

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Summer 2021

Volume 47 Issue 3

- 439 *Ann Charney Colmo* The Virtues and the Audience in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*
- 457 *Dustin Gish* Reasonable Foundations for Happiness: The Pursuit of Self-Knowledge in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*
- 483 *Dana Jalbert Stauffer* Richard III, Moralism: Shakespeare's Critique of the Politics of Christian Piety
- 503 *Jeffrey A. Bernstein* **Review Essays**
The Philosophy of Emil Fackenheim: From Revelation to the Holocaust by Kenneth Hart Green
- 519 *Borys M. Kowalsky* *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Artists of the New Weimar* by Sebastian Schütze
- 555 *Robert A. Ballingall* **Book Reviews**
The Spartan Drama of Plato's "Laws" by Eli Friedland
- 563 *Adam M. Carrington* Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*: two editions by Jeffrey Kahan and Jan Blits
- 569 *David Fott* *The Philosophy of Isaiah Berlin* by Johnny Lyons
- 575 *Will Morrisey* *Memoirs on Pauperism and Other Writings: Poverty, Public Welfare, and Inequality* by Alexis de Tocqueville
- 587 *Antoine Pageau-St-Hilaire* *Leo Strauss and the Theopolitics of Culture* by Philipp von Wussow
- 593 *Benjamin Schvarcz* *Justice Is Steady Work: A Conversation on Political Theory* by Michael Walzer and Astrid von Busekist
- 599 *Daniel Tanguay* *Montaigne: Life without Law* by Pierre Manent
- 605 *Jonathan Yudelman* *Natural Law and Human Rights: Toward a Recovery of Practical Reason* by Pierre Manent

Interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

- Editor-in-Chief* Timothy W. Burns, Baylor University
- General Editors* Charles E. Butterworth • Timothy W. Burns
- General Editors (Late)* Howard B. White (d. 1974) • Robert Horwitz (d. 1987)
Seth G. Benardete (d. 2001) • Leonard Grey (d. 2009) •
Hilail Gildin (d. 2015)
- Consulting Editors* David Lowenthal • Harvey C. Mansfield • Thomas L.
Pangle • Ellis Sandoz • Kenneth W. Thompson
- Consulting Editors (Late)* Leo Strauss (d. 1973) • Arnaldo Momigliano (d. 1987) •
Michael Oakeshott (d. 1990) • John Hallowell (d. 1992)
• Ernest L. Fortin (d. 2002) • Muhsin Mahdi (d. 2007) •
Joseph Cropsey (d. 2012) • Harry V. Jaffa (d. 2015)
- International Editors* Terence E. Marshall • Heinrich Meier
- Editors* Peter Ahrens Dorf • Wayne Ambler • Marco Andreacchio •
Maurice Auerbach • Robert Bartlett • Fred Baumann • Eric
Buzzetti • Susan Collins • Patrick Coby • Erik Dempsey •
Elizabeth C'de Baca Eastman • Edward J. Erler • Maureen
Feder-Marcus • Robert Goldberg • L. Joseph Hebert •
Pamela K. Jensen • Hannes Kerber • Mark J. Lutz • Daniel
Ian Mark • Ken Masugi • Carol L. McNamara • Will
Morrisey • Amy Nendza • Lorraine Pangle • Charles T.
Rubin • Leslie G. Rubin • Thomas Schneider • Susan Meld
Shell • Geoffrey T. Sigalet • Nicholas Starr • Devin Stauffer
• Bradford P. Wilson • Cameron Wybrow • Martin D. Yaffe
• Catherine H. Zuckert • Michael P. Zuckert
- Copy Editor* Les Harris
- Designer* Sarah Teutschel
- Inquiries* ***Interpretation, A Journal of Political Philosophy***
Department of Political Science
Baylor University
1 Bear Place, 97276
Waco, TX 76798
- email* interpretation@baylor.edu

Richard III, Moralism: Shakespeare's Critique of the Politics of Christian Piety

DANA JALBERT STAUFFER

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS, AUSTIN

danastauffer@austin.utexas.edu

Abstract: Shakespeare's Richard III is famously villainous, and because Richard associates himself with Machiavelli, many scholars read *Richard III* as a comment on the perils of Machiavellianism. By tracing the development of Richard's character through the first tetralogy, we see that Richard is not properly understood as a Machiavellian. On the contrary, he is a confused moralist whose disappointment in his brother prompts him to unleash his own ambitions before he unravels in despair. Shakespeare's depiction of Richard's rise in *Richard III* emphasizes the role that the prevalence of Christian morality plays in allowing him to seize power. Ousting Richard requires a departure from that morality, although Richmond and his allies cast that departure as necessary to defend both God and country. Richmond achieves a lasting peace by maintaining England's Christianity while bringing it under secular control.

If there is one thing that Shakespeare scholars agree on, it is that Richard III is a diabolical villain. In the character of Richard of Gloucester, Shakespeare shows us "the tyrannic soul," guilty of "limitless self-love," writes Morton Frisch. Richard has "no potential goodness in him." Grant Mindle writes that Richard is "perfectly, splendidly, and delightfully wicked"; he has "no regard for natural right." Mary Ann McGrail calls Richard "utterly indifferent to guilt"; Harry Jaffa says that he "has no conscience"; John Alvis, that he "lives for nothing but egocentric assertiveness." "From beginning to end, an alien force, a monster," asserts Robert Pierce.¹ Certainly, Richard's crimes

¹ Morton J. Frisch, "Shakespeare's Richard III and the Soul of the Tyrant," *Interpretation* 20 (1993): 275, 279–80; Grant B. Mindle, "Shakespeare's Demonic Prince," *Interpretation* 20 (1993): 259, 260; Mary Ann McGrail, "Richard III: That Excellent Grand Tyrant of the Earth" in *Tyranny in Shakespeare* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001), 55; Harry V. Jaffa, "The Unity of Tragedy, Comedy, and

are plentiful. After opening *Richard III* by announcing his determination to scheme his way to the crown, Richard proceeds to manipulate, deceive, and murder, pausing to offer conspiratorial asides to the audience about each new dastardly deed. By the time he meets his demise, he has disposed of his brother Clarence; his wife; the queen's brother and son; Lord Hastings, who opposed his bid for power; the Duke of Buckingham, his erstwhile ally; and, mostly infamously, his two young nephews, rival claimants to the throne.

