by cursing him and praying for his death: "Bloody thou art; bloody will be thy end."

The mother's shame and loathing are not merely a consequence of her son's wicked deeds; they reach all the way to the beginning, to her first glimpse of her newborn and to his tetchy and wayward infancy. Toward Edward and toward George she expresses maternal tenderness and solicitude; toward deformed Richard, she has always felt only disgust and aversion.

Richard's response, not surprisingly, is to order the sounding of trumpets and drums in order to drown out her curses. But the play manages to imply that his mother's rejection has reached him and implanted in him something more than impatience and rage. It implies, as well, that in response to this rejection, he has somehow developed lifelong strategies to make himself heard, attended to, and taken in. One of Richard's uncanny skills—and, in Shakespeare's view, one of the tyrant's most characteristic qualities—is the ability to force his way into the minds of those around him, whether they wish him there or not. It is as if, in compensation for the pain he has suffered, he has found a way to be present—by force or fraud, violence or insinuation—everywhere and in everyone. No one can keep him out.

"SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLISH KINGS" Peter Saccio (1977)

The official account of the restored Yorkist government later announced that Henry had received the news of Tewkesbury "with such hatred, anger, and indignation, that of pure displeasure and melancholy he died." It is difficult to imagine anyone believing this disingenuous tale. Modern examination of Henry's remains has suggested that he died of a fractured skull. The Tudors, including Shakespeare, held that Richard of Gloucester personally despatched Henry on his own initiative, but this is quite unlikely. The death of the last Lancastrian king must have been ordered by Edward IV, possibly with the advice of his council. Richard, as constable of England, would probably have been charged with seeing that the decision was carried out.

The events between the duke of York's death at Wakefield in December 1460 and Henry VI's death after Tewkesbury in May 1471 provide the material for the last four acts of *3 Henry VI*. Although they are condensed in Shakespeare's usual way, so that the pace of the play is extraordinarily vigorous, Shakespeare manages to preserve a large amount of detail. In these four acts the playwright elides and omits less historical fact than he does elsewhere in the trilogy on Henry VI. Of course, certain episodes are subordinated for the sake of dramatic focus. In Act II, which presents Edward IV's rise to power after his father's death, the battle of Mortimer's Cross is omitted save for the three suns, and the second battle of St. Albans is reduced to a report of offstage events. Thus full emphasis can fall upon the decisive battle of Towton, which receives elaborate treatment. In Act III, the gradual estrangement between Warwick and Edward is simplified by the omission of much international diplomacy. Edward's surprising marriage to Elizabeth Woodville becomes the single cause of Warwick's alienation and his subsequent alliance with Margaret and Louis XI. Here the events of 1464 (the marriage, the consequent collapse of negotiations for the hand of Bona of Savoy) are telescoped with the events of 1470 (Louis's reconciliation of

Margaret with Warwick, their plan to restore Lancaster in England) to form a single scene in which Bona, Margaret, Prince Edward, Oxford, and Warwick all appear at the court of King Louis. Acts IV and V dramatize the many reversals of fortune between 1469 (Clarence's desertion, Warwick's brief capture of Edward) and 1471 (the return of Edward, the confrontation at Coventry, the battles of Barnet and Tewkesbury, and the death of Henry) with remarkable comprehensiveness and very few changes. Some minor alterations keep the lesser characters in tidier order: Oxford, for example, is present at both Barnet and Tewkesbury instead of fleeing the kingdom after Barnet, and the third and fourth dukes of Somerset become a single person.

Shakespeare's version of the 1460s is also true to a large-scale element of the struggle between the houses of Lancaster and York. As was noted at the beginning of this chapter, Shakespeare focuses throughout the Henry VI trilogy upon the personal ambitions of individuals. This focus drew him into what is now perceived as historical falsehood in the earlier scenes of the trilogy. The duke of York was not pressing for the crown as early as 1450, although Shakespeare represents him as doing so. But by the 1460s, the civil struggle had become much more a matter of naked personal ambition. Warwick's astonishing change of sides in 1469–1470 was provoked by mere disgruntlement with Edward's behavior. Warwick had lost power, and he turned to Lancaster simply as a way to recoup. Although his propaganda condemned Edward's government for the same kind of misrule that the Yorkists had complained of under Henry VI's regime, Edward had in fact exerted himself to strengthen the monarchy and pacify the local feuds that had vexed the 1440s and 1450s. He did not fully succeed in restoring the prestige of the crown and the peace of the kingdom until after Tewkesbury, but he had made a considerable start in the first decade of his reign. Warwick's revolt did not arise from any significant concern for the

method of government, the state of the realm, or the constitutional legitimacy of the ruling house. In other words, by 1470 the Wars of the Roses involved no principles concerning the proper nature or use of power. Men fought simply to determine which individuals should wield power. Thus by the middle of *3 Henry VI,* Shakespeare's view of history as governed by the passions and power-lusts of influential persons has coincided with our present understanding of events.

But Shakespeare goes further. He entertains (with perhaps some qualifications) a notion no modern historian would espouse, the notion that the passions of individuals mesh into a large-scale, divinely guided pattern. His Yorkists and Lancastrians are locked in a chain of appropriate disasters: revenge follows murder, punishment follows crime to the entire extermination of the Plantagenets and their noble supporters. Working out of Hall and Holinshed, he unhistorically molds events so that the balancing design of a savage justice emerges. In particular, he elaborates and emphasizes certain characters and episodes to create the appearance of a doomed heritage for the Plantagenets, a well-merited curse upon the royal house that works with a relentlessness suggesting the second law of thermodynamics.

