

THE GUILD  
*Shakespeare*



THE GUILD

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HENRY VI, PART 3

RICHARD III

BY

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDITED BY

JOHN F. ANDREWS

Foreword by Claire Bloom

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## FOREWORD

to

*RICHARD III*

by Claire Bloom



The fascination of evil, the absolute fascination of absolute evil.

I was, as a young actress, given the role of Lady Anne opposite Laurence Olivier in his film of *Richard III*. As we rehearsed the wooing scene, a line from Ibsen's *A Lady from the Sea* kept coming to mind. "A terrible thing is something that attracts and repels you, but most of all, attracts." As I looked into Olivier's hooded, sea-cold eyes, I felt as unable to decide my own fate as the rabbit transfixed by the snake. If I felt like that, how could Lady Anne, bereft, vulnerable, grieving for her dead husband,

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CLAIRE BLOOM made her Broadway debut as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*. Among her many stage and screen roles are Blanche du Bois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Lady Anne in the film version of *Richard III*, and Teresa in *Limelight*, for which she won the British Film Award in 1952. More recently, she toured Britain and the United States with her one-woman show "These Are Women: A Portrait of Shakespeare's Heroines."

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resist seduction by this man who could so easily seduce at his will the most powerful peers of his realm, great princes of the Church, even his dead brother's wife Elizabeth Woodville, frantic with grief, whose sons he has murdered, and who, so soon after, appears ready to agree to give the monstrous king her daughter in marriage.

Lady Anne's punishment is swift and terrible. Richard soon tires of her, and after their coronation she disappears from the play, only to return as a restless, tormented ghost. The only memory that remains of her earthly existence is that she had never slept a quiet hour in his bed, but had constantly been awakened by his timorous dreams.

Sleeplessness and nightmare are endemic to this play. Murder and violence fill the nights of Richard's followers, all terrified of being betrayed to Richard's secret police, betrayed by each other. England sleeps under an evil spell, and will only be awakened after the ritual killing of the malevolent king by a pure knight without fear and without reproach. Then the Middle Ages of endless civil wars and bloodshed will be finally over, and the golden age of the Tudor dynasty can at last begin.

I had seen Laurence Olivier's definitive performance of *Richard III* when I was a schoolgirl in London. My mother and I would go to the Old Vic theatre—often with my reluctant brother in tow—and watch the performance every Saturday night, not caring much which play in the Old Vic's repertoire was being performed. These were the superb years of the Olivier/Richardson partnership. Olivier played Hotspur—Richard III—Oedipus, while Ralph Richardson appeared as Falstaff—Peer Gynt—Uncle Vanya. Our small family would sit in the modestly priced Upper Circle

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## FOREWORD BY CLAIRE BLOOM

seats, and could name every actor in the company. *Richard III* was my favorite play, and my heroine in the company, Joyce Redman, a delicious, petite, Irish actress, who had the privilege to my adoring eyes of playing Lady Anne opposite the great man himself. I could never have believed it possible that less than ten years later, I would play Lady Anne in Olivier's film of *Richard III*.

In Olivier's performance, both on stage and in the film, the power of evil was so manifest it was almost palpable. I would imagine Edmund Kean had such power. From Olivier's first appearance, standing silently upstage in the shadows, then lurching suddenly toward the audience on his crooked legs, with his shrivelled arm, his claw-like hand, his staccato voice clipping the consonants like sharpened knives, you knew you were in the presence of true malevolence. Makeup had transformed Olivier into an Italianate tyrant, a Malatesta or Visconti, with aquiline nose and black lank hair, and a posture like one of the great cats waiting for the right moment to spring on, to destroy, his prey. Combined with mordant wit, self-knowing and self-loathing, and the courage in battle of a lion, Olivier's Richard was a Luciferian character of heroic yet demonic proportions. He flung his opening line, "Now is the winter of our discontent," before the audience like a steel gauntlet, and he died fighting for life with the animal stubbornness of a Rasputin. This was a performance by a great actor interpreting his greatest role. How fortunate that this magnificent performance was recorded on film, and how grateful I am to have played my role opposite Olivier's Richard III.

