



RICHARD III

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**TEACHERS' RESOURCE PACK
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**INTERVIEWS & ADDITIONAL MATERIAL
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SHAKESPEARE HIS STORY

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on a date that is widely acknowledged to be 23 April 1564. His father John Shakespeare was a glove-maker, and his mother Mary Arden was a local heiress. Although there is no evidence to support the idea, it is thought that Shakespeare probably attended the grammar school in Stratford, where he would have been given a strong classical education.

He married Anne Hathaway (a local woman who was eight years older than him) in November 1582. Anne was already pregnant at the time and gave birth six months later to their eldest child, Susanna. In January 1585 Anne gave birth to twins, Judith and Hamnet.

It is thought that shortly after the births of the twins Shakespeare left Stratford for London. Rumour has it that this was the result of him being caught poaching deer. Once in London, Shakespeare began to establish himself as an actor and a playwright.

Shakespeare didn't publish his plays himself, they were written down and published by other actors and associates after they had been performed, so it is difficult to know in which order he wrote them. However, it is most likely that his first play was the comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, closely followed by *The Taming of the Shrew*. However, after writing these two Italian-based comedies, Shakespeare decided to turn his attentions to English History.

It is now thought that the first history play Shakespeare wrote was *The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* in 1590, closely followed by *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good King Henry the Sixth* in 1591. These are the plays that eventually became known as *Henry VI: Parts Two and Three*. Due to their success with audiences, in 1592 he wrote *Henry VI: Part One* as a prequel, before completing the cycle with *Richard III* in 1592–3.

The First Tetralogy (as this history cycle became known) undoubtedly contains some of Shakespeare's earliest work as a playwright; the raw and earthy dialogue of the *Henry VI* plays suggest a writer gradually exploring and developing his craft. By the time he wrote The Second Tetralogy, which charts the earlier cycle of English history, covering the reigns of *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, his writing style had become more poetic and complex. But in *Richard III* we begin to see Shakespeare constructing a psychologically complex central character, flawed yet charismatic, perhaps paving the way for future Shakespearean tragic heroes such as Hamlet and Macbeth.

Shakespeare went on to write a total of 38 plays, not including collaborations with other playwrights, as well as 154 sonnets and four narrative poems.

He died on 23 April 1616 at his house in Stratford-upon-Avon.

CHRONOLOGY

SHAKESPEARE'S CAREER

- | | | | |
|----------------|--|----------------|---|
| 1564 | – William Shakespeare is born on 23 April in Stratford upon Avon. | 1596 | – Shakespeare writes <i>King John</i> . His only son Hamnet dies at the age of 11. |
| 1582 | – Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway. | 1596-97 | – <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> and <i>Henry IV Part One</i> |
| 1583 | – Shakespeare's first child, Susanna, is born, just six months after her parents' wedding. | 1598 | – <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> and <i>Henry IV Part Two</i> |
| 1585 | – Shakespeare's twins, Judith and Hamnet, are born. | 1598-99 | – Shakespeare writes the comedy <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> and the conclusion to the Second Tetralogy, <i>Henry V</i> . |
| 1589-90 | – Shakespeare writes his first play, <i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> . | 1599 | – <i>Julius Caesar</i> and <i>As You Like It</i> |
| 1590-91 | – Shakespeare writes another comedy, <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> , and begins writing his first cycle of History plays, with <i>Henry VI Part Two</i> . | 1600-01 | – <i>Hamlet</i> |
| 1591 | – <i>Henry VI Part Three</i> | 1601 | – <i>The Phoenix and the Turtle</i> (poem) |
| 1592 | – Shakespeare writes a prequel for his Henry VI plays <i>Henry VI Part One</i> . He also writes his first Tragedy <i>Titus Andronicus</i> . | 1601-02 | – <i>Twelfth Night</i> and <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> |
| 1592-93 | – Shakespeare concludes the First Tetralogy with <i>Richard III</i> . He also writes the poem <i>Venus and Adonis</i> . | 1604 | – <i>Measure for Measure</i> and <i>Othello</i> |
| 1593 | – Shakespeare begins to write his collection of sonnets. | 1605 | – <i>King Lear</i> |
| 1593-94 | – <i>The Rape of Lucrece</i> (poem) | 1606 | – <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i> , <i>Timon of Athens</i> and <i>Macbeth</i> |
| 1594 | – Shakespeare writes another comedy, <i>The Comedy of Errors</i> , and there is evidence to suggest that he may have collaborated with other writers on <i>Edward III</i> . | 1606-07 | – <i>All's Well That Ends Well</i> |
| 1594-95 | – <i>Love Labour's Lost</i> | 1607 | – <i>Pericles</i> |
| 1595 | – Shakespeare begins his second cycle of History plays, returning to the start of the Wars of the Roses with <i>Richard II</i> . He also writes <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> and <i>Romeo & Juliet</i> . | 1608 | – <i>Coriolanus</i> |
| | | 1609-10 | – <i>The Winter's Tale</i> |
| | | 1610-11 | – <i>Cymbeline</i> |
| | | 1611 | – Shakespeare writes what is considered by many to be his final play, <i>The Tempest</i> . |
| | | 1612-13 | – It has been suggested that Shakespeare collaborated with other writers to write the plays <i>Cardenio</i> and <i>Henry VIII</i> . |
| | | 1613 | – <i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i> , allegedly a collaboration between Shakespeare and John Fletcher, is written. |
| | | 1616 | – William dies on his birthday aged 52. |

RICHARD III SYNOPSIS

ACT I

The play begins with Richard, Duke of Gloucester, alone on stage. He addresses the audience directly, telling us that although his brother Edward is the reigning King of England, he intends to be king himself, and will stop at nothing to achieve this goal. He laments the fact that he is physically deformed, but tells us that this makes him all the more determined to succeed.

His first target is his brother Clarence, who has been arrested on suspicion of plotting Edward's murder. After Clarence is led away to the Tower of London, Richard reveals to us his intention to marry Lady Anne, the widow of Henry VI's son Prince Edward, whom Richard murdered.

Lady Anne enters as she journeys to bury King Henry VI. Much to Anne's distress, Richard begins to woo her, deflecting with compliments each of the insults she throws at him. He offers her his knife and tells her to kill him, but she is unable to do it. Defeated, she takes his ring and exits, leaving Richard alone to celebrate his victory.

Meanwhile at the palace, Queen Elizabeth and her family discuss the King's health. She tells them that if Edward dies, then Richard will be Protector. Richard enters and begins to argue with Elizabeth. Henry VI's widow Queen Margaret enters and puts curses on all of them: that Elizabeth's son Edward will be killed as her son Edward was; that the Lords Rivers, Grey and Hastings will all die early; that Richard will be plagued by guilt, betrayal and nightmares; and that Buckingham will be betrayed by Richard.

When everyone else leaves, Richard is visited by two murderers whom he instructs to go to the Tower and murder Clarence. At the Tower of London, Clarence tells his guard Brakenbury about a nightmare that he had in which he drowned, having been pushed off a ship by Richard. When he goes back to sleep, the two murderers enter and Brakenbury reluctantly leaves. The murderers debate whether or not to kill Clarence as he sleeps, but when he wakes up, one of them stabs him before drowning him in a vat of wine.

ACT II

Richard tells the royal family that Clarence is dead. Edward is overcome with guilt that he did nothing to prevent the murder, and exits with Elizabeth. She quickly re-enters, accompanied by the Duchess of York, with the news that Edward has died. As they mourn Edward's death, Buckingham encourages them to look to the future, and they make plans for Edward's son's coronation.

Meanwhile Elizabeth, her youngest son Richard of York, the Bishop of Ely and the Duchess of York await news of Prince Edward's arrival. Lord Stanley arrives and tells them that Rivers and Grey have been arrested and sent to Pomfret Castle, at the command of Richard and Buckingham. Elizabeth realises that she and her family are in danger, and so the Bishop escorts her and young York to sanctuary.

ACT III

Prince Edward arrives in London and is welcomed by Richard and Buckingham. Despite the Bishop of Ely's protests, Buckingham instructs Hastings to fetch York from sanctuary. When he arrives, Richard suggests that the boys are taken to stay at the Tower of London. Richard and Buckingham express their concern that Hastings will not support Richard's claim to the throne, and ask Catesby to find out where his loyalties lie. Richard tells Buckingham that when he is crowned King, he will make him Earl of Hereford to thank him for his loyalty.