The chief character so developed is Richard of Gloucester. He is made the final and most awful embodiment of Plantagenet savagery, who will eventually usurp the throne after Edward IV's death. Consideration of the character of Richard III must wait until the next chapter, but it must be pointed out here that his role in *3 Henry VI* is almost entirely unhistorical. Following the Tudor conjecture that Richard cherished ambitions for the throne from his earliest days, Shakespeare gives him several brilliant soliloquies expressing his yearning for absolute power and his hatred for all his relatives. He goes beyond the Tudor historians by introducing him as a major figure far before his time. Thus throughout the middle and late scenes of *3 Henry VI,* the omi-

nous figure of the future Richard III looms over hopes for peace and prepares for the final play of the Yorkist tetralogy, the play that bears his own name. In sober fact, Richard was too young to participate in most of the events of *3 Henry VI.* His part in history began in 1469, when, at the age of seventeen, he supported his brother Edward against Warwick. The first battle he fought in was Barnet. Whatever his actions may have been after Edward's death thirteen years later, he displayed unfailing and energetic loyalty to his brother during the latter's lifetime.

The chief episodes that Shakespeare elaborates to suggest a doomed heritage concern the murder of children. In Act I of *3 Henry VI,* York's son Rutland is slaughtered at Wakefield by the butcher Clifford. In Act V, Henry VI's son Prince Edward is even more savagely cut down after the battle of Tewkesbury by the three York brothers, Edward IV, Clarence, and Richard of Gloucester. Again following the Tudor chronicles, Shakespeare makes much of the blood-lust of the killers and the pathos of the slain. In fact, Edward of Lancaster was not wantonly murdered after capture: he was killed (by whom no one knows) in the battle itself. Rutland also died in battle. Both were men in their late teens at the time, adult soldiers by medieval standards. Prince Edward was indeed only a year younger than Richard of Gloucester. But the child-murders given the playwright by his sources were far too good a symbol of the internecine strife of late Plantagenet England for Shakespeare to ignore. The killing of a child, the ultimate act of tyranny in a Christian society that well knew the story of Herod and the Innocents, marks out the appalling savagery of Clifford and Margaret. It then recurs to mark the sons of York as avengers who will sink as low as their enemies.

Finally, one suggestion implicitly made by the whole of *2 and 3 Henry VI* must be countered. It would appear from the plays that between 1445 and 1471 England experienced continuous

turbulence on a national scale, that the whole country suffered from unceasing uproar, punctuated by episodes of hideous atrocity, while the nobles sought to control or seize the crown. It is not so. "The lack of politic rule and governance" under Henry VI (the phrase is that of a fifteenth-century judge and political theorist) did allow riot, feud, and extortion to proceed, often unchecked by justice; and the escalation of private quarrels did of course lead to war and changes of dynasty; but Shakespeare's plays greatly exaggerate the turmoil. Risings of the commons were exceptional. Despite the occasional outrages and disorders, peasants mostly tilled their fields and merchants mostly tended to trade. The wars of the lords were confined to a skirmish in 1455 (first St. Albans), six battles in 1459–1461, and three (including the brief clash at Edgecote) in 1469–1471. In other words, very little time was spent in actual campaign. Only at Towton was there a really long casualty list. The marauding march of Margaret's northerners before the second battle of St. Albans provided the only episode of extensive sack. England did not suffer the devastation that had occurred in northern France during the Hundred Years War. During the Wars of the Roses, those who suffered most were the noble combatants themselves and their immediate retainers, a tiny group in comparison to the whole population. Villagers, of course, derive no benefit from having a battle take place in their fields, and the citizens of St. Albans must have been vexed to find themselves twice visited by grandees spoiling for a fight, but their sufferings bear no comparison to the horrors of civil war in more recent centuries. The Tudor vision of catastrophic convulsion in mid-fifteenth-century England was born largely of propaganda. Tudor Englishmen feared a repetition of the dynastic struggle, and the chronicles served as celebrations of the strength of Tudor rule and as warnings to any who might be discontented with the Tudor monarchs. Shakespeare converts that propaganda into eloquence, but no specialist in medieval English

history has yet identified "the father that hath killed his son."

Still and all, the eloquence is germane, regardless of Shakespeare's misinformation on the extent of the wars. Whether you are nine or nineteen, whether you have a handful of soldiers beside you or a host, to fight and die is still to fight and die.

throne during the re-adeption of Henry VI. Finally, he stirred up a small, ineffective rising in Cambridgeshire. The king's patience broke. Arresting Clarence, he introduced into parliament a bill of attainder of treason against him. Clarence was charged with perverting the king's justice, with trying to alienate the king's subjects, and with spreading rumors that the king was illegitimate. He was also charged with preserving a copy of an act of the re-adeption parliament, an act that declared Clarence himself heir to the crown should Henry VI and his son die without issue. (The last charge is dubious: there is no other evidence that such an act was passed. Clarence may have forged the thing in a wild dream of securing the throne, or Edward may have invented it to seal Clarence's fate.) Clarence had been many times forgiven. Now he was officially found "incorrigible." In February 1478 he was condemned. Ten days later he was privately executed in the Tower. Surprisingly enough, the story (used by Shakespeare) that he was drowned in malmsey may be true.*

The responsibility for Clarence's death has been debated. In Tudor times Richard was blamed. In Shakespeare, Richard contrives both the arrest and the execution in order to remove an obstacle in his path to the throne. This he certainly did not do. Contemporary reports suggest that he was grief-stricken at the whole affair. He held the Woodvilles responsible and thereafter came to court even less frequently than before. The Woodvilles *may* have encouraged the king in the deed. Any threat to the king threatened their power and position. They disliked Clarence anyway because of his participation in the re-adeption, during which several Woodvilles had died. Many did hold them guilty during the next few years. But the chief responsibility for Clarence's death must lie with Edward. He initiated proceedings. He took

* On the other hand, Professor Charles Wood informs me that, six years later, Richard III's only parliament passed "An Act for the Contents of a Butt of Malmsey." The statute does not mention royal dukes as a necessary ingredient of the wine.

the very unusual step of acting as Clarence's prosecutor in parliament—normally kings arranged for someone else to do this. It was his power that Clarence's schemes and follies threatened. The death of Clarence demonstrates Edward's authority in England and the length to which he would go to maintain that authority. He would have no subject opposed to him, not even his own brother. His own strength, the legality of the procedure, and Clarence's manifest guilt enabled him to escape the retribution that Richard II had suffered eighty years earlier for taking similar measures against a close royal relative.

