

The Uses of *Richard III*: From Robert Cecil to Richard Nixon

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In *Eikonoklastes* (1649), his attack on the recently executed Charles I's *Eikon Basilike*, Milton demonstrates Charles' hypocrisy and ignorance by quoting from a work he is sure the King would have known: Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Milton writes

William Shakespeare; [in 2.1] . . . introduces the Person of Richard the third speaking in as high a straine of pietie and mortification, as is uttered in any passage of this Book . . . [:]

'I doe not know that Englishman alive
With whom my soule is any jott at odds
More then the Infant that is borne to night;
I thank my God for my humilitie.'

Other stuff of this sort may be read throughout the Whole Tragedie.
(11)

Not only does Milton assume, correctly, that Charles had read and probably seen Shakespeare's play, he assumes that his own reader is familiar with the character of Richard as a notorious dissembler. Milton depends on this familiarity to advance his argument about the validity of the new government. In other words, his intent is to use the dramatic character of Richard (rather than the historical figure) to vilify Charles' and justify his execution. Milton's propagandistic use of Richard is one example of how in early modern England this particular character shifted from the sphere of dramatic entertainment to become available as a tool for personal attack and political commentary.

This essay will examine the character of Richard III and the social and sometimes political uses to which it has been put in two distinct cultural moments: early modern England and postwar England and America.

In the early modern period, Richard—popularized by Shakespeare's and others' plays, printed histories, and manuscript libels—was used by people who were, as Milton was, interested in defaming or commenting on living or recently deceased public figures. This usefulness was enhanced by public knowledge of Richard and the historical proximity of the real Richard. The diversity of media at the time (print, manuscript, and performance) made such critiques available to a diverse range of literacies and locations. Eventually Shakespeare's Richard, on stage and in print, became dominant, in particular because of the elevation of Shakespeare to national poet in the early eighteenth century. Despite the popularity of the character and the play, by the twentieth century, the use of Richard as a tool for personal attack had nearly disappeared from the Anglo-American stage. The figure of Richard continued to be useful in social and political critique, but Richard in performance remained largely fixed in a medieval setting. What constituted "medieval" varied from some attempts to present some measure of historical authenticity to others that used a stylized modern or even Elizabethan construction of the Middle Ages. In any case, the tendency to look backward limited the character's potential for a local critique. Aside from a few moments in the 1930s and in 1973, because of these changes and the rise of a visually powerful twentieth-century fascism, the stage Richard became less effective as a tool for criticism. Instead, the play as a whole became the tool for criticism and, in an inversion of the early modern practice, contemporary public figures were used to characterize Richard rather than the other way around. Richard once again became fixed by his performance history.

Even before Shakespeare presented his character "crooke-backe Richard" on stage in *The First Part of the Contention* (*Henry VI Part I*) around 1590, the villain needed no introduction. The historical Richard had been deposed by the current monarch's grandfather and his reputation as a Machiavellian villain had been established by Thomas More in his *History of King Richard the Thirde* (1513) and Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* (1534). Edward Hall (1548) and Raphael Holinshed (1587) both drew on More and Vergil, perpetuating Richard's reputation as an ugly, scheming, murderous tyrant. Richard also appeared in ballads and works such as *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559, 1563, 1571, and 1610). The first dramatic representation of the character was probably in the Latin play *Richardus Tertius* (1579), attributed to Thomas Legge and apparently performed several times over a number of years at Cambridge (Sutton vii–xlvii).

Richard was especially popular in the 1590s. An anonymous play entitled *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third* was printed in 1594 and

most likely performed by the Queen's Men in the late 1580s, roughly one hundred years after the death of Richard the historical figure (Chambers 4.44; Churchill 528). Shakespeare gave audiences more Richard around 1590 with *Henry the Sixth* and a play about Richard himself about 1591, *The Tragedy of Richard III* (Hammond 54–67). The second of Thomas Heywood's two plays on Edward IV (c. 1599) included Richard as a scheming, duplicitous character indulging in sharp asides to the audience.¹ The character also appeared in printed poetry: Giles Fletcher's *The Rising to the Crowne of Richard the Third* (1593), Andrew Chute's *Beawtie Dishonoured . . . Shore's Wife* (1593), and Michael Drayton's *England's Heroical Epistles* (1597) (Churchill 231–539). In these works, Richard is familiar from More's biography and Shakespeare's play: a deformed antagonist scheming to gain the crown and, as a result, threatening the social order.