In *3 Henry VI*, Richard boasts of his ability to “set the murd’rous Machiavel to school” (3.2.195). Many scholars agree with Richard’s self-assessment.² Those who argue that we are meant to delight in Richard’s villainy see the play as a confirmation of Machiavelli’s wisdom;³ those who see it as a critique of Richard read the play as a critique of Machiavelli’s teachings as well.⁴

Richard is misunderstood, and so, as a consequence, is the relationship of *Richard III* to Machiavelli. To understand Richard, we have to do something that most scholars do not: examine his character as it develops throughout the first tetralogy.⁵ Richard first appears in *2 Henry VI* and figures heavily in

History: An Interpretation of the Shakespearean Universe,” in *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*, ed. John E. Alvis and Thomas G. West (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2000), 39; John E. Alvis, “Spectacle Supplanting Ceremony: Shakespeare’s Henry Monmouth” in Alvis and West, *Shakespeare as Political Thinker*, 122; Robert B. Pierce, *Shakespeare’s History Plays: The Family and the State* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), 101.

² L. Joseph. Hebert, “The Reward of a King: Machiavelli, Aquinas, and Shakespeare’s Richard III,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 44 (2015): 249; Jan Kott, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (New York: Norton, 1974), 22; A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns and Other Shakespeare Lectures*, ed. Graham Storey (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961), 17; Larry S. Champion, *Perspective in Shakespeare’s English Histories* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 54; Chris Barker, “Freedom in Shakespeare’s English History Plays,” *Interpretation* 40 (2013): 221–51; Jaffa, “Unity of Tragedy,” 40; Mindle, “Shakespeare’s Demonic Prince,” 266; McGrail, “Richard III,” 49.

³ Mindle, “Shakespeare’s Demonic Prince,” 266; Jaffa, “Unity of Tragedy,” 40; Rossiter, *Angel with Horns*, 17; Champion, *Perspective in Shakespeare’s English Histories*, 54, 67; Tracy B. Strong, “Shakespeare: Elizabethan Statecraft and Machiavellianism,” in *The Artist and Political Vision*, ed. Benjamin R. Barber and Michael J. Gargas McGrath (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1983), 213–14.

⁴ Hebert, “The Reward of a King”; McGrail, “Richard III”; Kott, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, 22; Barker, “Freedom in Shakespeare,” 234, 242.

⁵ One notable exception to the general neglect is Kristian Smidt, *Unconformities in Shakespeare’s History Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 70. Others who consider Richard’s character in the early plays tend to dismiss its relevance to *Richard III* in one way or another. Pierce suggests that, prior to his announcement that he will seek the Crown, Richard is “merely a type, an expression of the family loyalty of the Yorks, whereas later he becomes an independent character” (*Shakespeare’s History Plays*, 82). Pearlman suggests that Shakespeare was initially experimenting with the character of Richard, unsure of what to do with him, and it was only when Shakespeare arrived at the middle of *3 Henry VI* that he made up his mind (E. Pearlman, “The Invention of Richard of Gloucester,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43 [1992]: 411). Hebert insists that Richard is “single-minded in his villainy all along” (“Reward of a King,” 239).

3 *Henry VI*. When we look at the arc of his character in these plays, we find that Richard is not the ruthless Machiavellian that he aims to be in *Richard III*. To be sure, he does horrible things. But he does not always do them out of cool-headed calculation. Machiavelli argues that princes must be open to immoral means of maintaining their power. Princes must learn “to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity.”⁶ Richard’s cruelty, by contrast, stems from indignation and contempt, passions that are bound up with his sense that he has been wronged by those around him. He is ruthless, sometimes, not in spite of his morality, but because of it. Moreover, it is not the case that “there is simply no sufficient explanation for the villainy of Richard.”⁷ On the contrary, 2 and 3 *Henry VI* show us exactly how and why Richard becomes an unrestrained seeker of power.⁸ He begins and ends a moralist—a tormented moralist who feels cheated out of his due by an unfair world.

Fundamentally, Richard is not a Machiavellian, but rather, someone who wishes he were. This distinction has crucial implications for the lessons to be drawn from his rise and fall. As central as Richard is to the plot of the play, his actions are only one part of the story. Equally important are the reactions, and nonactions, of everyone around him—those who witness his rise to power, but fail to stop him.⁹ The point of the play is neither to criticize nor to affirm Machiavelli’s teachings, although it does some of both along the way, and rather more of the latter than the former. Rather, the play explores the moral and political environment that allows Richard to seize power. The moral environment in which Richard’s reckless ambition prevails

⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), XV.

⁷ Frisch, “Shakespeare’s Richard III,” 281.

⁸ As modern readers, we may be skeptical that Shakespeare would have written *Richard III* in such a way as to make our understanding of the character of Richard dependent on familiarity with the *Henry VI* plays. Thomas Cartelli explains a misconception that may lie behind this skepticism. “Since its emergence in the 1590s as one of Shakespeare’s most popular plays, *Richard III* has most often been performed independently of the other three plays of the tetralogy, and it is as an independent production that most modern readers and audiences continue to experience it” (*Richard III: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Thomas Cartelli [New York: Norton, 2009], x). But it was not written as a free-standing story. *Richard III* “initially served as the final and last installment of a four-play sequence that tells the long, complicated story of the so-called Wars of the Roses” (ibid., ix). See also E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 230. And while the dating of many of Shakespeare’s plays presents difficulties, the dating of this tetralogy to the early to mid-1590s is well established. Shakespeare wrote these plays in close proximity to one another, and quite probably in order (Pearlman, “Invention of Richard of Gloucester,” 410).

⁹ Cf. McGrail, “Richard III,” 47; Tim Spiekerman, *Shakespeare’s Political Realism: The English History Plays* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 151.

is emphatically and unmistakably Christian. Richard pursues the crown with an extraordinary energy and ferocity. But the Christian attitudes of many of the characters around him clear his path. Richmond and his supporters defeat Richard by departing from the dominant Christian morality and resurrecting the values of courage, strength, and patriotism. Through the efforts of Richmond and his supporters, England secures a lasting peace that is Christian in name but secular in its foundations.

THE BRAVE BEAR: RICHARD IN 2 AND 3 *HENRY VI*

Why does Richard of Gloucester seek the crown? The explanation he offers in the play's opening scene is famous; Richard's determination to seize the crown stems from "his inadequacy as a lover."¹⁰ The end of the conflict between Lancaster and York has given way to peace, and a new focus on the pleasures of peace: love and romance. Richard is excluded from such pleasures by his ugliness and deformity, "cheated of feature by dissembling nature" (1.1.19).¹¹ So he turns to villainy.