2. *THE ACCESSION OF RICHARD III*

Edward IV died on 9 April 1483. Two days later his eldest son was proclaimed king. On 26 June, however, Richard of Gloucester was proclaimed in his stead, and on 6 July he and his wife were crowned King Richard III and Queen Anne at Westminster Abbey. The intervening three months were busy with plots and counterplots, not all of which can be clearly discerned now.

April saw a struggle for possession of the prince. Edward had made the obvious appointment of Richard as protector during the minority. Richard was, after all, the only surviving adult male in the house of York, a loyal, long-tested prop of the Yorkist throne, and the most powerful man in the realm. Edward had also, however, left the prince himself in the hands of Richard's enemies the Woodvilles. The struggle was the more acute because the persons concerned were geographically scattered. Richard was in the north. Buckingham was on his own estates at Brecon (Brecknock) in southern Wales. The twelve-year-old prince, together with his governor Rivers, was at Ludlow in the Welsh marches. The rest of the Woodvilles, the little duke of York, and Hastings were in London where the king died. (Shakespeare does not adhere to this geographical scattering. For dramatic conven-

ience, all his characters except the prince are in London.) Those in London, moreover, were deeply suspicious of one another. Despite Edward IV's deathbed attempt to reconcile them, the Woodvilles glowered at Hastings and his friends across the council table as they tried to make arrangements for the succession. Each party bid for the support of moderate members of the council: John Russell bishop of Lincoln, John Morton bishop of Ely, Thomas Lord Stanley.

The Woodvilles wanted no protectorate. They feared Richard and could only perpetuate their power through young Edward. They therefore sought to terminate the protectorate by crowning the prince as soon as possible. Gaining the support of the moderates, they scheduled a coronation for early May and directed Rivers to bring Edward to London posthaste. They also strengthened their military position. Dorset was made constable of the Tower; Sir Edward Woodville put to sea with a fleet. Apparently the royal treasure was split up among Dorset, Sir Edward, and the queen. In all this they governed in disregard of the protectorate and over the opposition of Hastings. The best Hastings could do was to persuade them to limit the prince's escort from Ludlow to 2000 men (the Woodvilles wanted Rivers to bring a large army) and to send frantic messages to Richard. It was only through Hastings that Richard learned of his brother's death and his own appointment as protector. No official message came to him from the pro-Woodville chancellor (Thomas Rotherham archbishop of York) or the Woodville-dominated council. Hastings urged Richard to come quickly to London, taking charge of the prince on the way.

Richard, having publicly sworn fealty to his nephew and written to reassure the queen, started south in late April with 300 Yorkshiremen. Simultaneously Buckingham, who had also been in touch with Richard, came from Wales with a small force. The two dukes met at Northampton on 29 April. By this time the Ludlow party had arrived at Stony Stratford, fourteen miles nearer

London, but Rivers rode back to Northampton to greet the dukes and spend the night there. Early the next morning he found himself under arrest. Richard and Buckingham rode hastily to Stony Stratford and offered homage to young Edward. They then disbanded the Ludlow escort and, to Edward's dismay, arrested Sir Thomas Vaughan (the prince's elderly chamberlain) and Richard Grey (the prince's half-brother, who had come out from London the day before). The dukes had neatly severed the prince from the Woodvilles. Accused of plotting to ambush Richard and of dark designs against the prince, Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey were sent as prisoners to Richard's castles in Yorkshire. When news of Richard's coup reached London the next day, the remaining Woodvilles were thrown into confusion. After several lords refused to grant her further military support, the queen, together with her daughters and little York, rushed into sanctuary at Westminster Abbey. Hastings, jubilant, ruled the city until Richard and the prince arrived on 4 May.

During the next month Richard solidified his position as protector. The council recognized his authority and issued writs in the name of Edward V for a parliament in late June. Archbishop Rotherham was replaced in the chancellorship by Bishop Russell. (When the queen fled into sanctuary, Rotherham may have given her the great seal of the realm, to which she had no right whatever. More, at any rate, reports such an incident, and Shakespeare uses it.) Grants of authority were bestowed upon Richard's supporters Buckingham and John Lord Howard. (The latter became duke of Norfolk at the end of June.) Most of Sir Edward Woodville's fleet was induced to return to London, although Sir Edward himself fled to Brittany with several ships. In only one significant action that we know of did the council overrule Richard: they refused to entertain treason charges against Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey on the grounds that, even if the three men had in fact planned any move against Richard at Northampton, Richard at that time held no office that would make an attack

upon him treasonable. No new date for the coronation was announced. Although Richard arranged for more oaths of loyalty to be sworn to Edward V, he seems to have planned an indefinite postponement of the coronation and a confirmation of his protectorate by parliament.

Except possibly for the attempt to condemn Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey, Richard's actions in May demonstrate no design on his part to seize the crown. The Woodvilles had attempted to exclude him altogether from power: he had responded with the coup at Northampton and Stony Stratford and then proceeded to shore up his authority. London and the prince were in his hands; he was reasonably popular with the citizens and backed by Buckingham and the council; parliament would meet to seal the status quo. The realm might go comfortably on, ruled by Richard until the prince came of age, by which time Richard might have weaned him away from the influence of his maternal relatives. His failure to crown Edward immediately is no reliable indication that he intended to depose him: the child Henry VI had been king in name for seven years before his council decided to crown him. Unfortunately for Richard, the queen remained hostile. Her refusal to emerge from sanctuary, and especially her refusal to allow little York to join his brother under Richard's care, constituted a loud statement of distrust in Richard and provided a focus for any discontent with his government.