Beyond his villainous presence in plays and poetry, Richard became a means for personal attack. Writers would compare contemporary figures to Richard to suggest that those figures were corrupt and dangerous and should be curbed, or simply to level a political or personal attack. In the words of Besnault and Bitot, the character of Richard, "escape[d] from historical boundaries, strict fact and chronology to become a stylized, larger than life . . . figure" (108). This departure took a number of forms, one of which was the association with the actor Richard Burbage. A number of anecdotes support this, the most colorful of which was recorded by John Manningham in his diary on 13 March 1602, "Upon a tyme when Burbidge played Rich[ard] 3, there was a Citizen grewe soe farr in liking with him, that before shee went from the play shee appointed him to come that night unto hir by the name of Ri[chard] the 3" (Manningham 75). This anecdote is redolent of urban myth; however, its circulation and preservation indicate that it is not so outlandish as to be easily dismissed. The citizen had blurred the boundary between actor and role, and she had done so selectively, presumably because Burbage had made Richard attractive despite his character's villainous actions.

Richard's transposition via Burbage persisted into the seventeenth century, so much so that at least one other audience member conflated the two, as evidenced by Richard Corbett's account of his visit to Bosworth field, written about 1621 (Crofts 81–82). His local guide was knowledgeable about the battle:

... [H]e could tell
The Inch where Richmond stood, where Richard fell;

Besides what of his knowledge he could say,
 He had Authentique notice from the Play;
 . . . chiefly by that one perspicuous thing,
 where he mistooke a Player for a King.
 For when he would have said, King Richard dy'd,
 And call'd a Horse, a Horse; he, Burbage cry'd. ("Iter Boreale" 12)

For the guide, Shakespeare's Richard as played by Burbage has become the real Richard, even uttering Shakespeare's words. And as did the citizen above, the guide has affixed the character to the image of Burbage. Richard's shift away from the play and from history demonstrates how, through the act of being portrayed by an actor, he has also crossed lines of literacy. Richard moves from being a purely verbal construction, as he is in *More*, to being a verbal and visual construction—a dramatic character accessible to both the literate and the illiterate.

If the uses to which Richard was put in the above examples were politically inert, others found uses for him that were more activist. Whereas the citizen in Manningham's anecdote found Richard a charismatic and attractive figure, for others he was a way of demonizing Elizabeth's and James's minister Robert Cecil. Margaret Hotine and Pauline Croft have traced a number of these connections using verse libels about Cecil and the printing history of the quarto of *Richard III*. Hotine begins with the connection between history plays and contemporary events by showing coincidences between the character of Richard III and Cecil (Campbell 306–34; also Besnault and Bitot 107; Bevington 233; Gurr 141–47). Both Richard and Cecil were described as hunchbacked and deformed. In a letter dated 1603 that describes Cecil's journey to Flanders fifteen years earlier, the Venetian Ambassador to London called Cecil "... a little hunchback . . . but wise . . ." (qtd. in Handover 55). In letters that he knew Queen Elizabeth would see, Cecil carefully complained that she affectionately referred to him as her "little elf" or her "pygmy" (qtd. in Handover 34, 57). Even Cecil's friend Sir Robert Naunton described him as "a little, crooked person" (Naunton 139). The nicknames did not disappear with the ascension of King James who went on to call Cecil "little beagle" (Naunton 137).