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days. (1.1.28–31)

Bitter and spiteful, Richard becomes determined to find a path to power, no matter how much deception or cruelty it requires. Even here, we can see some indication that, as McGrail writes, he is "driven by an unacknowledged sense of injustice."¹² Richard is angry with nature for depriving him—cheating him—of a chance to enjoy the pleasures those around him enjoy. One of the shrewder observers in the play seems to agree: Queen Elizabeth remarks in act 4 that her young sons would be alive if "grace had blessed [Richard] with a fairer life" (4.4.231).

But Richard describes himself as "*determined* to prove a villain." One might wonder: Would a conscienceless, unscrupulous villain have to *try* to be one? Why does Richard want to be villain? To see the answer to this, we must look further back. The man we meet in *Richard III* is already well into his treachery—"plots have I laid, inductions dangerous," he explains in the

¹⁰ Mindle, "Shakespeare's Demonic Prince," 260.

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references are to William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

¹² McGrail, "Richard III," 69.

opening soliloquy (1.1.32). He first announces his ambition in the middle of *3 Henry VI*. In fact, his speech declaring his ambitions bisects that play. Once he gives that speech, he becomes the Richard we recognize from *Richard III*, single-minded in his pursuit of the crown by any means necessary. But Richard enters the story much earlier, near the end of *2 Henry VI*, when he is a young man and the Wars of the Roses are just getting started. His father, Richard of York, is beginning to stake a claim on the throne against the weak and ineffective Henry VI of Lancaster. We see Richard develop over the course of *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*. What kind of man is Richard in those plays?

Richard comes on the scene in *2 Henry VI* as a loyal defender of his father, ready to fight, and full of indignation on his behalf (*2HVI*, 5.1.50–52, 143).¹³ York calls his sons his “two brave bears” (*2HVI*, 5.1.147). Once the battles begin, Richard distinguishes himself by protecting his father’s elderly ally, Salisbury, who obstinately charges into battle repeatedly and needs saving (*2HVI*, 5.3.8–12, 17–23). Richard fells his father’s enemy, Lord Somerset. As he does so, he remarks:

Sword, hold thy temper! Heart, be wrathful still!
Priests pray for their enemies, but princes kill. (*2HVI*, 5.2.71–72)

Richard speaks as though he was tempted to pity, possibly even to pray, for Somerset. He is angry, but he has to urge himself to maintain his anger, to sustain it, just as he later becomes “determined” to prove a villain.

In *3 Henry VI*, when the York and Lancaster factions meet to negotiate, Richard is impatient with words and diplomacy, and eager to press his father’s cause by force (*3HVI*, 1.1.118).¹⁴ But underlying his impatience is certainty of the rightness of his father’s claim. As a result of the negotiations, York strikes a deal with Henry that Henry can live out his reign unchallenged in return for designating York as his successor. But Richard convinces his father to reopen hostilities. Even as he argues that his father should break his promise to Henry, he grounds his argument in justice. Promises made to Henry need not be respected, he claims, because Henry is a usurper (*3HVI*, 1.2.22–28). “Your right,” he tells his father, “depends not on his life or death” (*3HVI*, 1.2.11).

¹³ William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 2*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), hereafter *2HVI*. Cf. Pearlman’s reading of him in *2 Henry VI* as “deformed, audacious, and bloodthirsty” (“Invention of Richard of Gloucester,” 412).

¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part 3*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), hereafter *3HVI*. On Richard’s general contempt for words, see also *3HVI*, 5.5.44.

Richard's certainty that his father is the rightful king is rooted in his belief in the claims of courage.¹⁵ Recounting how his father's enemies fled from him in fear, Richard remarks, "Methinks 'tis prize enough to be his son" (3HVI, 2.1.20). When his father dies, Richard wants to hear every detail of the manner of his death. The story brings his indignation to its highest pitch. First, Clifford killed Richard's youngest brother, Rutland, as he begged for his life. Clifford then killed Richard's father, but not before he and Margaret taunted him about the death of his youngest son and threw at him a rag soaked with Rutland's blood. After they killed him, the Lancaster faction took his head and posted it on the gates of York. Richard is devastated, but he restrains himself from expressing his grief, saying:

I cannot weep, for all my body's moisture
Scarce serves to quench my furnace-burning heart.
.....

To weep is to make less the depth of grief;
Tears, then, for babes; blows and revenge for me. (3HVI, 2.1.79–80, 86–87)

It is not the case, then, that Richard feels no impulse to weep. Rather, he restrains himself from weeping so as to sustain his anger. He immediately urges his brother Edward to claim his father's right. When they hear of their defeat at St. Albans, Richard spurs the beleaguered Yorkist faction on to fight, saying:

In this troublous time, what's to be done? Shall we go throw away
our coats of steel and wrap our bodies in black mourning gowns,
numb'ring our Ave Marys with our beads? Our shall we on the hel-
mets of our foes, tell our devotion with revengeful arms? If for the last,
say "Ay," and to it, lords! (3HVI, 2.1.161–67)

For a time, Richard's desire for vengeance overwhelms even his concern with victory. When the two sides meet in the field, Richard confronts Clifford, and he can hardly be restrained from attacking him. He begs Warwick to break off parley, saying "scarce I can refrain the execution of my big-swollen heart upon that Clifford, that cruel child-killer" (3HVI, 2.2.112–14). When Warwick is wounded and it looks like defeat is at hand for the side of York, Richard embraces Edward and Warwick and, finally, weeps (3HVI, 2.4.44–47).¹⁶ But Richard soon gets his vengeance on the "wolf" Clifford, and it is harsh indeed (3HVI, 2.4.13). He and his brothers find Clifford mortally

¹⁵ On his admiration for his father, see Pierce, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 82–83.

¹⁶ This outpouring of sadness belies Pearlman's claim that Richard is "incapable" of expressing his emotion ("Invention of Richard of Gloucester," 422).

wounded, and Richard argues that they should afford Clifford no mercy despite the fact that the battle has ended. They taunt him and lament that he dies too quickly, such that they do not have time to torment him further. Richard and his allies treat Clifford with great cruelty because they regard that cruelty as the wholly deserved punishment of a coward who killed a man far superior to him (their father) and a weak and innocent youth (Rutland).