According to the Tudor myth, Richard had long dreamed of the crown and, once Edward IV was dead, deviously and cannily plotted to obtain it. The actual events of April–May 1483 show a less masterful and far less wicked Richard. Thrust into an unexpected situation and openly antagonized by an upstart party he already had reason to distrust, he moved, sometimes skillfully as at Northampton, sometimes awkwardly as with the treason charge, to secure the authority his brother had bequeathed him and to neutralize the threat of Woodville rule. He may have been more the victim of events than their master. Sometime in June,

however, whether through ambition or through fear for his own safety, he decided that the protectorate was not enough.

Early in June the council scheduled Edward's coronation for the 22nd. Richard had evidently decided that only under such circumstances would the queen release her younger son. On 10 June, Richard despatched a letter to the city of York, telling his friends there that the Woodvilles were plotting the destruction of Buckingham and himself, and begging them to send troops. Since Richard could hardly have expected these troops to arrive until late in the month, he cannot have foreseen an immediate crisis. Perhaps he wanted them on hand when parliament met. Hastings, however, took fright, perhaps because of Richard's move to reinforce himself. He began to conspire with his former enemies the Woodvilles against his former ally Richard. His plot included the ex-chancellor Rotherham, Bishop Morton, and, oddly enough, Jane Shore. (After her king's death, Jane seems to have become Hastings's mistress or Dorset's, perhaps both. She may have been the go-between in the Hastings plot.) Richard, perhaps equally alarmed, struck hard. On 13 June he suddenly arrested Hastings's fellow conspirators and had Hastings himself executed without trial. On 16 June the queen, persuaded by the arguments of cardinal-archbishop Bourchier of Canterbury that little York should attend his brother's coronation, or perhaps more persuaded by the presence of soldiers around the abbey, at last surrendered York. In the next few days, Richard cancelled both the coronation and the parliament (far too late to prevent people from coming to London for these events) and issued death warrants for Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey. By 22 June he was openly preparing his own accession.

In More and Shakespeare, the order of two crucial events is reversed: the queen releases York before the death of Hastings. This sequence has the merit of making better sense of the queen's behavior: why, unless she was absolutely forced, would she have given York up if Richard had already started high-handedly kill-

ing people? Indeed, a historian has recently argued that the Shakespearean order is correct, but, after a flurry of controversy in the historical journals, it seems that the Hastings plot and execution did in fact come first. Also in More and Shakespeare, the Hastings plot is a mere fabrication designed by Richard to destroy Hastings after Hastings has made it clear that he will not help Richard to the crown. It seems more likely, from Richard's startled response and his hasty illegal procedure, that Richard was gravely frightened by a genuine conspiracy. With Hastings and the moderates on the council joining the Woodvilles, his support was rapidly collapsing. The fate of royal uncles to young kings in the past century (including two previous dukes of Gloucester, Richard II's uncle Woodstock and Henry VI's uncle Humphrey) furnished little hope that he could live to a hale old age. He arrived at the decision to take the crown, I think, after he had dealt with the immediate threat of Hastings and had gotten hold of York. More and Shakespeare, as previously mentioned, suppose that Richard was governed by long-range ambition. It looks much more likely that he was governed by fear, that he was anxiously trying to cut through a difficult and dangerous impasse. Indeed, it looks as if all the persons concerned were governed by fear.

Starting on 22 June, Buckingham and a popular preacher named Ralph Shaa (brother to the lord mayor of London) delivered public addresses claiming that Richard was the true heir to the crown. The reasoning behind the claim was shoddy and inconsistent. Shaa apparently charged that Edward IV was illegitimate. Since that would disinherit the princes, and since Clarence's attainder disqualified his children, Richard was the only available heir of the house of York. Edward's bastardy was an old and feeble story (Warwick and Clarence had both bandied it about) and a peculiarly embarrassing one: the Duchess Cecily, at whose London house Richard had been living in May and early June, cannot have enjoyed a public accusation of adultery. Two

days later, it seems, Buckingham charged that it was Edward's children—not Edward himself—who were illegitimate. They were supposedly the fruit of a bigamous union: at the time of his marriage to Elizabeth Woodville, Edward IV had allegedly been contracted to a foreign princess. This story could stand up a little longer, although it too was eventually changed. When circumstances obliged Richard to ask the parliament of the following January for confirmation of his title, Edward's supposed precontract turned out to involve, not a foreign lady, but one Eleanor Butler, who had died in 1468. The foreign betrothal could be disproved, but a secret betrothal, to which both parties were now dead, could not be. Even this third story has flaws, however. Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville had long been recognized by the clergy and people of England; the secular court of parliament had no authority to pronounce on matters touching the sacraments; and the legitimacy of a prince born in 1470 probably could not be affected by his father's betrothal to a woman who had died two years earlier. In short, Richard had grave trouble devising a suitable hereditary claim to the crown. Yet a hereditary claim was essential. In law, the Yorkist crown was based entirely upon the contention that the Yorkists were the true heirs to Edward III whereas the Lancastrians had been usurpers. Moreover, unlike the deposed Edward II and Richard II, the child-king Edward V could not be plausibly charged with bad government. Richard had to maintain that Edward V had never had any right to the throne. The flimsiness of his declarations was not amended by the peculiar constitutional arrangements he was forced to adopt. Richard was acclaimed king on 26 June by "the lords spiritual and temporal and the commons of this realm." That phrase was intended to suggest parliament, but the persons who had been summoned for parliament under the writs of Edward V could not constitute a legal parliament if the king who had summoned them was no king. That is one of the reasons why Richard needed a further act of parliament the next January. In

short, Richard was legally as well as morally the usurper of his nephew's crown. On that point, the Tudor legend is correct.