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Editor's Introduction to  
*HENRY VI, PART 3*  
and  
*RICHARD III*



In one of the tragicomedies that Shakespeare wrote near the beginning of the seventeenth century, a French Lord observes that "the Web of our Life is of a Mingl'd Yarn, Good and Ill together." The speaker's point is that there are flaws in the best of us, and strengths to admire or frailties to pity in even those human beings who initially impress us as corrupt to the core.

This perspective on the complexities of humanity is one of the hallmarks of Shakespearean drama at its most profound, and it has long been commended in the greatest achievements of the playwright's artistic maturity. What we sometimes fail to appreciate, however, is the degree to which such a viewpoint informs the very earliest of the author's works. We see many instances of it in Shakespeare's initial experiments with comedy and tragedy. And it is all-pervasive in the four plays—*Henry VI, Parts 1–3* and *Richard III*—with which the poet launched his career as a writer of serious historical drama in the years between 1589 and 1592.

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These plays have often been described as epic in the grandeur of their survey of the origins of the Elizabethan order. They dramatize more than sixty years of political and military turmoil. In the process, they allude to more than a century of previous discord. They display a broad cross-section of contemporary society. They touch on many of the religious and philosophical questions that occupied the minds of the playwright and his compatriots. And they allow the audience to participate in the lives of an extraordinary range of personalities as individual characters respond to the vicissitudes of Fortune and evolve over the course of a lifespan. By the time we finish *Henry VI, Part 3* and *Richard III* we cannot help feeling that, like the proverbial Nestor, we have lived long enough to experience virtually every facet of humanity.

We will probably never be able to account completely for Shakespeare's special ability to convey this impression of weight, depth, duration, and growth over time—this sense of human nature in all its ambiguity and variety. But one means of approaching the subject is to observe the way the playwright devises to offer us multiple views of the characters he regards as most significant.

Take the figure of Margaret. We first meet her toward the end of *Henry VI, Part 1*, when the Marquess Suffolk encounters a French maiden who captures his eye and prompts him, like the Trojan Paris, to subvert both King and Commonwealth in an obsessive quest to obtain her favors for himself. Suffolk cozens the impressionable young monarch into a rash marriage with this bewitching Helen, and by the time *Henry VI, Part 2* commences, the firebrand Marquess is on his way to an illicit affair with Queen Margaret that will reduce the King to a feckless Menelaus, foment

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

strife among the nobility, and thrust the Kingdom into a civil war that eventually leaves it no less devastated than the Ilium of antiquity. Before *2 Henry VI* draws to a conclusion, the Queen's lover has overplayed his hand; as a result he calls down upon himself a fate whose grotesquery befits the egregiousness of his crimes. Before he departs for what will turn out to be his final voyage, however, Suffolk is permitted a farewell scene with Margaret (III.ii) that is clearly designed to move even the most implacable of playgoers to share the loss that both characters feel at this unexpectedly touching moment.

As we follow Margaret through the three plays in which she appears, we witness a remarkable series of metamorphoses. She begins as a seeming ingenue (in V.v of *1 Henry VI*). Then she progresses from a modest bride (in I.i of *2 Henry VI*) to a proud Queen jealous over the royal prerogatives she perceives to be threatened by the patronage of Duke Humphrey and his haughty wife Elianor (in I.iii). Before long she becomes a vigorous participant in the conspiracy that rids the Kingdom of both the overreaching Elianor and the virtuous but impolitic Lord Protector (II.iii and III.i). After the shocking deaths of the Cardinal and Suffolk leave her without allies, however, Margaret is forced to deal with the irony that the sole beneficiary of all her maneuvers is Richard Plantagenet, the Yorkist Duke who has been stealthily biding his time in preparation for the moment when he could mount his own campaign for total power. As *2 Henry VI* draws to a close, Margaret sees the Duke of York and his sons emerge victorious from what will turn out to be the first battle of the Wars of the Roses, with Plantagenet now positioned to assert his claim to the Crown in the opening scene of *Henry VI, Part 3*.