THE BEAR, BAITED: RICHARD'S DECISION TO SEEK THE CROWN

Throughout *2 Henry VI* and the first half of *3 Henry VI*, Richard shows himself to be a loyal son and friend, open in his love and hate, and lacking the guile of his later self. He weeps rather than laughs, he needs to steel himself to maintain his anger, and he is driven by a sense of right rather than a desire for power.¹⁷ Richard looks for courage in others and frames his praise of others, such as Warwick, in terms of it (*2HVI*, 5.1.155–60; *3HVI*, 2.1.159–60, 188–90). And he frames the enmity of others, such as Clifford, in terms of cowardice.¹⁸ Kristian Smidt calls him “mainly a brave soldier and a man of honor.”¹⁹ How, then, does Richard become the unscrupulous schemer of *Richard III*?

As soon as the battle is over, Warwick announces that he will go to France to broker a marriage between Edward and a relation of the king of France to secure Edward's power and protect him against further attempts on his power (*3HVI*, 2.6.90–94). In Warwick's absence, Edward takes an interest in a beautiful widow and, to woo her, he decides to marry her. As Shakespeare writes it, it is a spur-of-the-moment, ill-considered decision of the heart rather than the head. Women are Edward's weakness (*3HVI*, 2.1.41–42). It is immediately after this scene that Richard reveals his intention to seek the crown. The speech starts with a sarcastic reaction to Edward's telling the lords who are accompanying Lady Grey to “use her honorably.” Richard responds,

Ay, Edward will use women honorably!
 Would he were wasted—marrow, bones, and all
 That from his loins no hopeful branch may spring
 To cross me from the golden time I look for. (*3HVI*, 3.2.126–29)

He reflects on how much he longs to have the crown, and how many obstacles lie in the way. After some consideration, he declares himself ready to lie,

¹⁷ Far from the “uncomplicated ferocity” Pearlman sees in him (“Invention of Richard of Gloucester,” 417).

¹⁸ “Clifford's manhood lies upon his tongue,” Richard asserts (*3HVI*, 2.2.128).

¹⁹ Smidt, *Unconformities*, 33.

deceive, and even kill to obtain the crown. In making this shift, Richard likens himself to an “unlicked bear-whelp,” someone whose lack of a loving rearing by a mother prevented him from taking proper shape.²⁰ This is not the self-understanding of a cool-headed Machiavellian. There is an edge of resentment at having been shortchanged by both nature and nurture, deformed from the start, and born to a loveless mother.

Smidt notes, “a change of personality seems to occur after the arrival of Lady Grey and the beginning of Edward’s impolitic infatuation.”²¹ Edward’s proposal to Lady Grey is often read as an appealing romantic interlude, a respite from the blood and bloodlust of the rest of the play. But the proposal has far-reaching consequences. First, it insults Warwick, who has negotiated a marriage in France on Edward’s behalf. When Warwick learns of Edward’s marriage, he is so offended that he breaks with York and defects to Lancaster, breathing new life into the Lancaster cause. Richard reveres Warwick for his courage and military prowess, so the slight to Warwick hits him hard. The proposal also offends the king of France. This is no small thing. The question of who has the right to rule England is bound up with France. Henry V’s conquest of France was the primary basis of his family’s claim to the throne. Henry VI discredited himself and opened himself up to rival claims to the throne through an act remarkably similar to Edward’s in this scene. Henry VI married Margaret, a princess of Naples rather than of France—and gave away a good part of England’s lands in France to do it. Earlier in the play, Edward himself threw these same facts back at Margaret as evidence of her role in ruining Henry. By marrying Margaret, Edward says, Henry VI “washed his father’s fortunes forth of France, and heaped sedition on his crown at home” (3HVI, 2.2.161–62; see also 3HVI, 1.1.110–12). Now Edward does something similar just as his claim to the throne is beginning to look secure.

Richard and Clarence initially watch the flirtation between their brother and Lady Grey with the casual amusement of those who know their brother’s faults. But when Edward proposes to Lady Grey, they are shocked. Warwick and Clarence eventually express their anger and disappointment by defecting to Lancaster. But this does not happen immediately; Warwick is still in France, and Clarence does not defect until it becomes clear that Edward is giving preferential treatment to the queen’s relatives. Richard, by contrast, reacts right away. This is not because he is irrational or evil. On the contrary,

²⁰ It was thought that bears were born as shapeless masses and their mothers gave them shape by licking them (editors’ note, 2HVI, 262).

²¹ Smidt, *Unconformities*, 34.

he reacts quickly because he sees more quickly than Clarence the long-term ramifications of Edward's act. He reacts differently, deciding to pursue the crown himself rather than defecting to Lancaster, in part because he is ambitious, but also because, in his view, Henry does not deserve to be king any more than Edward does.²² To Richard, the best man—the ablest, most courageous, most deserving man—ought to rule. Richard's ambition swells and bursts the bonds of moral restraint when he is confronted with his brother's unworthiness to rule, and sees this cause, their father's cause, which all three brothers have spent their lives fighting for, threatened by his brother's lack of self-control.

FROM BEAR TO BOAR: RICHARD'S RISE TO POWER

In the final two acts of *3 Henry VI*, Richard keeps to his course of brotherly loyalty on the surface. But he lets the audience know in asides that all of his actions are strategic, aimed at securing his own path to the crown. As Richard kills King Henry, he reasons, "since the heavens have shaped my body so, let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it" (*3HVI*, 5.6.79–80). Oddly enough, the view that Richard is as evil as he looks may be comforting even to him. The revelation that his brother is unfit to rule badly undermines Richard's sense of moral order in the world. If Richard's true character corresponds to his outward appearance, it suggests that the world is fair and that people get what they deserve.

As he embraces the role of villain, Richard is sustained in his pursuit of the crown by his continued disappointment in, and contempt for, those around him. Early in *Richard III*, Richard is confronted by the ex-queen Margaret, who is full of outrage at her fate. Eventually, Richard masters himself and dismisses her as a harmless lunatic worthy of pity (1.3.325–27). But before he manages to cloak his views in a veneer of Christian compassion and forgiveness, he recounts her savagery in the war, including her participation in Clifford's merciless murder of his father. Richard suggests that Margaret's own past deeds are the true causes of her misfortune. Margaret, in other words, is getting what she deserves (1.3.186–88).²³ Even as he himself lies and schemes, Richard cannot tolerate the hypocrisy of Margaret playing the

²² Cf. Mindle's assertion that Richard sees his brother as morally virtuous ("Shakespeare's Demonic Prince," 269). Tracey Strong, on the other hand, gives Richard too much credit in attributing to him a public-spirited motive, saying that he "wants to unify England" ("Elizabethan Statecraft," 202). Richard only mentions the public good when he is making arguments to others.