Hastings is woken in the early hours of the morning by a messenger, asking him to meet with Stanley, who is concerned about Richard's intentions, before the day's Council meeting. Hastings dismisses the messenger, telling him that Stanley has nothing to fear. Catesby enters and tells Hastings that he thinks Richard is planning on making himself King. Hastings is shocked and tells Catesby that he would rather die than see Richard crowned. Stanley arrives and they leave for the Council meeting together.

At Pomfret Castle, Rivers and Grey are about to be executed. They protest their innocence and realise that Margaret's prophecy has come true. Rivers prays that her prophecies for Richard, Buckingham and Hastings will also come true, and that Elizabeth and the princes will be saved.

The Council meet to discuss the coronation of young Edward V. Richard reveals his withered arm to the Council, and claims that Elizabeth has been practising witchcraft and has cast a spell on him. Richard accuses Hastings of being a traitor for seeming to defend Elizabeth and sentences him to death. As the Council leave, Hastings also realises that Margaret's curse has come true, and he himself prophesies that Richard will bring about England's downfall.

Richard and Buckingham invite the Mayor of London to meet with them and show him the executed Hastings's head. They reassure him that Hastings was a traitor and that his death was absolutely necessary. After the Mayor leaves to pass this information on to the citizens of London, Richard and Buckingham plot to spread a rumour that the young princes are illegitimate, as was Edward IV, making Richard the rightful heir to the throne.

Richard and Buckingham stage a conversation in front of the Mayor and citizens of London. Richard pretends he is at prayer, and initially rejects Buckingham's suggestion that he should be King, claiming loyalty to the princes. However, he is eventually persuaded and the citizens celebrate Richard's imminent coronation.

ACT IV

Elizabeth and her family arrive at the Tower to visit the princes but they are forbidden from seeing them. Anne is taken to Westminster to be crowned Queen, and predicts that she will be Richard's next victim. Dorset flees to France to join with Richmond.

After Richard is crowned, he arranges Anne's murder, and plots to marry his niece Elizabeth in order to secure his place on the throne. After Buckingham refuses to help him, Richard hires Sir James Tyrrel to murder the princes. Richard ignores Buckingham's requests for the title he was promised and then refuses. Buckingham realises his life is now in danger and decides to flee to Wales.

Elizabeth and the Duchess of York mourn the deaths of the princes and are joined by Queen Margaret. They discuss their various bereavements, they have all lost their husbands and children over the course of the Wars of the Roses, and they realise that Richard is the source of all of their woes. With all her curses now fulfilled, Margaret decides to return to France but before she does she teaches Elizabeth how to curse. Richard enters and the Duchess of York tells him she wishes she had strangled him at birth, before cursing him and leaving. Richard then tells Elizabeth that he wants to marry her daughter, Princess Elizabeth initially fights against him but eventually relents and agrees to talk to her daughter about his proposal. However, unbeknownst to Richard, Elizabeth arranges for her daughter to marry Richmond instead.

ACT V

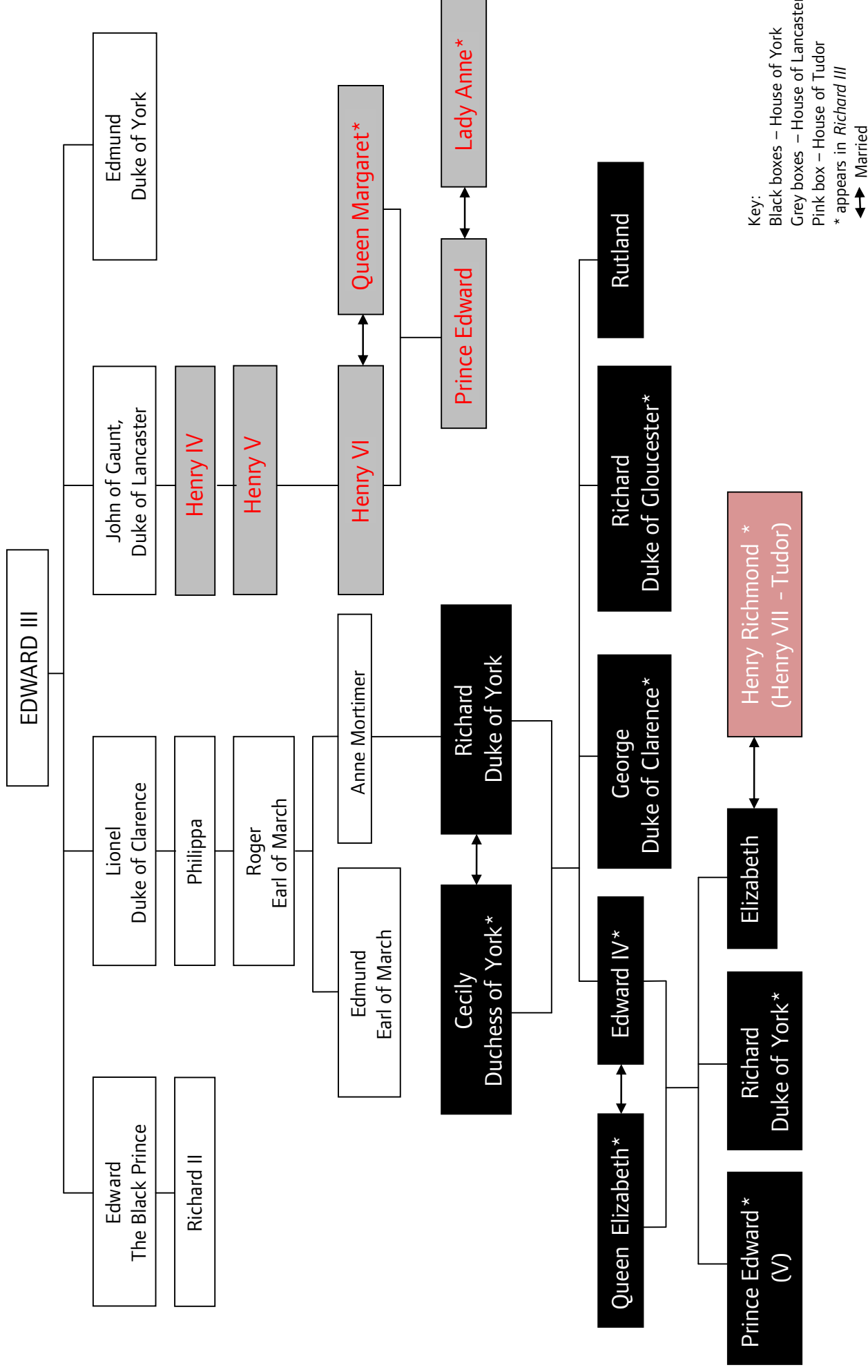
As Buckingham is being led to his execution, he reflects on his past wrongdoings realising, like many of Richard's victims, that Margaret's curse has once again exacted itself and he deserves the beheading he is about to face.

Having now arrived in England and marched to Tamworth, Richmond addresses his followers, promising to defeat Richard and return England to its former glory. Despite having fewer soldiers, Richmond rallies his troops, telling them that they have God and hope on their side.

The night before the battle, both Richard and Richmond set up their camp with their followers. While both men sleep, they are visited by the ghosts of Richard's victims, who curse Richard to 'despair and die,' and give Richmond their blessing to win the battle. Richard wakes from his nightmare and reflects on his guilt. Richmond, on the other hand, has slept peacefully and is feeling uplifted by his dream. Both men arm themselves for battle and address their soldiers as they head to fight.

On the battlefield, Richard's horse has been killed and he now fights on foot. Richmond enters and they fight each other. Richard is killed and Stanley removes his crown, presenting it to Richmond, who reflects on the bloodshed of the Wars of the Roses and promises that his marriage to Princess Elizabeth will unite the houses of York and Lancaster and that England will finally live in peace.