When the pusillanimous Henry tries to appease Plantagenet with a pledge to make him heir to the throne in I.i of *3 Henry VI*, the outraged Margaret seizes control of the Lancastrian forces. Together with Clifford the "Butcher," she hunts Plantagenet down and slaughters him (I.iv). For much of *3 Henry VI* she holds the armies of the Red Rose together and fights bravely to keep the Yorkists at bay. But by the end of the play the heirs of York prevail, and Margaret loses both her valiant son and her pitiable husband to the fierce swords of the new King, Edward IV, and his perfidious brothers.

At this point Margaret shifts into her final and most imposing persona, that of a haunting Cassandra. She hovers in the background of *Richard III* like an avenging Fury, combining in her presence the roles of a Greek chorus, an Old Testament prophetess, and a Apocalyptic conscience for an England whose sufferings are now shown to be the direct consequence of the nation's failure to heed the immutable laws of Heaven. The Nemesis figure we witness in I.iii and IV.iv may be largely oblivious to her own complicity in these dire events, but she gives eloquent voice to the retributions that remain to be visited on others.

The transformations of Margaret are among the most stunning of Shakespeare's achievements in the Plantagenet tetralogy. But there are a number of additional characters who change and develop in equally telling ways.

Henry begins the trilogy that bears his name as a naive but well-meaning youth. In his first scene, III.i of *1 Henry VI*, he attempts to resolve a dispute between the irascible Winchester and the good Duke Humphrey by making the two men swear to live at peace; then he restores Richard Plantagenet to the two

titles that would have descended to him if Plantagenet's father, the Earl of Cambridge, had not conspired against the late Henry V. In his second scene, IV.i, the newly crowned King endeavors to make light of the feud between the Yorkists and the Lancastrians by donning the Red Rose of the Duke of Somerset and professing, no doubt sincerely, that he sees no reason why his wearing the color of one faction should suggest that he is any less inclined to the other: "Both are my Kinsmen," he affirms, "and I love them both."

It is not until the end of *1 Henry VI* that the King makes the decision that will spell his doom. After agreeing (V.i) to an arrangement that would have wed him to the daughter of the French Earl of Arminack (a union that promised to bring a generous dowry to the Crown and would have had the additional benefit of cementing favorable ties with the King of France), Henry allows Suffolk (V.vii) to seduce him into a disgraceful bond with the daughter of a penurious nobleman who claims to be "the King of Naples and Jerusalem." As the Lord Protector warns, Henry's determination to obey his passions rather than his reason will deface his honor, impoverish his realm, and unleash the ambitions of those who will now have reason to scorn the King as a foolish lightweight.

*2 Henry VI* dramatizes the effects of Henry's fateful error. Powerless to control his new wife and her co-conspirators, the King stands by as they alienate much of the kingdom, undercut the nation's foreign policy, and divest the inexperienced monarch of his one good counselor, the loyal Duke Humphrey. For a brief moment in III.ii Henry speaks out with boldness and indignation. He denounces the murderers of the "Shepherd" who has

been "beaten from [his] side." And then, with the encouragement of Warwick and the rioting Commons, he defies the Queen and sentences Suffolk to banishment. Shortly thereafter he also displays spiritual strength in his exhortations to the dying Cardinal (III.iii) and in his strategically wise decision to offer amnesty to the followers of Jack Cade (IV.viii, ix) rather than attack a mob of illiterates who have been misled by a demagogue. From this moment on, however, the King recedes more and more deeply into the passivity that becomes his besetting flaw.

