

Richard III

By William Shakespeare

What makes *Richard III* so compelling in the 21st Century? It's still one of the most frequently produced Shakesperean plays.

In this play,

- the **Apollonian** (intelligence, rationality, psychological insight) serves
- the **Dionysian** (instinct, irrationality, loss of self in frenzy)

According to Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, addressing the tension between the Apollonian and the Dionysian is the typical function of tragedy in the classical era (By **classical**, I mean ancient Athens of the 5th Cen B.C.).

There are some special attributes of *Richard III* that distinguish it for today.

- Richard is popular with actors because he is an actor himself, always lying to the people around him. They get to ham it up while he hams it up. He is a performer, director, observer, and critic.
- The 20th century was the century when the "demonic has siezed the rational for its own monstrous forwarding" (Weiss 200), i.e., when the Apollonian has served the Dionysian.
The Ian Mclellan movie makes Richard & his men like Hitler & the Nazis.

Important dates the remember

- **1483-1485** Richard III reigned as King of England. He was the last medieval king.
- **1592-1593** Shakespeare composed *Richard III*. He was writing about the civil war called the **War of the Roses**, which ended with Richard's death.

Shakespeare wrote numerous plays about the **War of the Roses**. It was a civil war that affected Shakespeare's England the way the American Civil War has affected us. His characters in these plays often needed little introduction--like Abraham Lincoln and Robert E. Lee, they were already familiar to his audience and only needed to be trotted out to play their expected roles

Richard III was the fourth in a series of plays called Shakespeare's **First Tetralogy**. (A tetralogy is a series of four, just as a trilogy is a series of three.).



The First Tetralogy

1. *King Henry VI, Part I*
2. *King Henry VI, Part II*
3. *King Henry VI, Part III*
4. *Richard III*

Weiss compares these four to the classic tradition of presenting three tragedies, followed by a satyr-play (Weiss 200). A satyr play was a burlesque, funny play to conclude the more serious tragedies.

Sources Shakespeare used

1. Historical sources: The War of the Roses. Why was it called that? The warring houses were each represented by roses.

	The House of Lancaster	the Red Rose
	The House of York	the White Rose

2. Political Philosophy

Machiavelli had written the infamous book on politics, *The Prince*. It described the amoral political behavior of Italian Renaissance rulers. Shakespeare makes his Richard an example of the Machiavellian prince even though he lived before Machiavelli. This is an **anachronism**, where something takes place before it really could. The movie we'll watch is full of anachronisms, which are intentional.

3. Medieval Drama. The Morality stories portrayed various allegorical characters. Richard at one point plays the Vice, a character noted by cheerful evil. Shakespeare is influenced by these old dramas.
4. Classical Drama. Shakespeare is especially influenced by Seneca, a Roman poet / philosopher / statesman. Seneca wrote 10 dramas based on earlier Greek works. In Seneca's *Atreus*, Furies pursue the house of Tantalus. Atreus is a king who pretends to make up with his brother Thyestes to exact revenge. He kills his nephews, cooks them, and feeds them to his unsuspecting brother. Like Richard, he revels in his evil. The Furies in *Richard III* are the women who follow him around cursing him.

Objectively, Richard and Richmond (who became Henry VII) behave in similar ways.

- They kill off the king to take the throne themselves.
- They marry a woman from the other camp so they can solidify their claim to the throne.
- Richard was actually brave. He was the last king of England to die in battle. Kings since then have led from behind.

Why then does Shakespeare make this a case of good versus evil?

- a. It's better drama that way.
- b. It's the traditional way of portraying Richard III.
- c. The **Tudor Myth**. Henry VII (Richmond) founded the Tudor Dynasty after killing off Richard III. To strengthen his claim on the throne, which he won from the crowned king in a rebellion, he had to make Richard look as bad as possible. Henry VII's granddaughter, Elizabeth, was Shakespeare's queen. For him to undermine her legitimacy by questioning her rebel grandfather's right to rule would be politically incorrect in an era when being politically incorrect could mean that you lose your head. Elizabeth had been declared illegitimate by the Catholic church because she was Protestant. Shakespeare makes Henry VII / Richmond look good to make Elizabeth look good. Therefore, Richard III must look bad. For a more balanced evaluation of Richard, try the [Richard III Society \(http://www.richardiii.net/\)](http://www.richardiii.net/).