²³ Cf. Mindle's claim that Richard "has no desire for vengeance" ("Shakespeare's Demonic Prince," 262).

victim, when she herself was among the war's most heartless and vengeful participants.

As Richard targets the people who stand between himself and the crown, he is sustained by his sense of his own moral superiority to each of them. Richard is disgusted by the rapidity with which Anne abandons the memory of her husband, who was, he reflects, "young, valiant, wise, and no doubt, right royal" and even a far better man than himself (1.2.229–34). Clarence betrayed his brother while Richard was, in his words, "a packhorse in [Edward's] great affairs, a weeder out of his proud adversaries" (1.3.126–27). The queen's relatives were elevated by her marriage to a far higher station than they deserved. "The world is grown so bad," he complains, "that wrens make prey where eagles dare not perch" (1.3.71).

Even before he orders the killing of the young princes, though, Richard begins to be troubled. Anne reports that he is regularly tormented by nightmares (4.1.86–89). The character of his troubles becomes clearer in his falling out with his most valuable ally, the Duke of Buckingham. Buckingham supports Richard in his early moves against the queen's relatives and against Hastings. But when Richard announces his intention to kill the young princes, Buckingham hesitates. He asks for time to think, and when he returns, he asks for the earldom that Richard had promised him earlier. Richard refuses, saying only "I am not in the giving vein today" (4.2.121). Buckingham is so offended by this reaction that he turns against Richard and declares his intention to join the opposition on the spot. "Repays he my deep service with such contempt?" he asks. "Made I him a king for this?" (4.2.124–25).

Why does Richard react in this way?²⁴ When Buckingham declares that he needs time to consider the matter, Catesby observes, "The King is angry. See, he gnaws his lip" (4.2.29). Why is he angry? Richard knows as well as Buckingham that Buckingham has been integral to his success. Just before they begin to quarrel, Richard asks Buckingham to take his hand as he is seated on the throne, saying:

²⁴ Hebert argues that Richard is losing his grip on reason altogether ("Reward of a King," 244). The difficulty with this claim is that Richard shows considerable facility for reasoning in subsequent scenes. Strong argues that Richard denies Buckingham because "independence from mutuality or reciprocity with those around him is the source of his strength and ability" and that to grant Buckingham's request would "reduce his autonomy" ("Elizabethan Statecraft," 210). The difficulty with this argument is that Buckingham has been a great source of strength for Richard. The truth is simpler. Richard is angry.

Thus high, by thy advice
And thy assistance is King Richard seated. (4.2.4–5)

Buckingham did not oppose the killing of the princes; he only asked for some reward for himself—a reward he was in fact promised earlier. Was not his demand perfectly reasonable? In Buckingham's absence, Richard says:

I will converse with iron-witted fools
And unrespective boys. None are for me
That look into me with considerate eyes. (4.2.30–32)

Buckingham balks at the killing of children; but Richard understands Buckingham's hesitation to stem from the fact that Buckingham "looks into him with considerate eyes." In his mind, Buckingham's unwillingness to act stems from his low—his *properly* low—estimation of him, the estimation of "all who look into him" in this way. He is angry with Buckingham for confirming his own low opinion of himself.

Why does Richard think that anyone who saw into his soul would oppose him? There is a clear Machiavellian rationale for "eliminating the bloodline" if one wants to secure one's power. The answer is that Richard feels guilty for killing the princes. The very crime for which Richard sought vengeance against Clifford was the killing of his youngest brother, Rutland. In ordering the murder of the princes, Richard repeats the crime of Clifford, "that cruel child-killer," twice over. He lowers himself to cowardly Clifford's level, or even lower, insofar as he kills both of his nephews, and not in the heat of war, as Clifford killed Rutland, but unprovoked, as the princes sit imprisoned, defenseless, in the Tower. Buckingham's resistance to killing the princes angers Richard not because he sees nothing wrong with this act, but precisely because he *does* see it as wrong, and Buckingham's resistance makes the wrongness harder to ignore.

When Buckingham angrily departs, Richard does not stop him.²⁵ But Richard's violence does not stop here. As he moves against the princes, he learns of the gathering threat from Richmond. In an effort to stop Richmond from marrying into Edward's family, he determines that he needs to murder his wife, Anne, so that he can marry the princess Elizabeth himself. "I am in so far in blood," he observes, "that sin will pluck on sin" (4.2.66–67). He sees these murders, then, *as* sins. Richard's objection to the fact that wrens make

²⁵ "Here Richard violates a cardinal rule of Machiavelli by offending a formidable man and allowing him to live (see the *Prince*, Chapter 3)." Hebert, "Reward of a King," 244. See also Barker, "Freedom in Shakespeare," 246.

prey where eagles dare not perch does not mean that, in his view, eagles have no obligation to wrens. Much as he attempts to ignore his “sins,” he cannot.

As he attempts to fend off Richmond’s challenge, Richard becomes paranoid and suspicious; his judgment suffers. As he heads into battle with Richmond, Richard’s misdeeds come back to haunt him quite literally, in the form of ghosts of all of those he has killed. He awakes in torment.

Have mercy, Jesu! Soft, I did but dream.
O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!

After a long, rambling monologue full of self-contempt, he concludes:

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain. (5.3.190–91, 205–7)

In the end, then, he is plagued by his own guilt.²⁶ He is not as cold-blooded as he wants to be—indeed, he is not as cold-blooded as he *needs* to be, to steel himself to the deeds necessary to keep his crown.

Because Richard falls, undone by his own inner demons, some scholars suggest that the play casts doubt on “whether it is possible to be a true Machiavellian.”²⁷ Richard’s unraveling does suggest a certain rebuke of Machiavelli on this point: it is not easy to sustain ruthless amorality. Perhaps Machiavelli underestimates the depth of the human attachment to morality, even in people who are eager to be villains. But Richard is not undone solely by his own inner demons. He is defeated by Richmond and his army. To understand why Richard falls, we must examine not only his weakness, but Richmond’s strength. Before we come to that, however, there is a prior question prompted by the consideration just raised. If conscience has a power over human beings that cynics or realists tend to underestimate, then how does Richard acquire the crown in the first place? Why do not any of the other characters in the play rise up to stop “the boar,” as Stanley dubs him, from becoming king (3.2.11)? Why is he able to frame and murder innocents without more people intervening? The answer to this question lies in the character of the morality that dominates *Richard III* during Richard’s rise.