Richard's usurpation, despite its moments of legal muddle, was in one way the most efficient and least costly of the many irregular seizures of power in medieval England. No lives were lost in battle or riot. Only a handful of men were executed. The dangers of another long minority, with royal relatives squabbling over the government, were averted. A selfish and unpopular faction was removed. An experienced administrator became king, and his proven abilities suggest that, had he ruled longer, England would have enjoyed a reasonably enlightened and strong reign. In another way, however, Richard's usurpation was a startling act of tyranny barely clothed in the rags of legal process. There was no real justification for the execution of Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey. There was no justification for the execution of Hastings without formal trial. The flimsy bastardization of the princes was a flagrant violation of a cherished medieval principle, the right of inheritance. Although Queen Elizabeth Woodville certainly helped to make Richard an enemy and a usurper by behaving as if he already were one, Richard finally acted with no more political finesse or understanding than she had. He certainly alienated many former supporters by his drastic solution to the problem of the minority. Reflecting upon all the experiences of the house of York since the 1450s, he may have thought that taking the crown in one swift and decisive gesture would settle matters, but in his case the cost of the deed was too high. One problem not experienced by earlier Plantagenet princes who had seized the crown dogged him particularly. Although Henry IV and Edward IV almost certainly caused the deaths of the kings they replaced and thus can be held guilty of murder, they replaced adults with a long history of misrule. They could not be accused of slaughtering innocent children.

Did Richard III murder his nephews? It is the master-crime attributed to him in the Tudor legend. More provides the famous account. According to this curious tale, Richard, while on prog-

ress through the west country after his coronation, despatched an agent with a letter ordering the constable of the Tower, Sir Robert Brackenbury, to murder the princes. Brackenbury refused. Thereupon Richard, introduced by a "secret page" to the ambitious and unscrupulous Sir James Tyrell, sent Brackenbury orders to surrender his keys to Tyrell for a night. Brackenbury complied. Two ruffians hired by Tyrell smothered the boys and buried them. All this, More claims, Tyrell confessed before he was executed for treason (on a different charge) nineteen years later. Shakespeare dramatizes a large portion of this tale. Its errors and impossibilities have long been exploded, most recently in P. M. Kendall's biography of Richard. Not the least among them concern Tyrell and Brackenbury. Tyrell was hardly unknown to Richard: he had been a Yorkist knight since Tewkesbury, and in the summer of 1483 was Master of the King's Horse. Brackenbury, whose behavior in surrendering the keys after refusing to commit murder appears incredible, neither lost his post for his failure to cooperate nor turned against Richard for a crime he must have known of. Two years later he fought and died for Richard at Bosworth.

Defenders of Richard have passionately argued that Richard was not guilty. Many have pointed out that he had no need to kill the princes since he had already bastardized them. Some have suggested that Buckingham was the culprit. Some have argued that the princes survived Richard only to be killed by Henry VII, who did need to get them out of the way since he had relegitimated them in order to marry their sister. This is also difficult to believe: there is no contemporary accusation of Henry and no evidence that the princes survived the summer of 1483.

The existing historical evidence does not permit a firm conclusion on the fate of the princes. There is really no courtroom evidence upon which to convict anyone. We must rest content with a probability, and the probability points toward Richard. An Italian visitor to London who left England shortly after Richard's coronation in July wrote later that year that many Englishmen

(including Edward V himself) feared that they would soon die. In the fall of that year, an alliance against Richard was undertaken by Elizabeth Woodville, Dorset, Bishop Morton, Buckingham, and Henry Tudor. This unlikely quintet sought to place Henry Tudor on the throne. They could hardly have joined in such an aim unless they believed that the princes were dead. Neither of these arguments proves that the princes were indeed dead by late 1483, or if they were that Richard killed them, but they contribute to the likelihood. One overwhelming fact stands out: the princes were not seen after the summer of 1483, when, of course, they were in Richard's hands. Although he was ever after plagued by the rumor of their death, he never produced them to disprove the damaging charge. If he did murder them, it is strange that he did not follow the usual practice in such matters, namely to still the clamor by exhibiting their bodies with some beguiling tale of death from natural causes. Yet the responsibility for their death must touch him most nearly. It was he who had taken their throne. In all other cases of displaced English kings down to the mid-seventeenth century, deposition led to death. To others may belong some of the guilt for the deposition: Edward IV perhaps, for having made no better arrangements for the succession of his son; Elizabeth Woodville perhaps, for treating Richard with such unmitigated hostility; Buckingham perhaps, for urging Richard on. Nonetheless, Richard brought about the deposition, and thereby in some sense signed the princes' death warrant.

3. *BOSWORTH AND THE TUDORS*

> The cat, the rat, and Lovell our dog
> Ruleth all England under the hog.

The cat was Sir William Catesby, a lawyer, Hastings's estate-manager, and afterwards councillor and squire of the body to

Richard III. In Shakespeare he serves as a valuable agent for the usurpation. The rat was Sir Richard Ratcliffe, another close advisor, who had fought for Richard at Tewkesbury and against the Scots. Shakespeare accurately depicts him as supervising the execution of Rivers, Vaughan, and Grey. Francis Lovell, whose crest included a dog, was a viscount, Richard's lord chamberlain, and another fellow-soldier against the Scots. The hog was Richard himself, whose personal emblem was a white boar. Hence in Shakespeare Richard is frequently reviled as boar, hog, and hedgehog. The whole scurrilous jingle sums up the disaffection of many Englishmen for their new king. Although the rhyme dates only from 1484, public restiveness under Richard broke into open revolt in the fall of 1483. Dorset appeared with rebel soldiers in Yorkshire; the family of Guilford rose in Kent; the Courtenays (one of whom was bishop of Exeter) did likewise in Devon. Some of these people initially sought to rescue the princes, but, with the rumor of the princes' death, all eventually proclaimed the cause of Henry Tudor. They were ill coordinated and easily crushed, but they represented a widespread threat. The threat was all the greater because the rebels included Richard's most powerful ally, the duke of Buckingham.