THE HOUSES OF YORK AND LANCASTER



RICHARD III

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

THE HOUSE OF YORK

Richard, Duke of Gloucester

Richard is the youngest surviving brother of King Edward IV. He is physically deformed, but is fiercely intelligent and a very able soldier, having already murdered King Henry VI and his son Prince Edward before the action of the play begins. He is hungry for power and plots his way to becoming King of England. He is manipulative and devious, but also charming and charismatic, and frequently addresses the audience as his closest allies. He marries Prince Edward's widow Lady Anne, orchestrates the murder of his brother George, Duke of Clarence, and after the death of his eldest brother Edward IV, he also arranges the murders of his young nephews Edward V and Richard, Duke of York. By the time he is crowned King Richard III, he has also been responsible for the deaths of everyone else who has posed as a threat: Queen Elizabeth's brother Lord Rivers; her son Lord Grey; Lord Hastings; his closest friend and ally the Duke of Buckingham; and his wife Lady Anne. The more successful he is, the more insecure he becomes, and starts to behave increasingly irrationally. He shows some signs of guilt the night before the Battle of Bosworth, after the ghosts of those who he has killed visit him and predict that he will be defeated. The following day, he is killed in battle by his rival Henry, Earl of Richmond, who is crowned Henry VII and becomes the first Tudor king.

George, Duke of Clarence

Clarence is the older brother of Richard and younger brother of King Edward IV. At the beginning of the play he is falsely accused of plotting to murder his brother and he naively trusts that his other brother Richard will help to defend him. Imprisoned in the Tower of London, Clarence dreams that he is drowning and is later stabbed and then drowned in a vat of wine by two murderers hired by Richard.

King Edward IV

Edward is the reigning King of England at the beginning of the play. He is married to Elizabeth Woodville and has two young sons and a daughter. After being convinced that his brother Clarence is plotting to murder him, and as a result of divisions in his court between his followers and his wife and her family, his health rapidly declines and he dies, leaving his son Prince Edward as King.

Queen Elizabeth

Elizabeth Woodville is Edward IV's wife, and Queen of England. Their marriage has caused controversy for two reasons; firstly, because she is a widow, and secondly because she is the first commoner in British history to marry a monarch. She has two sons (the Marquess of Dorset and Lord Grey) from her previous marriage, and has two young sons and a daughter with Edward. She and Richard do not like or trust each other. She is fiercely protective of her children and, after the murder of her young sons, she lets Richard believe that he can marry her daughter Princess Elizabeth. However, she secretly promises her to Richmond, helping him in his quest to overthrow Richard.

Prince Edward & Richard, Duke of York

Edward and York are the sons of King Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth, and Richard's nephews. After his father's death, Prince Edward is brought to London in preparation for his coronation, whilst York is taken into sanctuary by his mother. Edward tries to behave as maturely as possible, whilst York is playful and cheeky. At Richard's insistence, York is taken out of sanctuary to stay with his brother at the Tower of London. After spreading the rumour that both of the boys are illegitimate, Richard arranges their murder, and the boys are suffocated as they are sleeping.

Duchess of York

Cecily Neville, the Duchess of York, is the mother of Edward IV, Clarence and Richard. She had a fourth son, Rutland, who was murdered at Queen Margaret's command during an earlier battle between the Houses of York and Lancaster, and her husband, Richard Duke of York, was murdered by Margaret herself. By the end of Richard III, the Duchess has mourned the deaths of several members of her family and, after realising that her only surviving son Richard is the cause of many of them, places a curse on him.

Lord Rivers, Lord Grey and the Marquess of Dorset

Rivers is Queen Elizabeth's brother, and Grey and Dorset are her sons from her previous marriage to Sir John Grey. As key members of the Woodville family, they have made several enemies within the court of Edward IV due to the power they have been given as a result of Elizabeth's marriage to Edward. On their way to escort Prince Edward to London, Rivers and Grey are arrested and executed, under the instruction of Richard and Buckingham. Dorset, acting on the advice of his mother, flees to France to assist Richmond.

THE HOUSE OF LANCASTER

Queen Margaret

Margaret of Anjou is the widow of King Henry VI, who was murdered by Richard in the Tower of London. Her only son Prince Edward was killed on the battlefield by Richard and his brothers. At the end of *Henry IV Part Three* she is banished to France, but reappears in *Richard III* to watch the decline of the House of York. She is bitter and vengeful, placing a curse on all those involved in the deaths of her husband and son, but her curses are greeted with disbelief and laughter. However, as each of her prophecies come true, her victims begin to see the true power of her curses. After the murder of the princes, she meets with Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, celebrating in their grief, before teaching Elizabeth how to curse and then returning to France.

Lady Anne

Anne Neville is the widow of Henry VI's son Prince Edward. She is first seen mourning the death of Henry VI, but her grieving is interrupted by Richard who attempts to woo her over Henry's corpse. Although initially disgusted and enraged, she eventually relents and agrees to marry him. Resigned to her fate, she predicts that Richard will soon dispose of her and, shortly after their coronation, Richard arranges to have her poisoned so that he can marry his niece Elizabeth.

Henry, Earl of Richmond

Richmond is Lord Stanley's stepson, living in France, having fled there with many other Lancastrians following the coronation of Edward IV. He is an illegitimate descendant of Richard II's uncle John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and so has his own claim to the throne. With Stanley's help, he arranges to marry Princess Elizabeth in order to strengthen his claim. As he gains more supporters, including Dorset, Ely and Buckingham, he takes his army to England, leading them into the Battle of Bosworth, where he is shown to be a religious, optimistic and strong leader. He kills Richard and is crowned Henry VII, the first Tudor King, thus ending the Wars of the Roses.



OTHER CHARACTERS

Duke of Buckingham

Buckingham is Richard's closest ally, assisting him with his ascent to the throne, playing a crucial role in the executions of Rivers, Grey and Hastings. Like Richard, he is manipulative and cunning, although he is not quite as ruthless. Richard promises him that when he is King, Buckingham will be given the Earldom of Hereford. However, when he refuses to be involved in the murder of the princes, Richard breaks his promise in anger. Buckingham returns to his home in Wales to raise an army to fight on Richmond's side, but is arrested and executed at Richard's command.

Lord Hastings

William, Lord Hastings is Edward IV's Lord Chamberlain, acting as spokesman and advisor to the King. However, he is an enemy of the Woodville family, and at the beginning of Richard III he has just been released from prison, having been arrested on Elizabeth's suggestion. He allies himself to Richard after Edward's death, but naively tells his councillor Catesby, unaware that Catesby is spying on him on Richard's behalf, that he will fight to the death to protect Edward V's right to the throne. Having received this news from Catesby, Richard accuses Hastings of treason at a Council meeting and Hastings is beheaded soon after.

Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby

Lord Stanley is a member of the Privy Council, and is one of the first characters to voice his concerns regarding Richard. He cleverly pretends to stay loyal to Richard, but secretly plots with his son-in-law Richmond to have him overthrown. When Richard begins to doubt Stanley's loyalty, he takes his son George as prisoner, promising to release him only if Stanley stays loyal. At the Battle of Bosworth, Stanley's army fights on Richmond's side and, following the death of Richard, George Stanley is safely returned to his father.

Sir William Catesby & Sir Richard Ratcliffe

Catesby and Ratcliffe remain loyal followers of Richard right up until his death. They are both ruthless and driven: Catesby betrays Hastings, by acting as a spy for Richard, and Ratcliffe unsympathetically oversees the executions of most of Richard's victims. At the Battle of Bosworth, Ratcliffe helps Richard prepare for battle, and Catesby tries to assist him on the battlefield after his horse is killed.

Bishop of Ely

Ely is a religious and loyal man, providing comfort and advice to Queen Elizabeth, and escorting her and her son to sanctuary. He expresses concern at some of Richard's actions, including the removal of York from sanctuary, and eventually joins Richmond's forces in France.

Sir Robert Brackenbury

Brackenbury is the Keeper of the Tower of London, whose role it is to guard the prisoners. He comforts and reassures Clarence, and reluctantly allows the murderers access to him whilst he is sleeping.

The Lord Mayor of London

The Mayor represents the citizens of London, so is seen by Richard and Buckingham as an important ally. Following the death of Hastings, they persuade him that Hastings was a traitor whose death was necessary, in the hope that he will spread this message amongst the citizens. Either naively, or wary of what may happen to him if he does not comply, the Mayor obliges and, along with Buckingham, helps to persuade the citizens that Richard should reign as king.