²⁶ Spiekerman doubts the sincerity of Richard’s professions of guilt and self-loathing, noting, “He certainly does not hate himself enough to abandon his quest for power.” *Shakespeare’s Political Realism*, 165, 196. See also Frisch, “Shakespeare’s Richard III,” 279. But by the time his conscience gets the better of him, Richard is already headed into battle to defend his kingship. There is no real prospect of withdrawal at that point.

²⁷ Frisch, “Shakespeare’s Richard III,” 282; McGrail, “Richard III,” 49.

FEAR YOU THE BOAR, AND GO SO UNPROVIDED? HOW
CHRISTIAN PASSIVITY ENABLES RICHARD

“Here’s a good world the while.’ But what world is it?” Kott asks.²⁸ That is to say, what is the world that Shakespeare depicts in *Richard III*? The answer is the world of Christian morality. We see this with particular clarity when we compare *Richard III* with the preceding play. In *3 Henry VI*, the chief moral concerns of almost all the characters are courage, honor, and military strength. I noted earlier that the young Richard values courage above all other human qualities. His view is a more pronounced version of a view shared by nearly all of the characters in *3 Henry VI*.²⁹ For instance, when York and Lancaster meet to discuss the question of Henry’s right to the throne, what begins as a consideration of hereditary succession quickly turns to questions of courage and military success. Courage and military excellence are held to be the true foundations of royal right, and cowardice grounds for removal (3HVI, 1.1.41–42). So much are courage and strength admired, to the exclusion of all other qualities, that a cruel and even savage atmosphere sets in. In the opening scene of *3 Henry VI*, Richard holds up the severed head of Somerset in gruesome triumph, and his father registers his strong approval: “Richard hath best deserved of all my sons” (3HVI, 1.1.17; see also 1.4.14–17). This sets the tone for the play that follows.

The moral code that dominates *3 Henry VI* is emphatically, in Nietzsche’s words, a “master morality,” that is to say, one that associates virtue with strength and assertiveness. The weakness and passivity of King Henry, “famed for his mildness, peace, and prayer,” are remarked upon by all as the reasons for his loss of power. When Henry tries to avert violent conflict through compromise, everyone disapproves, both his enemies and his allies, and it does not work. Perhaps because of the affinity of this moral outlook with pagan morality, classical allusions abound. The characters frequently compare themselves and their circumstances to characters of Homer and of Greek myth.³⁰ And in good, classical fashion, with the exception of Henry, they all embrace vengefulness. Everyone seeks revenge and, more important,

²⁸ Kott, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, 30.

²⁹ Cf. Pierce’s claim that “Richard has always stood alone against all the values that bind society together.” *Shakespeare’s History Plays*, 107.

³⁰ For a summary of the counts scholars have made of the classical allusions in the first tetralogy, see Pierce, *Shakespeare’s History Plays*, 122n3. Especially important examples in 3HVI: 2.1.50–52; 2.1.140–41; 2.2.150–53; 2.6.10–19; 3.2.190–92, 5.1.36, 5.6.19–26.

everyone accepts vengeance as a fitting response to injury. No one expresses any misgivings about it.

Christianity is held in near-universal low regard. The only person in the play concerned with Christian morality is King Henry, and he is held in contempt by everyone else. When the other characters speak of Christian moral duties, it is to dismiss or reject them, as in Richard's rejection of the idea that he and his allies should "wrap our bodies in black mourning gowns, numb'ring our Ave Marys with our beads" (3*HVI*, 2.1.163–64). The York faction expressly denies Clifford the benefit of Christian forgiveness.

RICHARD: Clifford, ask mercy and obtain no grace.

EDWARD: Clifford, repent in bootless penitence. (3*HVI*, 2.6.69–70)

When the characters are not rejecting the obligations of Christian charity and forgiveness, they are making light of Christian rules and sacraments. Richard and Clarence playfully compare King Edward's propositioning of Lady Grey (before he starts talking of marriage) to a priest offering confession (3*HVI*, 3.2.108–9). Once the two are married, Richard speaks of the sanctity of marriage with sarcasm verging on scorn. "God forbid that I should wish them severed whom God hath joined together. Ay, and 'twere pity to sunder them that yoke so well together" (3*HVI*, 4.1.21–23). There are no moments in 3 *Henry VI* in which characters fear for their immortal souls, or feign Christian virtues they lack, or speak of the duty to forgive and forget. The play is full of revenge and betrayal, and no one save Henry seems to crave an end to the violence.

Richard III, by contrast, opens on a time of peace. The fighting is over—at least, so everyone thinks. What people value and admire seems to have changed with the political situation. Anne, for instance, praises her late husband for being "gentle, mild, and virtuous" (1.2.111)—a compliment that, in the previous play, would have been an insult. There are a handful of classical references in the entire play. Christianity, on the other hand, in its various aspects, is referenced in virtually every scene. And the characters' Christian attitudes help to clear Richard's path to the crown. The first such instance is Anne. Richard persuades Anne to listen to him by appealing to her sense of charity (1.2.50, 72–73, 219), and quells her anger with the claim that "it is unnatural to be revenged on him that loveth thee" (1.2.144–45). Rather than feeling obligated to stand up to Richard, Anne feels obligated to forgive past wrongs. But above all, what makes Anne vulnerable to Richard's entreaties is her belief that one's thoughts matter more than outward deeds. After holding

out against him for much of the scene, she finally falters with the words, “I would I knew thy heart” (1.2.211). In spite of the clarity of Richard’s outward deeds in murdering her husband and father-in-law, the possibility that his heart may be purer than his deeds causes her resistance to weaken. Once she accepts him, in good, Christian fashion, she consoles herself with his penitence (1.2.238–39).³¹

The second character who falls prey to Richard’s machinations is Clarence, a self-described “Christian faithful man” (1.4.4). When the men Richard sends to murder Clarence arrive, he appeals to Christian doctrine directly and implores them to think of their own redemption (1.4.165). But his warnings, while persuasive enough to induce regret after the fact, are not enough to overcome the murderers’ anticipation of reward (1.4.125–30). Clarence himself lacks moral authority in light of his own past wrongs. He is plagued by guilt for his role in killing Prince Edward, Henry’s son (1.4.197). When the murderers seize on his wrongdoings to assuage their consciences, Clarence tells them to have faith that God will provide his own justice (1.4.190). “Take not the quarrel from his powerful arm. He needs no indirect nor lawless course to cut off those that have offended him” (1.4.193–94). But that reasoning proves too weak to counter the prospect of Richard’s reward and the murderers’ fear of Richard’s wrath if they disobey.