In the battle of Saint Albans (V.ii of *2 Henry VI*) the King proves so ineffectual that the Queen asks him "What are you made of? You'll nor fight nor fly." Then in the scene that opens *3 Henry VI* he reveals himself to be so craven in the face of Plantagenet's challenge that he forfeits all his supporters and earns himself the contempt of both the Queen and the Prince whose inheritance he has just bargained away. After this it is up to Margaret and her son to preserve a legacy that the King now regards as a curse. The moment that defines Henry most eloquently is his pastoral meditation on a molehill (II.v) as the battle of Towton swirls around him. While he is lamenting the role into which life has cast him without his consent, he suddenly finds himself commiserating with two soldiers who have also been miscast in this senseless, bloody world: a son who has inadvertently killed his own father and a father who has mistakenly slain his own son.

By the concluding scene of *3 Henry VI* the King discovers himself in the hands of the man who is destined not only to kill the last Lancaster but to lop off his own Yorkist branch of the royal tree. As Henry awaits the blade that will dispatch him to the

Heaven for which he has long yearned (V.vi), he upbraids his assailant with the inspired conviction of a righteous Jeremiah. Then, in a Christ-like gesture that epitomizes both his strength and his weakness, the expiring King asks God to forgive his murderer and grant him pardon even for the atrocities he is yet to commit.

It is one of the paradoxes of the Shakespearean canon that the monarch whose name adorns the largest number of plays turns out to be the one with the least active role to perform in the life of those plays. What makes the troubled reign of Henry VI so miserable is the way virtually everyone but the King takes a stab at running the country during the thirty-nine years that transpire between the death of Henry V in 1422 and the ascent of Edward IV in 1461.

As *2 Henry VI* draws to a close, for example, it appears likely that Richard Plantagenet will re-enact the rise of Henry Bullingbrook and thereby redress some of the injustices that have been festering since the disfranchised Duke of Lancaster initiated this cycle of discord with his deposition of Richard II more than half a century earlier in 1399. Plantagenet seems every bit as aggrieved as Bullingbrook had been; but for all his machinations, he is much less cunning than his predecessor. Like the Hotspur whom Shakespeare would later depict in *1 Henry IV*, Plantagenet becomes intoxicated with self-confidence. That leads him to underestimate the prowess of his enemy (*3 Henry VI*, I.ii), and before he realizes what has happened he finds himself defenseless before a brace of Lancastrians with every motive to be ruthless.

What then occurs is another of Shakespeare's dramatic surprises. After depicting instance after instance of Plantagenet's



unscrupulousness, the playwright softens York's image in his final crisis (*3 Henry VI*, I.iv) by showing us the impassioned tears with which he responds to the tokens of a deed so inhumane that even his enemies are moved to pity.

After their father's death, York's sons repay cruelty with cruelty until they win for Edward (III.i) the Crown that had been denied Richard Plantagenet. Once he obtains the throne, however, Edward IV falls victim to the same kinds of folly that destroyed both Henry VI and Edward's own father. Like Henry, Edward spurns a politically prudent alliance that might have solidified relations with France (III.iii); and like Henry, he does so by heeding his passions rather than adhering to the dictates of reason (III.ii). For a while it appears that the new King may be able to evade the worst consequences of his error. What does him in (IV.ii–iii) is the same kind of misplaced "Security" that had precipitated his father's downfall.

To Edward's good fortune, his captors prove incapable of holding on to their advantage (IV.v) or even of keeping their own alliance intact (V.i). This gives Edward and his brothers the opportunity to finish the task they had earlier left undone. As everyone gathers around Edward's Queen and his newborn heir in the final scene of *3 Henry VI*, the reinstated King expresses the hope that here "begins our lasting Joy."

Once again, of course, such optimism proves premature. As we learn at the beginning of *Richard III*, Edward's "evil Diet" has begun to exact its toll, and a weakened King soon becomes susceptible to the manipulations of a younger brother whose previous loyalty would appear to have earned him the right to be trusted. Edward pays attention to a series of "drunken Prophe-

cies" that hint at the ambitions of his middle brother Clarence; and since Clarence has already forsworn his vows to Edward once, the King takes the prudent course and incarcerates him in the Tower.