Sir James Tyrrel

Tyrrel is described by Catesby as a man who would do anything for gold, and he agrees to arrange the murder of the princes in the tower. However, after he hears the report of their murder from the men he has hired and sees their bodies for himself, he seems full of regret and pity.

THE STORY SO FAR SHAKESPEARE'S WARS OF THE ROSES

Richard II

King Richard II banishes his cousin Henry Bolingbroke after he accuses another nobleman of murdering their uncle. After the death of Bolingbroke's father (John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster), Richard also seizes Bolingbroke's inheritance. Bolingbroke returns to England, having gathered support, and forces Richard to hand over the crown to him. Having been deposed, Richard is taken to Pomfret Castle where he is murdered by Sir Piers Exton, thinking he is acting on behalf of Bolingbroke. On hearing the news of the murder, Bolingbroke, now crowned King Henry IV, disowns the crime, and vows to take a crusade to repent for Richard's death.

Henry IV Part One

Civil war breaks out in England under Henry IV's rule, with the main rebel faction led by Henry Percy, or 'Hotspur.' Meanwhile, Henry IV's son Hal has no wish to help his father, instead choosing to spend his time with a group of lower-class friends including a rogue known as Falstaff. Eventually Henry manages to persuade Hal to join him, and Hal kills Hotspur, successfully defeating the rebels.

Henry IV Part Two

Three years later, the rebel forces once again rise up against Henry IV, who is now seriously ill. Prince Hal and his younger brother Prince John lead the King's armies and successfully quash the rebellion. Having made peace with his son, Henry IV dies, leaving Hal to take the throne. Hoping to be honoured by his friend, Falstaff goes to London but is rejected by the newly crowned Henry V.

Henry V

Not content with simply being King of England, Henry decides to conquer France. Before he leaves, he successfully deals with a group of conspirators who are plotting to assassinate him. In France, he besieges the town of Harfleur, but when he suffers heavy losses, he decides to return to England. However, the French are now ready for battle, so the King leads his severely depleted troops to victory at the Battle of Agincourt. He arranges with King Charles of France that he will marry his daughter Katherine and that he will inherit the throne of France on Charles's death.

Henry VI Part One

By now, Henry V has died, and France and England are ruled by his young son Henry VI, and his Protector, the Duke of Gloucester. However, they face rebellion in both countries: the French rebels are led by Joan of Arc, and in England, an argument breaks out in a garden between Richard Duke of York, who believes he has a claim to the throne, and the Lancastrian Duke of Somerset, who encourage the other nobles present to pluck a white rose if they support the House of York, and a red rose if they support the House of Lancaster. York's potential rebellion is temporarily repressed when he is sent to help defeat Joan and the French rebels. The Earl of Suffolk arranges the marriage of Henry to Margaret of Anjou, whom he loves himself, and through whom he hopes to be able to control the King.

Henry VI Part Two

Suffolk plots to get rid of Gloucester, whilst York continues to plot against the King, recruiting the rebel Jack Cade to lead a revolt. When Gloucester is murdered, Henry banishes Suffolk, with whom his wife Margaret is having an affair. Suffolk is later attacked and murdered by pirates. Jack Cade's uprising is unsuccessful, but York declares war on Henry and murders Somerset, as the Houses of York and Lancaster go to battle.

Henry VI Part Three

Having been defeated in battle, Henry reaches an agreement with York; that he will continue to rule until his death, at which point York will be crowned King. Margaret is furious that Henry has disinherited her son Edward, and so leads an army herself against York. She has his youngest son Rutland murdered, before humiliating, torturing and killing York herself. However, York's eldest son Edward leads the Yorkist army, imprisoning Henry in the Tower of London, and taking the crown for himself. In a battle at Tewkesbury, Edward, with his brothers Clarence and Richard murder Henry's son Prince Edward, but spare Margaret's life, banishing her to France instead. The newly crowned Edward IV marries a commoner, Elizabeth Woodville, who gives birth to a son. Meanwhile Edward's brother Richard of Gloucester begins to plot against him...

RICHARD III FACT VS FICTION

Thanks to Shakespeare, history's Richard III will forever be seen as a hunchbacked murderer; but how accurate is Shakespeare's portrayal? The historical sources Shakespeare used as the basis for Richard III, primarily Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles, have faced accusations of being examples of Elizabethan propaganda, written to celebrate Elizabeth I's family and to strengthen her place on the throne as the granddaughter of Henry VII. This biased account is frequently referred to as 'The Tudor Myth'. In attempt to redress the balance and present Richard in a more favourable light, The Richard III Society was founded in 1924. The society researches alternative historical sources in an attempt to raise public awareness of the fact that the Richard of history may have been very different from the Shakespearean villain with whom we are acquainted.

Richard

There is very little historical evidence to suggest that Richard was a hunchback and, given his undoubted ability as a soldier, he could not have had an arm withered 'like a blasted sapling.' However, most historians agree that he probably was unusually small and slightly deformed, with his right shoulder slightly higher than his left. Several historical accounts link him to the deaths of Henry VI at the Tower of London and Henry's son, Edward, on the battlefield at Tewkesbury.

Clarence

There is little doubt that Richard was tactical and manipulative. With his brother Clarence married to Warwick's daughter Elizabeth, Richard married Warwick's eldest daughter Anne, preventing Clarence from inheriting all of Warwick's estate. Historically however, Clarence's arrest was not arranged by Richard. Clarence himself had been plotting against Edward, inciting riots against him and casting horoscopes to discover when Edward and his sons would die. There is no evidence to suggest that Richard ordered Clarence's murder.

Edward IV

Edward suffered from severe indigestion, and died as the result of what was probably a stroke.

The Woodville Family

Rivers, Grey and Dorset all held important roles within the government. Rivers was Prince Edward's governor and Protector, but Edward IV's will stated that Richard should instead be made Protector. Richard did take power off the Woodvilles, persuading the public that they did not have Edward V's best interests at heart. He had Rivers and Grey arrested without trial and, to make matters worse, he had their naked corpses thrown into a common grave.

Hastings

Hastings was not allied to the Woodvilles but, as the Lord Chamberlain, he was one of Edward IV's closest friends and so stayed loyal to Edward V. According to most sources, Richard had him arrested after he defended his mistress Jane Shore and Queen Elizabeth against Richard's accusations of witchcraft.

Lady Anne

Although Shakespeare's Anne is the widow of Prince Edward, she was never actually married; they were simply betrothed to each other. It does seem strange that Anne should marry Richard given that there were rumours that he was involved with the death of her fiancé and his father, but there is no way that we can know anything about their personal relationship. Shakespeare omits the fact that they were married for 13 years and that they had a son, who died at the age of 11. There is a lack of any historical evidence to support the notion that Richard planned to marry his niece Elizabeth and had Anne poisoned.

Buckingham

Buckingham was one of Richard's closest allies. However, once Richard was crowned, he detached himself from him and led an unsuccessful uprising against him, possibly because, as Shakespeare suggests, he was not given the earldom of Hereford, or possibly because he no longer wanted to be associated with a king who had become so unpopular.

The Princes

The majority of sources suggest that Richard did move Edward V from his lodgings at St Paul's Cathedral to the Tower of London and convinced the Archbishop of Canterbury to persuade Elizabeth to let his younger brother York join him. However, we will never know exactly what happened to the princes inside the Tower, except that they disappeared. The discovery of the skeletons of two boys, aged approximately 10 and 12, found in a chest buried beneath a staircase in the Tower in 1674, suggests that they were murdered around the time of Richard III's coronation, but there is no surviving evidence to support the theory that it was Richard who had them killed.

THEMES & MAJOR INTERESTS

POWER

Many of Shakespeare's Tragedies, and all of his Histories, are concerned with the shifting of power, frequently showing individuals gradually gaining power, and then struggling to retain it. In the case of the Histories, the power in question is the English Monarchy. In *Henry VI Part Two*, the title character says: 'Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown,' and Shakespeare explores this uneasiness throughout both of his history cycles.

In *Richard III*, we are presented with five English kings at different points during the course of the play. We can trace the arc of power from the corpse of Henry VI, to the dying Edward IV, to his doomed son Edward V, and on to Richard III, before settling with the victorious Henry VII. Power is seen as something transient, that doesn't last for any great deal of time, and that ultimately kills those who have had it. The message seems clear; gaining power leads to losing power, and losing power leads to death.