The defects of Christian morality also express themselves in King Edward. He blames his own “brutish wrath” for Clarence’s “sinful” execution (2.1.117). He seeks atonement by urging peace among the factions around him. Once it is secure, he happily reflects to Richard that “we have done deeds of charity, made peace of enmity, and fair love of hate between these swelling, wrong-incensed peers” (2.1.51–53). But the reconciliation Edward’s relations undertake is superficial; it lasts only as long as his presence. Edward makes no attempt to address the causes of their disputes or to make genuine provision for a resolution. He falls ill after a life of womanizing and gluttony, and his Christian moral outlook allows him to take comfort in the achievement of a shallow peace.³²

Christianity combines an emphasis on inward purity with attention to outward ceremony. In so doing, it deemphasizes the importance of ordinary deeds and choices. Richard uses this to his advantage, committing terrible

³¹ For fuller treatments of Anne’s deliberations, see Mindle, “Shakespeare’s Demonic Prince,” 268, and Barker, “Freedom in Shakespeare,” 239–41.

³² On Edward’s weaknesses, see Hebert, “Reward of a King,” 242–43.

deeds and then compensating for it with professions of great inner purity and scrupulous attention to Christian ceremony. After Edward dies, Richard is able to move quickly against the queen's relatives because he has feigned Christian forgiveness while slandering the low-born queen and her relatives to the other nobles. He brags:

But then I sigh and, with a piece of scripture,
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil;
And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With odd old ends stol'n forth of Holy Writ
And seem a saint when most I play the devil. (1.3.354–58)

Similarly, when Richard and Buckingham frame Hastings, Richard uses their reputation as good Christians to testify to their concern for law. "Think you we are Turks or infidels?" he chides the mayor of London, when he inquires into Hastings's sudden arrest. As Christians, Richard asserts, they would only set aside the law in a case of grave personal danger (3.5.42). Finally, Buckingham uses the ceremonial trappings of Christianity to convince the mayor of London that Richard is pious and humble, calling the prayer book and other Christian accoutrements "true ornaments to know a holy man" (3.7.100).

Finally, in its championing of the weak, Christianity devalues courage and strength. Richard's machinations are met with a resigned passivity in the common people. Hearing of the king's death, the citizens hope that the rightful king will reign "by God's good grace," and that God will prevent rivalry among the new king's uncles from wreaking havoc on the kingdom (2.3.10, 26). One citizen remarks, "All may be well; but if God sort it so, 'tis more than we deserve or I expect" (2.3.40–41). He concludes: "Leave it all to God" (2.3.49). Richard's accusation of witchcraft against Hastings is laughably false, and yet no one argues with it. The scrivener writing up the writ of execution for Hastings, "to be read at Paul's," remarks: "Here's a good world the while! Who is so gross that cannot see this palpable device? Yet so bold but says he sees it not?" (3.6.10–12).

In *3 Henry VI*, after a long civil war, courage and military strength overtake all other virtues. The resulting moral environment is ugly, even barbaric. The desire for vengeance is given full vent. Mercy is conspicuously absent. But in *Richard III*, when peace comes, courage disappears, along with any sense of civic spiritedness. Rather than ushering in an era of humanity and kindness, Christian passivity and mercy open the door to an unscrupulous schemer. Putting a stop to Richard and founding a lasting and secure peace requires the recovery of courage and strength as virtues. It requires an assertive leader

who can defeat Richard and resurrect civic spiritedness without returning to the barbarism of *3 Henry VI*. It finds such a leader in Richmond.

THE “WATCHFUL SOUL” OF RICHMOND: THE UN-CHRISTIAN FOUNDATIONS OF ENGLAND’S CHRISTIAN SALVATION

Tillyard wrote that *Richard III* “displays the working out of God’s plan to restore England to prosperity.”³³ But Richmond, the ostensible agent of this plan, seems to act on human authority, in contrast to those who “leave it all up to God.” In the first place, “Richmond does not ask for divine authorization to assemble an army and set sail for England.”³⁴ Once arrived, Richmond appoints himself “God’s captain” (5.3.114) and he asserts that Richard “hath ever been God’s enemy” (5.3.267). Far from eschewing anger in favor of forgiveness, Richmond calls on God to put in the soldiers’ hands “bruising irons of wrath” (5.3.116). And far from ceding all moral judgment to God, he calls on God to help him win so that he (God) can receive praise. “Make us the ministers of thy chastisement,” he prays, “that we may praise thee in the victory” (5.3.119–20). Richmond knows that he needs God, but he seems to think that God needs him, too.

In his assertiveness, Richmond claims the right to fight for justice as he understands it. He asks the soldiers to fight in the name of God, but not *only* in the name of God. Just before the battle, he tells his troops that “God *and our good cause* fight upon our side” and claims the support of “the prayers of holy saints *and wronged souls*” (5.3.254–55). Richmond makes justice—not divine justice, but justice as it is understood by him and his allies—central to his appeal. He calls Richard a “bloody tyrant and a homicide” and he points out that Richard was not brought to power by an army willing to support his claim. The men who fight for Richard would rather fight against him (5.3.257–58).

Even as he invokes God’s help and appeals to the men’s sense of Christian duty, Richmond moves the men’s focus in a more secular direction. He addresses them as Christians, but also as Englishmen (5.3.251). He urges them to envision being welcomed home as “conquerors” (5.3.272–76). He speaks of the rewards the men will reap for fighting “their country’s foes,” and “safeguarding their wives” and “free[ing their] children from the sword.” He calls on the men to fight “in the name of god and *all these rights*.” And

³³ Tillyard, *Shakespeare’s History Plays*, 228.