There, in a theological sense that seems to go beyond the irony intended in a jest by his younger brother, Clarence is "new Christ'ned." He appears to repent of the crimes that have contributed to his arrival at this terrible pass, and among his last words (I.iv) are some remarks on Kingship that illuminate the remainder of the play.

Shortly thereafter (II.i) we witness a "new Christ'ned" Edward as well. The King who tries to implement the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12) before he dies is a far cry from the murderer who thrust the first blow at an earlier Edward in V.v of *3 Henry VI*. The Edward IV we see on his deathbed may be as naive in his peacemaking aspirations as the pious Henry VI turned out to be in his initial scene (III.i) of the play that opened the Plantagenet tetralogy; but an Elizabethan audience would nevertheless have been heartened by the degree to which the declining monarch appears to have prepared his soul for an eternal destiny that his earlier actions would scarcely have suggested.

Once Edward is gone, the way is cleared for the youngest of York's sons to "bustle" his way to the throne. In many ways Richard would have struck Shakespeare's first audiences as a conventional, even old-fashioned stage villain: the quick-witted, clever, self-disclosing Vice of the late-medieval Morality Plays (*Richard III*, III.i.82); the dissimulating Devil familiar from the Scriptures (*Richard III*, I.iii.337); the Judas who bestows a seemingly innocent kiss on the infant Prince he is secretly planning to

betray (*3 Henry VI*, V.vii.31–34). Richard compares himself to Sinon, the crafty Greek who beguiled the Trojans into taking the Wooden Horse within their walls, and he essays to lead a modern Troy to its own destruction (*3 Henry VI*, III.ii.189). He glories in his Ulyssean wiles; he boasts about the ease with which he can effect Protean transformations; he gloats that he "can add Colors to the Chameleon" (*3 Henry VI*, III.ii.123–94). Above all, Richard revels in pretense: he stage-manages and conducts his multiple roles with such facility that he never lets us forget that the Greek term for "actor" is the word from which we derive *hypocrite*.

Richard III is said to have been the most celebrated part of the great Richard Burbage, the performer who established Shakespeare's tragedy as one of the major hits of the early 1590s. From every indication the work remained popular throughout the playwright's lifetime. And it has maintained a prominent position on the boards ever since, with a stage tradition highlighted by David Garrick in the eighteenth century, Edmund Kean in the nineteenth, and Laurence Olivier and Antony Sher in the twentieth.

Nor is the reason hard to find. For despite the bold strokes with which he is portrayed, Richard III is a character of sufficient complexity to sustain a tremendous amount of dramatic interest. Even though we find ourselves repelled by his ruthless treachery, we cannot help admiring, even delighting in, the eloquence, resourcefulness, virtuosity, and sheer energy with which he first confides and then proceeds to execute his wicked intentions. His wooing of the grieving Lady Anne in the first act is a case in point. Having set himself the seemingly impossible task of seducing a woman whose husband and father-in-law he has recently mur-

dered, Richard is just as astonished as we are by the ease with which he accomplishes it.

But for all he owes to earlier models, the Richard we see in Shakespeare's play is also a character who seems disturbingly modern: the Machiavellian politician who acknowledges no law, human or divine, in restraint of his foxlike cunning and leonine rapacity; the totalitarian dictator who subverts every social and religious institution in his pursuit of the grandiose designs of a psychopath; the existentialist cosmic rebel whose radical alienation represents a threat to every form of order and stability. There is something broodingly ominous in the way this rough beast slouches his grim way to unbridled power; and a character who seems at times to be an embodiment of motiveless malignity becomes all the more terrifying when we consider the degree to which his abhorrent figure anticipates the worst nightmares of our own century.

As the play proceeds, however, we gradually come to see that Richard's "vaulting Ambition" (so anticipatory of Macbeth's) is ultimately an instrument of the same providential design that the protagonist scorns and seeks to circumvent. Richard may be a "dreadful Minister of Hell" (I.ii.46), as Lady Anne calls him, but members of Shakespeare's audience would have seen him simultaneously as a "Scourge" of God (I.iv.50): a tyrant unleashed by a just Deity to punish England for her misdeeds of the past, and then, after he has served His purpose, a tool to be cast into the everlasting bonfire.