Throughout Shakespeare's plays, power is represented symbolically by the throne and the crown. Richard's rise to power is only truly complete when he ascends the throne and puts on the crown. Similarly, Richmond's victory is confirmed when Stanley hands him Richard's crown. These physical objects represent the material worth of having such power. In *Richard II*, Richard agrees to hand over the title of king to Bolingbroke, but finds it much harder to actually hand over the crown.

In *Richard III*, Shakespeare explores the various factors that contribute to being powerful. We see that power as a monarch comes from not only having a worthy claim to the throne, but from having support from influential nobles, being popular with citizens and from being strong in battle.

Of course, there is more to power than monarchy and, in *Richard III*, it could be argued that the most powerful character is Queen Margaret. She may be physically frail and no longer hold any claim to the throne, but her words have the power to condemn her enemies to death and despair.

CONTEMPORARY RESONANCES

In rehearsals, the cast and creative team talked a great deal about dictators in contemporary society. It is not difficult to see the resonances between Richard III's barbaric regime, and those of leaders such as Colonel Gaddafi in Libya and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Like Richard, these men have used their charismatic public personas to mask their acts of tyranny. Director Sam Mendes reflects that 'it's interesting to observe how such figures tend to arrive with a reputation for confident, even-handed communication, promising order in a time of chaos. But then of course once they achieve power, the degree of their corruption is revealed.'

CURSING

Queen Margaret is the only Shakespearean character to appear in four plays. Anyone reading or watching the First Tetralogy from *Henry VI Part One* to *Richard III* would see her development from feisty young girl to a lonely cursing widow. In the *Henry VI* plays we see Margaret as a soldier on the battlefield, defending her son's right to the throne by gruesomely murdering Edward of York, and helping with the murder of the young Rutland. However, although she no longer fights physically, she is at her strongest and most dangerous in *Richard III*.

In Act IV Scene 4, Margaret and the Duchess of York repeat the names of their dead husbands and sons, in an almost ritualistic lament. This constant repetition builds a dramatic intensity between the two women, and in its listing of the victims, reminds us of the cyclical nature of death and power.

Shakespeare makes it clear that for his female characters there is a link between bereavement and empowerment, with cries of grief quickly turning to vengeful curses. Margaret shouts and screams at people throughout the *Henry VI* plays, but her son Prince Edward's death endows her words with greater intent and imbues them with an extraordinary power. Anne, having lost her husband, enters into a fierce battle of wits with Richard, during which she unwittingly curses herself. Elizabeth is powerless to stop Richard's onslaught of violence, but after the death of the princes, she gains the strength to trick Richard and plots his downfall with Richmond. The Duchess has lived to see her husband, sons and grandsons murdered and, when she finally speaks to her son, she curses him in an act which ultimately brings about his downfall.

Yet the cursing used in *Richard III* is unusual. Cursing would traditionally involve invoking either God or the Devil, but the women in *Richard III* do neither. Nor do they seem to employ any type of witchcraft. Instructing Elizabeth to 'Think that thy babes were fairer than they were, / And he that slew them fouler than he is', Margaret seems to draw on a power that comes not from any supernatural or divine order, but from somewhere within herself.

DREAMS & PROPHECIES

In Elizabethan England, dreams were not seen as expressions of the unconscious mind, but as omens or premonitions, and Shakespeare made great use of this belief throughout his Comedies, Tragedies and Histories. Although the audience are rarely shown these dreams, when they hear the description of a character's dream, they are encouraged to interpret the symbolism it contains. In doing so they are given a clue as to how the action may unfold, frequently creating instances of dramatic irony.

Clarence

Clarence dreams that he is on a ship with his brother, discussing their previous battles of the Wars of the Roses. Richard stumbles and pushes Clarence overboard. As he is drowning, Clarence sees the bodies of thousands of drowned men, scattered with gold and precious stones. His father-in-law, the Earl of Warwick, and Prince Edward, whom he helped murder at the Battle of Tewkesbury, appear to him and condemn him to Hell.

Stanley

Clarence tells Richard that one of the reasons he has been arrested is because Edward IV has had dreams and prophecies. Later on, Anne tells Elizabeth that she is kept awake at night by Richard's 'timorous dreams.' There are also frequent references to prophecies throughout the play, with Margaret being hailed a 'prophetess' as each of her curses come true. Perhaps most significantly, on hearing that Rivers and Grey have been arrested, Elizabeth has a vision where she sees a tiger killing a hind (a deer) and predicts the downfall of the House of York.

However, the most significant dream in *Richard III* is a shared experience between Richard and Richmond, in which the two men are visited by the ghosts of Richard's victims the night before they battle. Richmond feels refreshed by these dreams, whereas Richard is left in turmoil.

RICHARD'S DEFORMITY

As previously mentioned, there is little historical evidence to support the idea that Richard III was a deformed hunchback, but by choosing to construct his central character in this way Shakespeare paints a very vivid and memorable picture, and gives the actor playing Richard a great deal of physical and behavioural clues to the character.

In his opening speech, Richard discusses his deformity, telling us that his body is 'curtailed of this fair proportion,' 'cheated of feature' and 'unfinished,' and that as a result of this deformity, he is 'determined to prove a villain'. His choice of the word 'determined' poses an interesting question. He could be referring to his ambition, meaning that he has the determination to be a villain. However he could also mean that his fate as a villain has been predetermined by his physical appearance. Is Richard's deformity the cause or the sign of his villainy?



At several points during the play, it is suggested that Richard is deformed because he was born prematurely. He himself says that he was 'sent before my time into this breathing world'. In recent times, academics and actors have tried to identify the medical condition that Richard may have been suffering from. Some, including the actor Antony Sher, have suggested it is spinal polio, a contagious disease affecting the nervous system. Others have decided that scoliosis, a severe curvature of the spine, is most likely.

The insults frequently levelled at Richard frequently align his physical appearance to that of an animal. Lady Anne calls him a 'hedgehog,' whilst Margaret refers to him as a 'hog,' a 'bottled spider,' and a 'poisonous bunch-backed toad'. Actors playing the role have frequently drawn on these descriptions in their characterisation, with Antony Sher moving around the stage like a spider facilitating his movement with crutches, whilst Simon Russell Beale exhibited a toad-like physicality.

GHOSTS

Ghosts feature heavily in several of Shakespeare's tragedies. They are frequently associated with the themes of revenge and guilt. Perhaps most famously, Hamlet is visited by the ghost of his dead father who orders him to avenge his death. In *Macbeth*, the title character has his friend Banquo murdered, and is then haunted by his silent ghost, representing the physical embodiment of his guilt.

However, no other Shakespeare play features as many ghosts as *Richard III*. In Act V, Scene 3, the ghosts of all of Richard's victims appear to him.



Who are the ghosts?

Clarence

Richard's brother, and his first victim in the play, Clarence is stabbed and then drowned in a vat of wine at the Tower of London.

Lord Rivers

Queen Elizabeth's brother, Rivers, is executed at Pomfret Castle, along with the Queen's eldest son Lord Grey.

Lord Hastings

The Lord Chamberlain, and initially one of Richard's allies, Hastings is accused of treason and is beheaded.

Prince Edward and Richard of York

The young princes, Richard's nephews, are suffocated as they sleep at the Tower of London.

Lady Anne

The widow of Henry VI's son Prince Edward, and later Richard's wife, Anne is poisoned by Richard and dies shortly after.

Buckingham

Richard's closest friend and advisor throughout the play, Buckingham is arrested for treason and beheaded.

With the exception of Lady Anne, all of these deaths are prophesied by Henry VI's widow Queen Margaret in Act I, Scene 4, whereas Lady Anne actually curses herself in Act I, Scene 2. In Act V, Scene 3, the ghosts all place their curse on Richard, each ending with the cry 'Despair and die!'. They then appear to Richmond, giving him their blessing to win the next day's battle. These ghosts have no physical power, but their words have a deep impact on both men, endowing Richard with his first pangs of guilt and filling Richmond with confidence, as they enter into battle.

A ROUGH GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE'S VERSE

The majority of Shakespeare's writing uses the **iambic pentameter**. This is a metrical line which divides ten syllables into five pairs, most frequently following the pattern of 'unstressed/stressed'. It mirrors the rhythms of the human heartbeat and follows the common patterns found in everyday speech.