Buckingham's motives throughout 1483 remain a matter of conjecture. We do not know why this peer, formerly inactive in politics, suddenly leapt forward and helped Richard to the throne; we do not know why he turned on Richard within three months of the coronation. In June he may have sought vengeance on the Woodvilles, but it is harder to see what he sought in October. Many have supposed that the puzzle of Buckingham's breach with Richard would be solved if we knew more about the princes' death. Perhaps he briefly dreamed of a crown for himself; if so, he soon espoused the Tudor claim. Thomas More has him lured into rebellion by the wily tongue of Bishop Morton, whom Richard had committed to Buckingham's charge. Hall offers several explanations, one of which Shakespeare dramatizes: that Richard welshed on a promise to give Buckingham the earldom

of Hereford. This is simply not true. In July Richard signed letters patent giving Buckingham the crown's portion of the earldom (the rest Buckingham had already). Whatever the cause, Buckingham marched from Brecon against Richard. He was hampered by rains and floods until his troops deserted him. He was then captured, denied the favor of a final interview with Richard, and executed at Salisbury on All Souls' Day, 2 November.

The October rebellion made Henry Tudor, hitherto an obscure offshoot of the house of Lancaster, a major figure in English politics. Fifty or more years earlier, his grandfather Owen Tudor, a Welsh squire of no particular standing, had consoled, wooed, and married Queen Catherine, widow of Henry V. This striking misalliance was revealed only at Catherine's death in 1437. The sons of the union, Edmund and Jasper, were acknowledged and made earls of Richmond and Pembroke respectively by their half-brother Henry VI. Edmund died, probably of natural causes, in 1456, a year after marrying Lady Margaret Beaufort. Margaret's ancestry was less obscure. She was the only child of John Beaufort duke of Somerset (d. 1444), who was in turn son to the eldest of John of Gaunt's bastard offspring (later legitimated) by Catherine Swynford. Several months after Edmund's death, Margaret gave birth to Henry Tudor. Since both the main Lancastrian line and all the male Beauforts had been exterminated by 1471, any hope of a Lancastrian revival lay in this hybrid red rose. Henry was reared in Wales by his uncle Jasper, officially losing his father's earldom of Richmond during the Yorkist years, visiting London perhaps once during the re-adeption of Henry VI. (On this occasion, according to Tudor legend and Shakespeare, Henry VI prophesied that the lad would eventually rule England.) After the Yorkist triumph of 1471, Henry fled with Jasper to Brittany. His mother, however, remained in England. She married Thomas Lord Stanley, councillor and steward of the household to both Edward IV and Richard III. (Stanley is a secondary character in *Richard III,* also anachronistically called earl of Derby, a title he

received from Henry VII after Richard's death. Margaret Beaufort does not appear in the play, but is alluded to as countess of Richmond.) It seems to have been Margaret and Bishop Morton, assisted by such confidential agents as the priest Christopher Urswick, who spun the plots of October 1483, attempting to bring together the Woodville interest, the Beaufort-Tudor interest, and those simply disaffected with Richard. Margaret won Queen Elizabeth Woodville's support by proposing that, if Henry won, he should marry the queen's eldest daughter. Henry himself attempted to join the October revolt, crossing from Brittany with a small fleet. His ships were scattered by adverse winds and he found the English coast too heavily guarded to risk a landing. He sailed back to Brittany to await a better day.

Shakespeare, compressing the time sequence, converts Henry's return to Brittany into a false report, and arranges for Henry's successful landing of 1485 to follow directly upon the defeat of Buckingham. Thus most of Richard's two-year reign is abolished. During that time parliament confirmed his title as king (supposedly "quieting men's minds") and attainted many persons associated with the October rising. Margaret Beaufort, however, was generously treated. Richard punished her merely by handing her estates over to her husband Stanley. The generosity was not uncharacteristic of the king. He persuaded Elizabeth Woodville and her daughters to emerge from sanctuary and treated them honorably at court. His policies with respect to trade, finance, the administration of justice, and the promotion of learning were beneficent and salutary. Unfortunately, he soon encountered a dynastic problem. His only legitimate son (not mentioned in the play) died in April 1484. For a time he seems to have declared Clarence's son heir presumptive. (He did not, as Shakespeare asserts, imprison the boy, nor did he meanly match Clarence's daughter in marriage. It was left to Henry VII to do both those things and eventually to execute the boy on a trumped-up charge of treason. The daughter lived into her late sixties, becoming the

last surviving grandchild of the old duke of York. For this offense Henry VIII chopped off her head in 1541.) Clarence's son, however, may have been feeble-minded; certainly his position was complicated by his father's attainder. Richard eventually designated as his heir another nephew, his sister's son John earl of Lincoln. These arrangements for the succession were the more necessary because Queen Anne was ill and Richard could not expect to have more children by her. She died in March 1485. Upon her death, two damaging rumors circulated: that Richard had poisoned her, and that he intended to marry his niece Elizabeth, sister to the missing princes, in order to secure his tottering throne. There is no reason to believe the first of these exciting stories: in the Middle Ages, suspicions of poison far too commonly accompany the death of the great. The second story presumes a strange streak of illogic in Richard. His claim to the throne hinged on the declared illegitimacy of Edward IV's children: even if he had managed to obtain papal dispensation for an incestuous union, marriage with a bastard could not have strengthened his hereditary right. Nonetheless, the rumor vexed Richard enough to force him into public denials of such an intention, denials that some historians take as evidence of the rumor's truth. Shakespeare uses both stories, suggesting with deliberate murkiness that Richard has done away with Anne, and expanding the marriage project into a striking scene in which Richard woos Queen Elizabeth Woodville for the hand of her daughter.