Richard III works on both the natural level and supernatural / mythic levels. These are 2 levels of causation, supernatural and natural. These correspond to allegory versus realism, the two major representational techniques in the 1590s.

Mythic / Allegorical	Natural / Realistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is evil incarnate, the Vice of medieval plays. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The Vice uses asides, ◦ tells the audience his plans, ◦ boasts about his own power and depravity, ◦ attacks others, ◦ pretends to be a victim himself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is evil because his mom doesn't love him. • People look down at him because of his birth defect. Like us, they tend to judge a book by its cover. His external defect in the theory of the time reflected internal evil • He feels inferior and despises himself.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Furies (cursing women) pursue him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Richmond defeats him. A bland cipher of a character. Richard is much more appealing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His dreams are supernatural omens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His dreams are the product of a bad conscience & self-loathing.

Richard draws us into his evil & makes us participate in it.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Character	Title in Play	Description
KING EDWARD IV	King Edward IV	The King of England. Head of the York family. Richard's oldest brother.
EDWARD	Prince Edward King Edward V	Prince of Wales. Son to King Edward IV
RICHARD	York	Duke of York. Son to Edward IV.
GEORGE	Clarence	Duke of Clarence. Brother to Edward IV.
RICHARD	Gloucester, King Richard III	Duke of Gloucester. Brother to Edward IV. Afterwards King Richard III.
BOY	Boy	A young son of Clarence.
HENRY	Richmond	Earl of Richmond. Afterwards King Henry VII.
CARDINAL BOURCHIER	Cardinal	Archbishop of Canterbury.
THOMAS ROTHERHAM	Archbishop of York	Archbishop of York.
JOHN MORTON Bishop of Ely	Bishop of Ely	
DUKE of BUCKINGHAM	Buckingham	
DUKE of NORFOLK	Norfolk	
EARL of SURREY	Surrey	His son.
EARL RIVERS	Rivers	Brother to Elizabeth.
MARQUIS OF DORSET	Dorset	Son to Elizabeth.
LORD GREY	Grey	Son to Elizabeth.
EARL of OXFORD	Oxford	
LORD HASTINGS	Hastings	
LORD STANLEY Called also EARL of DERBY	Stanley Derby	
LORD LOVEL	Lovel	
SIR THOMAS VAUGHAN	Vaughan	
SIR RICHARD RATCLIFF	Ratcliff	
SIR WILLIAM CATESBY	Catesby	
SIR JAMES TYRREL	Tyrrel	
SIR JAMES BLUNT	Blunt	
SIR WALTER HERBERT	Herbert	
SIR ROBERT BRAKENBURY	Brakenbury	Lieutenant of the Tower.
CHRISTOPHER URSWICK	Christopher	A priest.
PRIEST	Priest	Another Priest.
TRESSEL	Gentleman	Gentlemen attending on the Lady Anne.
BERKELEY	Gentleman	Gentlemen attending on the Lady Anne.
LORD MAYOR OF LONDON	Lord Mayor	
SHERIFF OF WILTSHIRE	Sheriff	
ELIZABETH	Queen Elizabeth	Queen to King Edward IV
MARGARET	Queen Margaret	Widow of King Henry VI
DUCHESS of YORK	Duchess of York	Mother to King Edward IV.
LADY ANNE	Lady Anne	Widow of Edward Prince of Wales, Son to King Henry VI. Afterwards married to Richard.
GIRL	Girl	A young Daughter of Clarence [MARGARET PLANTAGENET]
Ghosts		Spirits of those murdered by Richard III.
Lords and other Attendants; a Pursuivant (a herald), Scrivener, Citizens , Murderers, Messengers, Soldiers, &c.		