Try saying the following line out loud, stressing the underlined words:

- 'We stress the words we want the world to hear'

Now think about some of Shakespeare's most famous lines, and do the same exercise:

- 'If music be the food of love, play on' (*Twelfth Night*)
- 'But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?' (*Romeo & Juliet*)

There are lots of memorable lines which use the iambic pentameter to great effect in *Richard III*. For example:

- 'My horse, my horse, my kingdom for a horse!'

In the majority of cases, it is the most important words that are stressed.

SHAKESPEARE'S PROSE

Prose refers to a style of writing which is not poetic, and therefore has no set rhythm. We would most frequently associate it with contemporary drama and novels. Most of Shakespeare's plays are written using a combination of verse and prose. There are only four plays written entirely in verse and they are all History plays: *Henry VI Part One*, *Henry VI Part Three*, *King John* and *Richard II*. As a general rule, it is Shakespeare's lower class characters who speak in prose; in *Richard III* it is used by Clarence's murderers.

SHAKESPEARE'S GENRES

Traditionally, Shakespeare's plays have been divided into three categories:

The Comedies

Typical Themes:	Romance, Mistaken Identity and Family
Characteristics:	Cross-dressing, unrequited love, shipwrecks, often set in Italy
Ending:	Marriage

The Tragedies

Typical Themes:	Power, Doomed Love, and Death
Characteristics:	The rise and fall of a flawed character, murder, dramatic irony
Ending:	Death

The Histories

Typical Themes:	Power, Fathers and Sons, and War
Characteristics:	Characters named after English towns and counties, battles
Ending:	Death or Cliffhanger

However, several of Shakespeare's later Comedies, such as *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Winter's Tale*, are now frequently referred to as 'Problem Plays' or 'tragicomedies' to reflect the fact that they do not sit comfortably within any of these traditional genres.

Some plays even align themselves with more than one genre. *Richard III* is obviously one of the Histories, but its full title, *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, indicates that the story of Richard's rise and fall follows the model of a traditional Shakespearean tragedy.

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

Have you ever written a 'love letter'? Played with a 'puppy dog'? Waited with 'bated breath'? Or been a victim of 'the green-eyed monster'? If you have, you have Shakespeare to thank for giving you the phrase to describe the experience! Shakespeare is credited with coining hundreds of phrases which have since established themselves as part of English speech. He also invented hundreds of words including 'assassination,' 'bedroom' and 'puke.'

SHAKESPEARE'S INSULTS

Nowhere is Shakespeare's creative use of language in greater evidence than in his inventive insults. Some of his strongest and most offensive feature in *Richard III*.

- 'Thou lump of foul deformity!'
- 'Out of my sight! Thou dost infect my eyes!
A knot you are of damned bloodsuckers!'
- 'Foul, bunch-backed toad!'
- 'Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog!'

VOCABULARY GUIDE FOR RICHARD III

Bastard is a word used to define a child who is born to unmarried parents, and most frequently refers to a child whose paternity is called into question, and is therefore classed as illegitimate. In *Richard III*, Richard and Buckingham try to spread the rumour that Edward IV and his sons Edward and York are all bastards.

The Boar refers to the emblem of the white boar on Richard's coat of arms. The boar was one of the most dangerous and aggressive wild animals in Medieval England, and its symbolism would not have been lost on Elizabethan audiences. As Richard is referred to as a 'hog' several times, the link is frequently made between him and his adopted emblem.

Council refers to the Privy Council, a group of important political and religious figures who gather together to advise the monarch. The Privy Council still exists in the United Kingdom today, although its function differs from within the context of *Richard III*. Full Council meetings are only held if a monarch becomes engaged, or if they die. In *Richard III*, the Council meets following the death of Edward IV to discuss the coronation of Edward V.

Plantagenet refers to the family line from which the Houses of York and Lancaster are both descended. There were fifteen Plantagenet monarchs in total, starting with Henry II in 1154, and ending with Richard III in 1485.

Protector refers to a position held by a member of the royal family or government, who acts as the head of state when a monarch is considered too young or ill to reign. In *Richard III*, Edward IV's will names Richard as his son's Protector.

Pomfret refers to the Yorkshire town and castle now known as Pontefract. Richard II was murdered in Pomfret Castle at the beginning of The Wars of the Roses, and it is at this same castle that Rivers and Grey are executed under Richard's regime.

Sanctuary can refer to either a consecrated area within a church, or, more frequently in *Richard III*, to the right held by those in danger to shelter within a religious building. A person claiming sanctuary could not be touched by their enemies, or by the law. Although sanctuary was most frequently reserved for criminals, in *Richard III*, when Queen Elizabeth realises that she and her family in danger, she and her youngest son York claim sanctuary in Westminster Abbey, temporarily protecting themselves from Richard.

The Tower refers to the Tower of London, which until the beginning of the Tudor period served a double purpose; as a royal palace and a prison. Henry VI was imprisoned and murdered by Richard in the Tower, and in *Richard III*, Clarence and the young princes are all murdered there.

Zounds is an exclamation of surprise, originating from the phrase 'God's wounds.'

IN CONVERSATION WITH... GT UPCHURCH

ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE OF THE BRIDGE PROJECT

You were the Artistic Associate on the previous two years of The Bridge Project; how was that?

Fantastic, it's been an amazing job. I think one of the great things about touring Shakespeare around the world is that a lot of the countries that we visited have seen Shakespeare productions but they have never seen them in English, in the original language. And even if the audience didn't speak English or were using surtitles to follow the dialogue, they still appreciated hearing the play in its original rhythm. That was exciting.

Were the responses quite different from country to country?

Yes, they were. There are cultural differences in how audiences appreciated certain characters and certain parts of the story. For example when we were in Singapore, Sinead Cusack was applauded on her exit from her Paulina scene in *The Winter's Tale*, because to see a woman take control of a room and speak to a king that way delighted them in a particular way. It was also quite shocking to them that Perdita and Florizell got married without their parents' permission. That part of the plot was thrilling and exciting to that particular audience.



In terms of the different venues that you played, what were some of the challenges that you experienced?

The varying stage sizes was one of the bigger challenges in terms of putting the shows into particular venues like Auckland and Singapore, which are vast, and then going into tiny jewel box theatres in Europe. The Theatre Marigny, Paris was tiny and required us to change the furniture and some staging around in some scenes as there just wasn't enough room on stage. That's always the fun part of taking a show around the world; you have to take the project apart and re-examine it each time, which I feel was exciting for the actors, and also beneficial in a way because it never stagnates. Sam is the kind of director who is quite happy for people to keep exploring and finding things and developing their characters, which often got deeper as we travelled.

Had you done a lot of Shakespeare before you came to this?

No, I had directed a production of *Romeo & Juliet* but it's quite hard as an emerging director in New York to get a job doing Shakespeare. Because of the amount of cast and the expense of the project, it sadly doesn't happen as much as I think it should. It was thrilling for me to watch Sam put these productions together and be a part of that. I've learned a lot.

What would you say would be an enduring memory that will stay with you about The Bridge Project over these last three years?

My favourite memory of The Bridge Project would be being in Epidauros, the ending venue of the first year tour. There's something very magical about that place. Performing *The Winter's Tale* there in which the characters bring on the oracle from Delphi, which is literally two and a half hours away from where we were, was one of the most magical moments in theatre that I can ever imagine. We were all sat under the canopy of the stars with 12,000 people. It was gorgeous.

IN CONVERSATION WITH... GEMMA JONES

When did you first happen upon Shakespeare?

The very first play that I did professionally was the *Merchant of Venice*, which I did at Nottingham play house. I played Portia and I absolutely loved it. But the first time I really got hooked and thought 'Oh gosh, I want to do much more of this' was playing Ophelia in *Hamlet*, which I did at the Birmingham Rep Theatre with an actor called Richard Chamberlain, who young people won't know now, but at the time he was a very famous American actor and was in an American series called Dr Kildare. He was brought over from America and he was very handsome, so there was a lot of focus and attention on this production. I got some nice notices for playing Ophelia and I wouldn't mind playing Gertrude who I've never played. I've only done *Hamlet* the once; it's a wonderful, wonderful play.

What is it that appeals to you about Shakespeare?