The prophetic Margaret reminds us over and over that had there not been discord in the kingdom prior to the advent of Richard, there would have been no ripe occasion for "this



pois'nous Bunch-back'd Toad" (I.iii.245) to ascend the throne in the first place. But as the play concludes, an action that has drawn our attention again and again to the past looks optimistically to the future. "By God's fair Ordinance," the Earl of Richmond proclaims in V.v, "the bloody Dog is dead," and the young Lancastrian who will marry the Yorkist Elizabeth to "unite the White Rose and the Red" is ushering in what promises to be an era of "Smooth-fac'd Peace, / With smiling Plenty, and fair Prosp'rous Days."

It would be going too far, perhaps, to suggest that the Richard we see on the eve of his final battle is a character who wins our sympathy. But as the protagonist comes to recognize some of the implications of his earlier assertion that he is himself alone (3 *Henry VI*, V.vi. 83), we can at least endorse his appraisal of the appalling perversion of humanity he has become. As a result of his systematic effort to disfigure every manifestation of God's image in the world around him, Richard has distorted his own image so grievously that in the final analysis (*Richard III*, V.iii.176–205) he himself is unable to love or pity the grotesque monster that remains.

Meanwhile, the ultimate irony of Richard's career is that his sportive campaign to dispatch Heaven's business (I.i.119–20, 146) proves successful. In one instance after another, characters who find themselves caught in Richard's snares are shocked into the "short Shrift" (III.iv.95) that will rescue their souls from peril. In the end Richard cannot do anything to stave off damnation for himself; but through the mysterious workings of Providence, he plays an unwitting role in sorting out the Good from the Ill in the gullible fools he scorns as his victims.

Shakespeare's principal sources for both 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III* were the 1548 edition of Edward Hall's *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* and the 1587 edition of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. For his portrayal of Richard III he may also have consulted Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* (1534), Richard Grafton's *Chronicle at Large* (1543), and Sir Thomas More's *History of Richard the Third* (a work left unfinished in 1513 but subsequently published in two separate versions and incorporated, largely intact, in the chronicles of both Hall and Holinshed). Shakespeare also drew on the multi-author *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559 and 1563), and it seems more than likely that he was familiar with an anonymous play, *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, that was probably on the boards well before its publication in a 1594 quarto.

*Henry VI, Part 3* made its first appearance in print in a 1595 paperback entitled *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York, and the Death of good King Henry the Sixth, with the Whole Contention between the two Houses Lancaster and York*. The text seems to have been compiled from memory by a group of actors, and it is thus much less authoritative than the version of the play that appeared in the 1623 First Folio. The Folio text derives, in all likelihood, from an authorial manuscript that had been annotated in the theatre for use as a promptbook. In places the Folio printers evidently consulted the Third Quarto (1619), and they may also have drawn to some extent on the Second Quarto (1600). The *Guild* text is based on the First Folio printing.

*Richard III* first appeared in a 1597 quarto entitled *The Tragedy of Richard the Third: with the Landing of Earl Richmond, and the Battle at Bosworth Field*. It too was apparently compiled from mem-

ory, but by a whole company of actors, and it is generally much more complete and accurate than memorially compiled texts normally turn out to be. Again the Folio version of the play, which derives largely from an authorial manuscript, is the preferred exemplar. The textual situation for *Richard III* is complicated, however, because (a) the Quarto version contains some passages not found in the Folio, (b) some of the Quarto readings appear superior to those in the Folio, and (c) in some places the Folio version is contaminated by readings that were picked up from derivative later quartos, particularly the Third Quarto (1602) and the Sixth Quarto (1622). The *Guild* text is based primarily on the First Folio printing, but some readings are reproduced from the First Quarto.

## HENRY VI, PART 3