Meanwhile, refugees from England gathered around Henry Tudor. Bishop Morton fled to the Low Countries, kept in touch with Henry, and helped him escape from Brittany into France at a moment when Richard had persuaded the Bretons to hand Henry over. Dorset joined Henry, although he came to be considered an unreliable ally. Most significantly, Henry gained the services of an experienced general, John de Vere earl of Oxford. Oxford was one of the few surviving unrepentant Lancastrian lords. He had fled after the Lancastrian defeat at Barnet in 1471, led an

attack on the southwest coast of England in 1473, and been imprisoned at Hammes Castle near Calais since 1474. In 1484 he escaped and joined Henry, bringing with him the captain of Hammes, James Blunt. Lord Stanley also wrote to assure Henry of his support.

On 7 August 1485 Henry landed at Milford Haven in Wales. As he marched up the Welsh coast and across to Shrewsbury, his following swelled. Sir Walter Herbert of Pembroke, Sir Gilbert Talbot uncle to the earl of Shrewsbury, and Rhys ap Thomas the leading figure in central Wales, joined his cause. Richard called up his nobles. The two armies met on 22 August in the heart of England, near Market Bosworth in Leicestershire.

Among the crucial battles in English history, Bosworth affords a notable peculiarity: the victory was determined, not by those who fought, but by those who delayed fighting until they were sure of being on the winning side. The calculation of his supposed supporters cost Richard the day, the kingdom, and his life. By all military judgment he should have won. Since the age of eighteen (he was now thirty-two) he had been a skillful and successful general. Henry, who was twenty-eight, had never fought in a battle before. Richard also had the larger army. But part of it was under the Percy earl of Northumberland (Richard's only rival as a northern power during Edward IV's reign), who did not strike a blow. Part was under the Stanleys—Henry's stepfather Lord Thomas and the latter's brother Sir William. Richard had tried to secure Lord Stanley's allegiance by holding his son George hostage, but the Stanleys sat on hilltops, awaiting a sign of the outcome. (They may have concerted strategy with Henry beforehand, but this is disputed.)

The main fighting was done by the vans of the two armies, Henry's under Oxford, Richard's under the duke of Norfolk and his son the earl of Surrey. After Norfolk was killed, the royal forces began to waver. Then Richard adopted one last time the strategy of the quick stroke that would, if successful, settle all.

He led his household knights around the main battle in a charge at Henry Tudor on the opposite rise. If Henry fell, his troops would have nothing to fight for. The charge was very nearly successful, Richard himself cutting down Henry's standard and its bearer Sir William Brandon. At this point one Stanley joined the battle: Sir William led his cavalry upon Richard's flank. Richard's knights were killed around him. He himself fought to the last in the thickest press of his enemies: even the most hostile Tudor accounts pay tribute to his courage. His battle crown was found among the spoils and placed on Henry's head by Lord Stanley.

Of Richard's followers, Ratcliffe and Brackenbury as well as Norfolk fell at Bosworth. Catesby was executed during the next few days. Lovell escaped and, together with Richard's designated heir the earl of Lincoln, died in a rising against Henry two years later. Northumberland made his peace with Henry and was murdered while collecting taxes four years later. Tyrell served Henry at the fortress of Guisnes, near Calais, until 1502, when he was called home and executed for treason. Surrey, after a period of disgrace, became a loyal servant of the Tudors and regained his father's duchy of Norfolk.

Henry, of course, became Henry VII, first Tudor monarch. He married Elizabeth of York, ruled for twenty-four years, and founded a dynasty that lasted until 1603. Bishop Morton became his chancellor, archbishop of Canterbury, a cardinal, and the patron of Thomas More. The Tudor myth depicts Henry as a savior figure, an angel rescuing England from the turbulent Plantagenets. In Shakespeare he is God's "minister of chastisement." It is difficult now to see anything angelic about Henry VII. Indeed, he was a man far subtler and craftier than the historical Richard, which is why, with the help of luck, he ruled far longer than Richard did. He had good reason to be a careful, scheming, suspicious man: he had become king of England while having no

experience of government and knowing practically no one in the country. He had spent half his life in exile, needing all his wits to stay alive. He again needed all his wits to rule England, maintain the new dynasty, become a respected European power, and amass wealth. (In pursuit of the last aim he gained notoriety for avarice and extortion.) He did not differ greatly from the Yorkist kings in his methods of government. He took over and made even more efficient the techniques developed by the Yorkists: Edward IV's accounting methods and his Welsh council, the council of the north that Richard instituted. The great change from medieval to modern government in England came under Henry VIII, during the Reformation in the 1530s. Before that, the chief difference between Tudor rule and the rule of the later Plantagenets was the success of the Tudor kings in keeping the crown on their heads. In part this difference arose from the relative infertility of the Tudors. Only one of Henry VII's sons survived to adulthood. None of Henry VIII's did. Thus the Tudors were not harrassed by a plethora of royal dukes who might claim the crown. Indeed, their dynastic problem was exactly the opposite: Henry VIII spent the first twenty-eight years of his reign trying to beget a legitimate son who would live more than a few days. In many other respects it made no difference whether England was governed by a Plantagenet or a Tudor.