Psychologically it's very contemporary; you can research into the psychology of the characters just as you would for a modern play. And the archetypal stories are just so moving.

How as an actor do you combat the language in order to make it clear for an audience?

Well, it can be really difficult and I don't always find it easy myself. I hope that as an actor one finds a way, because if the thought process is clear then the meaning should be clear. It doesn't necessarily matter if people don't understand it word for word, as long as they get the intention and the meaning of it. Sometimes I go to see theatre productions and I can't hear properly because the intentions aren't clear. Our director Sam Mendes says you absolutely have to think on the line, not between the lines. In contemporary work, if you're filming and doing television, you do a lot of thinking and there's thinking in pauses, 'umming' and 'aahing'. Whereas with Shakespeare, if you play the rhythm of the speech and focus on the overall intention, this is often far clearer than if you endow it with all sorts of contemporary pauses and reflections.

You're playing Queen Margaret: how do you feel about her and her role in the play?

As I'm talking to you it's still a work in progress, so it's hard for me to discuss really. It's a very, very demanding role because it's like an aria. I can't talk about it as I'm so nervous!



IN CONVERSATION WITH... CHUK IWUJI

Tell us about your previous experience with the History Plays.

I played Henry VI with the RSC; we did all eight of the History plays and I played Henry VI in Parts One, Two and Three which of course cumulates with the emergence of a young Richard III. It's quite interesting to actually be in scenes that I only had an aural relationship with, but it's great because a lot of the background of Henry VI has made its way into this production. It's great to come into the play knowing the young Richard, knowing the history that everyone's talking about, knowing the political turmoil. It's like revisiting an old friend. It's fantastic just having it on its own as the immediacy of the play is almost heightened, because we don't have the luxury of people having seen Henry VI, Parts One, Two and Three before this. You have to, in this contained play, give them that experience in a shorter amount of time, so there's something very exciting about that.



What sort of role does Buckingham play?

'Kingmaker' is the best word to describe Buckingham. In this production Buckingham is someone who is very politically astute, very driven, very ambitious, and his goal is to be the man behind the scenes who pulls the strings. History is littered with characters like that. I don't think he aspires for the crown but he aspires to be the person behind the crown. He thinks very quickly on his feet. He and Richard are a sort of double act to get to the crown until things go all horribly wrong, which inevitably in this world always does because it's a world built on lies. It's a world built on scheming which eventually comes around to catch up with you. As Buckingham says, in relation to the wrongs he's done 'Thus does He force the swords of wicked men to turn their own points in their masters' bosom': I think that's very much a theme in this play.

Do you think that it's fair to say that Buckingham does have limits? Despite his lust for power, is there a line that he won't cross?

Yes. And therein is where he and Richard have to go their different ways, because, however deep-seated it is inside him, Buckingham does have a limit. His limit, as we all see in the play, is that there are certain things he is willing to do and certain things he thinks are even beyond him. And unfortunately for him, Richard doesn't feel the same way.

As an actor, do you have a different approach to Shakespeare as opposed to a more contemporary play?

In preparation, not really. I approach preparation the same way as any play. I try to know as much of the text prior to rehearsals so that I don't have to think about the text when I get into the rehearsal room, and then I can play. Shakespeare is different because no one else does as much of the work for you as he does. The number of times I've attempted certain things and hit a road block, and then realise that coming back to just saying the words and following the structure unlocks everything. I don't think I've experienced that in any other writer as profoundly as in Shakespeare. Shakespeare is a writer who I really, really trust. He allows enough space for an actor to trust his instincts and use his instincts. Fortunately for us he gives us so many signposts, so many guidelines, so many lanes to go down, that if you actually break it down and go back to his text and follow the text, he gives you so many clues.

IN CONVERSATION WITH... TOM PIPER

DESIGNER

How do you begin designing a play like this, particularly a Shakespeare play?

I suppose the challenge for me is that I already designed the whole eight Histories for the RSC, so I've done *Richard III* but at the end of the story. For me it's been about trying to put away all of those sorts of things and start thinking 'How do you approach this play as a standalone?', and then it does become very much Richard's story. When you see Richard in the context of the other plays, he doesn't actually seem as mad and as brutal because you've seen so much brutality in the Wars of the Roses. There's nobody in this world who's actually an innocent. So then you think, how do we get the world of the play without that back-story?

So I begin by doing a lot of research and talking with Sam. There's a misconception sometimes that directors arrive and say 'This is how I want to do it', so you go away and design the set and they go 'Oh that's nice'. However, it's actually much more of a collaborative, two-way process where you exchange ideas and develop them together. Initially Sam was looking for something that had a Grand Guignol, a big impact to it, potentially quite big and grotesque. We looked at images of morgues, we looked at old warehouses, in fact at the very beginning he was talking about there being lots of TV screens and surveillance, so I explored those ideas. As it went along we went through various stages and began to focus down on the idea of a single playing space that could be multi-purpose. And so the idea of the doors developed. At one point I made three different versions of the model with different types of doors.

It's interesting as every director you work with has very different approaches to text and staging, and Sam is very clear that there is an anchor for every scene, that it is rooted in the sense of the place. One of the great things about Shakespeare is that in a sense he normally tells you where you are. So although the aesthetic will end up being quite pared back, one of the challenges is how we get the dynamism, so the momentum doesn't slow down. One of the things I've found from doing a lot of Shakespeare is that scenes should pile one onto the other; very often you join a scene in the middle of it so you don't get the leisure of thinking 'Ooh, here we are', instead you're bang straight into it and there is a danger with this way of staging it. I'm hoping that the audience don't get door fatigue!

What is it that excites you about Shakespeare's work?

For me it's the language. It's more than just beautiful; it can be very comic, it can be very profound, it can be very moving. It evokes the full range of human experience. I've done other Jacobean playwrights who just don't quite have that ability. They can be funny but you don't get moved in the same way. Shakespeare and his tyrants, in a sense, their fall, their charisma is what's compelling for us. They're complex, difficult people but ultimately it's their story that's going to move you. As a designer, less can be more. You don't need to realise every single location, you can keep it fluid; the language will tell you where you are. So even though we've got lots of different furniture for this, we're still fundamentally in the same space all the time. We're not moving walls around or flying pieces in to create different locations, so it's actually the words and what the actors can do, that will tell the story. That's what I enjoy.

What is the role of the designer?

To create the world of the play. The process is one of trying to serve the play and bring its meaning out, not in a worthy way but in an exciting way that hopefully will reveal things that the audience hasn't seen before. I think that's the reason why we keep redoing the same plays. I've done several of Shakespeare's plays, and because each time you do it, you're working with a new group of people, and the world is continually changing. New things come into focus. We've been doing this play during the Arab Spring uprising and there isn't really a hint of that, but we as an audience have seen tyrants be disposed. At the end of this play, you could wonder 'Will Richmond turn into another dictator?'.



IN CONVERSATION WITH... SAM MENDES & KEVIN SPACEY

EXPLORING THE DARK SIDE: SAM MENDES AND KEVIN SPACEY TAKE A BREATH FROM REHEARSALS TO DISCUSS AN ICONIC ROLE AND A PLAY THAT RESONATES TODAY

Why did you select *Richard III* for the final year of The Bridge Project?

Sam Mendes: When we conceived the idea of The Bridge Project, we always planned that Kevin would act in the final year. Casting and play choices are often about timing so, for me, it was about finding a vehicle for Kevin. And I've always thought, even before I met him, having seen *The Usual Suspects* and *Seven*, that here is a technically brilliant actor born to play Richard. I directed this piece about 20 years ago but what ultimately unlocked the choice this time was the thought of Kevin in the role. I wanted him to access that truly dark part of himself again.

So how does it feel being asked to access the dark side?

Kevin Spacey: Well, you have to go to places you generally don't want to go, examine all the things in your own life that you regret, unearth all the shit, for this role. Then you have to have the guts to share it with an audience, to say, 'here, I have nothing to hide from you, nothing to be ashamed of, this is the person I am, warts and all.' Richard is an incredible character because he does all the things he sets out to do and says he will, and is so delighted with the outcome that he constantly ups the ante. It is a big ask of an actor in every respect. It's a physically and emotionally demanding role, one that requires dexterity with language, and a commitment to giving 150%. That's why I've stopped drinking, smoking, everything, to dedicate myself to this character.