³⁴ Mindle, “Shakespeare’s Demonic Prince,” 272.

when they are victorious, he cries “God *and your arms* be praised, victorious friends!” (5.3.272–78, 5.5.1). He thus suggests that divine approval is partly responsible for his victory, but so also is the soldiers’ strength and courage.³⁵

Richmond posits a new understanding of what Christianity demands of its adherents, one that incorporates the demands of political life. He casts the protection and defense of the political community as compatible with Christian duty, and even required by it. Courage and strength are not threats or alternatives to Christian virtue; they are necessary supports of it. This revision of Christian morality lays the foundation for genuine political progress. By the play’s end, no one could mistake Richard—paranoid, tortured, desperate—as a suitable ruler for England. If Tillyard is wrong to see the play as a perpetuation of the Tudor myth, so, too, Rossiter is wrong to read it as a debunking of that myth, merely “comic history.”³⁶ Richmond brings a lasting peace that is decisively better than the civil war and tyranny that preceded it.

Richmond prevails in part because he is attentive to the importance of piety and justice, especially in contrast to Richard. And even before the battle at Bosworth, allies flock to Richmond because of the contrast between Richmond’s decency and Richard’s villainy. Richmond is also strengthened by his own clear conscience. After Richard and Richmond are visited by the ghosts of Richard’s victims, Richmond heads out into battle refreshed and emboldened, while Richard is crippled by guilt and fear of punishment. But it is not only moral decency that is responsible for Richmond’s success. To fully understand the meaning of Richmond’s victory, we must examine its foundations more closely.

Richmond cites Richard’s crimes and tyranny as his reasons for challenging Richard’s kingship. But Richmond’s dispute of the York claim to the throne predates any of Richard’s actions in this play. King Edward alludes to it in the first act. Indeed, Richmond’s claim has been asserted in one way

³⁵ For more on the superiority of Richmond’s rhetoric to Richard’s, see Mindle, “Shakespeare’s Demonic Prince,” 270, and Tillyard, *Shakespeare’s History Plays*, 230–31.

³⁶ Rossiter, *Angel with Horns*, 22. Kott writes that this play shows that “history has no meaning and stands still or repeats itself” (*Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, 37). These are two extreme versions of scholars’ general minimization of the political achievement signified by the play’s end. Strong writes that “the problem of power . . . is never solved by Shakespeare” and “Shakespeare’s only attempt at dealing with the problem of power” occurs in the *Tempest* (“Elizabethan Statecraft,” 215–16). Burns, for his part, writes, “The successful break with Christian political theology, and perhaps the beginning of the end of Christian England, comes only with Henry VIII” (Timothy W. Burns, *Shakespeare’s Political Wisdom* [New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013], 10). Richmond’s speech indicates that the break begins here.

or another since his birth (4.2.98–101). So Richard's vices provide a rationale for Richmond's bid for the crown. But they are not the only reasons for it. In casting his own actions as a response to Richard's wickedness, then, in speaking to his army, Richmond may speak the truth, but certainly not the whole truth.³⁷

Now, Richmond himself does not appear until act 5, giving us relatively few lines to go on in discerning his motives and his outlook. However, his ally and supporter, Lord Stanley, is present from the start of the play.³⁸ If we seek to understand the forces that ultimately prevail over Richard, we find the answer not only in Richmond, but also in Stanley. Stanley is the first character to recognize the threat from Richard. When he learns that Richard has moved against the queen's family, Stanley tries to take proactive steps to meet the threat. He tries to convince Hastings to ride north with him to gather support for Richmond. Stanley sees the imprisonment of the queen's relatives for what it is: a harbinger of Richard's attempt on the crown (3.2.86). But Hastings cannot—*will* not—see the danger. When the queen tells her son Dorset to flee to Richmond, Stanley praises this advice (4.1.43) and he advises Dorset, “Be not taken tardy by unwise delay” (4.1.47). Unlike those who end up Richard's victims, Stanley is proactive and forward thinking.

Stanley seems to have a knack for sensing when Richard feels himself to be vulnerable, because he tends to offer Richard bad news when he is already at a low moment. When Buckingham refuses to sanction the murder of the princes, Stanley enters and tells Richard that Richmond is gathering forces against him (4.2.45–47). As Richard casts about to figure out his next move in act 4, Four, Stanley arrives and informs him that Richmond is on his way (4.4.380). So, too, Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, acting in concert with Stanley, seek to dampen Richard's spirits by recounting his worst deeds back to him. It may well be their decision to “smother” Richard in the “bitter breath of words” that prompts him to be haunted by the ghosts of his victims shortly thereafter (4.4.137–38).

Stanley excels in deceit no less than Richard and Buckingham, assuring first King Edward, and eventually King Richard, of his continued loyalty (1.3.25, 4.4.506). “I never was nor never will be false,” he tells Richard (4.4.522).

³⁷ Richmond's ambition is a problem for reading the play as a cautionary tale of the hazards of ambition, as does Watson (Robert N. Watson, *Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984], 34); see also Pierce, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 118.

³⁸ It is surprising how little note most scholars take of the role of Lord Stanley in this play, beyond a brief mention (as in Barker, “Freedom in Shakespeare,” 242–43).

Meanwhile, he acts as go-between for Queen Elizabeth and Richmond in arranging the marriage to Princess Elizabeth that secures Richmond's claim (4.5.6–8). When Richmond first appears, he mentions Stanley in his first few lines. "And here receive we from our father Stanley lines of fair comfort and encouragement," he says (5.2.5–6). Before the battle, Stanley does not seem especially pious. He tells Richmond to "put thy fortune to the arbitrement of bloody strokes and mortal-staring war." He does not reassure Richmond that his fate is in God's hands (5.3.95–96). Finally, Stanley is bold; he risks his son's life by opposing Richard in the battle. As it happens, the risk pays off; his son escapes Richard's clutches. In the play's final scene, it is Stanley who puts the crown on Richmond's head. Stanley, then, is vital to Richmond's success. In helping to secure Richmond's victory, he acts in the service of a good end, but he is not afraid to use underhanded methods to achieve that end. For a supporter of the virtuous and pious Richmond, the supposed agent of God's divine plan, Stanley exhibits a surprising degree of Machiavellian *virtù*.

If it is correct to see Richmond's victory as the triumph of right, it is also essential to note that Machiavellian methods are among the foundations of that triumph. Just as Richard's fall does not spell a repudiation of Machiavelli, then, neither does Richmond's rise. The securing of a prosperous and stable peace for England requires a departure from Christian virtue. Shakespeare may well depart from Machiavelli on the wisdom of attempting to set aside morality altogether in the pursuit of political power. But he appears to agree with Machiavelli that Christian morality can be disastrous for politics if it is not brought under secular control.