It did, of course, make a difference to the Plantagenets. Henry VII was for a time pestered by risings in favor of surviving members of the house of York and by pretenders who impersonated them. Henry VIII in turn feared displacement by the last buds of the white rose. Accordingly, the first two Tudors exterminated the remaining Plantagenets. The fates of Lincoln and of Clarence's children have already been noted. Most of Lincoln's younger brothers (that is, the younger sons of Richard III's sister) were hounded to death. Even Buckingham's son, the last representative of the line of Thomas of Woodstock, was executed on a

flimsy treason charge in 1521 (see chapter IX). Henry VIII himself was of course half a Plantagenet through his mother, but, aside from that strain, the blood of the Plantagenets, once kings of England and France and lords of Ireland, had become a death sentence to those who carried it in their veins.

HENRY VI
"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL"
Peter Graystone (2021)

Henry VI is a trilogy of plays written by Shakespeare shortly after he arrived in London. He seems to have had a period of feverish activity in 1591 and 1592, both as an actor and a writer. *Henry VI Part 1* is assumed to be the play referred to by a theatrical impresario called Philip Henshawe, who kept a diary which is now a valuable source of information about what the experience of going to the theatre was like. He built the Rose Theatre and records the triumph of a play called 'Harey VI'. It took 3 pounds 16 shillings and 8 pence during its first season. That's about £700 today, suggesting large audiences. General admission to stand near the stage cost one penny, dropped into a box (which is how we get the term 'box office'). An extra penny bought you a seat and a cushion. Most new plays were performed three times in quick succession and then rested for several months. However, William's play was performed 13 times in the spring of 1592.

Henry VI had become King of England as a baby about 170 years before the play was performed. As a monarch he was either humble and saintly or weak and ineffectual, depending on your point of view. *Part 1* of *Henry VI* deals with the political machinations that led up to the Wars of the Roses, a series of civil wars for control of the English throne. Noblemen

gather in the Temple Garden outside parliament and quarrel over a small point of law. The House of Lancaster (the ruling family – Henry's father was the heroic Henry V) pluck red roses from a bush to symbolize their opinion. The House of York (the family from whom future kings such as Richard III would come) pluck white roses. One of the lords predicts that this trivial argument will one day escalate and cause thousands of deaths.

As the political system is torn apart by petty jealousies, a series of military blunders means that the territories in France that were gained by Henry V are lost by his son. Joan of Arc is a fiery presence in the play, rallying the French. It's a very unsympathetic portrayal, though, showing her as heretical, devious and demonic. The play ends with a brittle peace between England and France and the marriage of Henry to Margaret, the daughter of a French earl.

Henry VI Part 2 shows how armed conflict becomes inevitable because Henry is not strong enough to address the disunity of the country. Nobles are set against nobles. The honourable Gloucester, who had been protector of the country when Henry was an infant, is murdered. Henry's wife Margaret has an affair with Suffolk and they plot to take control.

Then the nobles are set against the commoners, who considered Gloucester to be their champion. They look to a new leader, Jack Cade – a working-class rebel. He inspires an uprising with a particular vendetta against people who can read and write, before coming to a bloody end. The nobles completely fail to understand the commoners. When Suffolk, in disguise on a boat, is captured by sailors, he announces who he is and insists with irritation that nobody so lowborn can possibly kill him. They do, of course. The play ends with Henry on the run and civil war inevitable.

Part 3 deals with the horrors of that conflict. The Duke of York has a claim to the throne and Henry lamely agrees that he will make him heir if he will allow him to continue his reign until he dies. But York is being urged to seize the crown by force. Margaret too has troops loyal to her and fights York so

that her son will succeed to the throne. She stabs him to death, but York's sons take up the fight in which they will eventually triumph.

Alongside all this comes the rise of Richard, who is a fierce supporter of the House of York and will become the future Richard III. He is physically disabled and convinced that he will therefore not succeed with women or in the politics of the court. The only way he can see to make a success of his life is to seize the throne, despite the fact that it will require the death of many with a stronger claim. It is Richard who finally kills Henry in the Tower of London.

Shakespeare, still developing his craft as a playwright, already knows how to dramatize scenes in such a way as to give a succession of brutal historical events an emotional grip. For instance, at the height of battle, Henry watches a soldier drag a corpse to a place where he can strip the armour and loot the pockets. As he takes off the helmet he realizes that the man he has killed is his father. Weeping, the soldier wonders how he can possibly tell his mother what has happened. This is the event that brings home to Henry the real cost of his inability to address the strife between his nobles.

No wonder he reflects that he would rather be a simple rural worker ('homely swain'). In his monologue he imagines himself sitting on a hill whittling wood to make a sundial. With it, he would watch minutes become hours and days become years. In this carefree life, his only worry would be to divide time up appropriately between the welfare of his animals, sleep, prayer and fun. In the repetition and constant pace of the lines we can hear the seconds tick genially by ('how many hours ... so many hours' – the technical name for this repetition is anaphora). Living in such simplicity he could expect to grow old ('white hairs') and experience a non-violent death ('quiet grave').

This vision of working life is, of course, absurdly over-romanticized in Henry's imagination. It doesn't take into account hunger, coping with ill-health without medical attention or the trauma of powerlessness. Those issues did not go away over the next four centuries. But the illusion that there is

a better life that could have been ours if only the dice had fallen differently is persistent in human nature.

In the Bible, the book of Ecclesiastes comments on it. Henry would have agreed with this analysis, that life is so hard that there is no point in attempting anything more grandiose than to enjoy your food and your work:

> What hath man of all his travail and grief of his heart, wherein he hath travailed under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief: his heart also taketh not rest in the night: which also is vanity. There is no profit to man, but that he eat and drink, and delight his soul with the profit of his labour.[2]

There is an irony in Henry's story. He does get the chance to see out his days unburdened with the role of king. But he forgoes it. He is in prison and is liberated by nobles loyal to him. When he is offered the crown once more, he takes it. However, what he actually wants is the trappings of being king without the responsibility. He announces that he will live out of the public eye with a king's privileges and comfort, while his rescuers will become Lord Protectors of England. It's a disastrous decision that will be the death of him.