As you have explored Shakespeare's text, what contemporary resonances have become apparent?

Sam: When you divorce *Richard III* from the history plays, taking it away from its War of the Roses context, it becomes a piece less about monarchy, less about English history, and more about power. In a sense this is one of the first great portraits of a modern dictator. It is astonishing living in the 21st century that there are still figures today on the front page of every newspaper, Gaddafi, for example, or Mubarak, who are exactly what Shakespeare described and anatomised 400 years ago. Staging *Richard III* with an international company allows you to loosen the ties that make it purely English and, in doing so, perhaps it becomes a little more global, a study of dictatorship. It's interesting to observe how such figures tend to arrive with a reputation for confident, even-handed communication, promising order in a time of chaos. But then of course once they achieve power, the degree of their corruption is revealed.

Kevin: The thing that is always so surprising about plays written in another century is how remarkably elastic they are. When you listen to the way in which Shakespeare attacks relationships, for example, even though the words may start off sounding foreign, in actuality they are so accessible, the motivations so clear, the resonances so contemporary. When you put it in a modern context, we could well be in a place with someone like a Gaddafi or Mubarak, it becomes apparent how *Richard III* resonates with that type of personality, with media and manipulation, alliances and petty jealousies. It is fascinating how relevant it is to a contemporary audience, even one that might not know Shakespeare well.

What other qualities make the play special?

Sam: In *Richard III* one has the impression of a young writer, Shakespeare completed the play fairly early in his career, exploring the many stylistic opportunities that theatre affords him. So he constructs scenes in different styles. There's a naturalistic death and a very stylised death. He writes almost ritualistic scenes of mourning and very funny scenes about political intrigue. He is unafraid of orchestrating dissonant scenes in this way, of harnessing high comedy and the deepest tragedy. That's still a pretty daring thing, a play in a multitude of styles out of which something unified emerges. This lends the piece modernity.

How important is the relationship that Shakespeare orchestrates between Richard and the audience?

Kevin: Unique, very special, because Richard confides in his audience, and they become his co-conspirators. Shakespeare quite brilliantly uses direct address throughout much of the play. If you look at the scene after he wakes from his nightmare in Act V, it is startling how much he is willing to reveal. There's a need to perhaps share what he is experiencing and feeling. It's the first time you get a sense that he might have a conscience, or feel guilt, or regret. That's exciting to explore.

Sam: Shakespeare uses theatrical forms that remain incredibly modern, and one of them is direct address. He doesn't really employ this much in the other history plays; he has Richard II and Henry V talking to God, to themselves, in a type of interior monologue, a form of soliloquy, but only with Richard and Falstaff do you have a man walk to the front of the stage, eyeball the audience, and say 'you, you people sitting in these seats, I'm talking to you directly'. It remains daring, even now.

REHEARSAL NOTES FROM ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR BRUCE GUTHRIE

EXTRACTS FROM BRUCE'S REHEARSAL DIARY

Week 1

There is a great feeling in the rehearsal room. The actors have bonded very well together (which is always important when you are going to be working and living together as a company for such a long period of time) and there is a great working relationship between Sam and all of his team. Kevin seems to be enjoying the process so far and is very well prepared coming into this process. Full of ideas and bristling with energy, he is a commanding presence when performing. He has a huge passion for the play and indeed The Bridge Project itself.

We start the week with a 'meet and greet' where the cast, creative team and staff from The Old Vic all meet together in the rehearsal room to say 'hello' to each other. Our American cast members only arrived a few days ago so they have the challenge of hitting the ground running so to speak. Kevin and Sam talk a bit about how they feel about The Bridge Project as a whole and then we get down to business; the reading. The first reading of a play can be nerve-wracking but, as we have such a grounded and excellent cast, the reading is playful and very clear.

We get to look at Tom Piper's set design. It is both eerie and practical with many 'wow' factors that will really add to the play and deepen the visual experience as well as enhancing the clarity of the story. Both he and Sam talk us through the plan for each scene but Sam makes it clear that this is up for debate and that a lot will change during the rehearsal process. I like this approach as it allows for creative ideas to be thrown into the mix and gives the actors the freedom to explore their surroundings and find what they need to tell the story better. It also means that Sam is not limiting himself should he have another idea on how the scene should work.

We talk through the play while reading it, clarifying any meanings of words or phrases in Shakespeare's language, as well as observing the blank verse Shakespeare writes in. Sam also asks cast members to paraphrase passages of the text in their own words. We talk about the history of the characters in the play (both factual and in Shakespeare's version of history). We discuss the merits of historical fact being used in the play and Sam makes it clear that we are performing the play of *Richard III* rather than a historical account of Richard's reign. I agree with this totally. While it is interesting to know the facts, if it's not in the text or it doesn't help to enhance the world of the play, we should ignore it. For example, there is no historical evidence to support the claim that Richard had a crook back or a limp or a withered left arm. Sam makes the point that it is always a good idea to try to stick to the blank verse rather than trying to naturalise Shakespeare's work. While he is not necessarily opposed to the notion of naturalising the text, he does point out that it is usually clearer if we observe the beats as he wrote them. This is very worthwhile as it ensures the actors know exactly what they are saying when they speak the lines and thus it is clearer to us as an audience.

Week 2

Having gone through the play while sat around a table, we now begin to put it on its feet. A circle of comfortable chairs and cushions is created in the rehearsal room and each actor gets up and acts out a scene when required. This is met with a mixture of excitement and terror from the actors at first. The idea of being so exposed and the pressure of performing the scenes well with everyone watching seems like a lot to deal with all at once. Kevin deals with the situation brilliantly and gives a rousing rendition of Richard's opening monologue. Sam then stops him from continuing with the scene and gives him some exercises and a variety of settings to play the speech with. These involve many members of the company and because the rehearsal process has been put on display for all to see, the nerves within the company disappear and there is a sense of freedom to play with the text that may well have been inhibited had they not been put at ease by the demonstration by Kevin and Sam.

It is an interesting process which give the actors license to offer up suggestions of how to play the scene and Sam uses it to experiment and try's out all sorts of different dynamics to scenes. He also makes sure the actors know everything they are saying and makes them feel very comfortable while introducing many of his ideas and concepts for the production. It is a method that seems to promote discovery and Sam treats it like it's a brand new play, exploring interpretation and relationships. Unlike Shakespeare's later plays which are more complicated in terms of plot, there is no subplot in *Richard III*: it is all about Richard's rise to, and fall from, power. We discover that when we adhere to the blank verse and pauses

Shakespeare has written, it is remarkably clear in meaning and intention.

This is not a process to rush through as I get a sense of the actors taking ownership of the play as a whole. Since many of them are used in several exercises, actors playing smaller roles are utilised a lot more than they may have expected to have been. I think this kind of ownership of a play is very important for actors as they will work harder and care more about the whole play rather than their own role exclusively.

Week 3

We continue to work in the same way as at the end of the previous week, and it continues to be beneficial. There are lots of interesting ideas coming through, and the actors are really making the script their own. Relationships between characters are being made clear, and bits of furniture and props are being introduced to the action.

Sam is working in more and more detail as the week goes on. A brilliant note from Sam is that “nothing you do is more important than the next thing you will say”. This is such an important note for playing Shakespeare. The beauty of it is in the spoken word and the narrative. It is so open to interpretation because Shakespeare wrote very few locations or stage directions. The sort of quasi contemporary setting really works for me as it will allow us to create our own world for the play and so it allows us a lot of creative freedom.

Sam also introduces the idea that Margaret is present at each of the deaths in the play to witness her curse being carried out. This gives the play a supernatural edge and an ominous feeling about the conclusion of the play. It also creates an even more eerie atmosphere during the various executions and absolutely highlights the importance of Margaret in the play. She is a sort of Cassandra figure and a warrior Queen driven to the edge by despair and grief. The women of the play are all flawed and touching in their own ways. Their scenes are very strong, even at this early stage of rehearsal. Haydn is off book as Elizabeth and this makes a huge difference to her performance. She is able to concentrate on creating scenes and relationships with other actors. Eye contact and listening are vital to performance. If the actors are engaged with each other then the audience is engaged; they cannot be thinking about what comes next, but what is happening there and then. This is what we call ‘being in the moment’.



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