In *Richard III*, Margaret uses a canine nickname too, referring to Richard as a dog several times (1.3.216, *passim*),² although her nickname is reproachful, not a demonstration of affection. As with Cecil, Richard's crooked back inspired these curses. For Margaret he was a "rooting hog" (1.3.228) and a "poisonous bunch-back'd toad" (1.3.246). Elizabeth echoes that sentiment with "that foul bunch-back'd toad" (4.4.81). Rich-

ard himself describes his arm as "a blasted sapling wither'd up" (3.4.69). As numerous writers have pointed out, including Cecil's cousin Francis Bacon, physical deformity at the time was regarded as reflecting, or even causing, moral deformity. "Deformed persons are commonly euen with nature: for as Nature hath done ill by them, so doe they by nature; being for the most [part] . . . void of naturall affection; . . . it is good to consider of deformity, not as a signe, which is more deceiueable, but as a cause . . ." (Bacon 146-47). Richard's crooked back indicates a moral crookedness, his withered arm the perversion of his actions. The toad metaphors suggest an ugly deformity and a lower, toxic form of life.

The moral deformity that the crooked back symbolized in Cecil and Richard was ruthless ambition. That ambition drove Richard to murder and betrayal and it brought wealth and power, as well as opprobrium and animosity, to Robert Cecil. Son of William Cecil, Secretary of State and Treasurer to Queen Elizabeth, Robert first came to the Queen's attention as a writer of propaganda that supported her decision to execute Mary Queen of Scots in 1586.³ Cecil benefited from his father's influence in his appointment as Elizabeth's Secretary of State ten years later and remained influential until his death in 1612, facilitating James's ascension by means of a secret correspondence prior to Elizabeth's death, continuing in his office as Secretary of State, becoming Treasurer, and receiving numerous titles and honors including the Earldom of Salisbury. Though they were able bureaucrats and loyal servants, both Cecils were targets of courtly infighting and popular criticism. Robert, in particular, was seen as scheming to undermine courtly favorites such as the Earl of Essex, Bacon, and later, even James. In so doing, he was perceived to have brought undeserved honors to himself and his family.

Hotine sees Cecil's ambitions and his regular promotions as connected to, if not a cause of, the printings of the first five of the eight *Richard III* quartos: 1597, 1598, 1602, 1605, and 1612. The conjectural performance history of the play strengthens these correlations: 1593, 1594, 1596, 1599, 1606, 1607, 1608 and 1612 (Foster qtd. in Davison 16). In 1591, at the age of twenty-eight, Cecil was knighted and made a member of the Privy Council. The anonymous, pro-Tudor play *True Tragedie of Richard III* and Shakespeare's *Richard III* may both have been performed that same year (Wood 29; Hammond 61). In 1596, while Essex was away with the Cadiz expedition, Elizabeth promoted Cecil over him to Secretary of State. The first quarto appeared the next year, followed by the second quarto in 1598. In 1599, Elizabeth made Cecil Master of Wards, another office to which Essex had aspired.

That Cecil was rapidly promoted exacerbated tensions with the Essex faction, tensions that were worsened when he was assigned to gather evidence related to the failed Essex rebellion. Handover describes the widespread anti-Cecil sentiment the trial generated, recording that someone scratched, "Here lieth the toad" (230) over Cecil's bedchamber door. Croft has noted similar connections between Cecil and Richard present in manuscript verse libels of the time. An allegorical libel written in reference to Essex, "A dreame alluding to my L of Essex, and his adversaries," has marginal notes identifying "a stately Hart" as Essex and "a CAMMELS uglië broode" as "Sir Rob: Cecill crookbackt" ("Early Stuart" A7). Another libel uses the same image and adds another Ricardian reference:

Proud and ambitious wretch that feedest on naught but Faction
 Dissembling smoothfaced dwarf . . . I know your crookback's spider-shapen . . .
 First did thy sire and now thy self by Machivillian skill
 Prevail and curb the Peers as well befits you will. (Croft, "Reputation" 47)

As did More and Shakespeare, the writer connects Cecil's physical deformity to his moral shortcomings. His twisted plots to gain power for himself and to disempower the legitimate rulers are reflected in his contorted body, just as Richard's deformities reflect his corrupt character. An element of class bias appears in the last line, suggesting that Cecil, a commoner, has circumvented the will of the aristocracy. Just as Shakespeare's Richard manipulated the factions in Edward IV's court, the libels portray Cecil as following his father's lead in exploiting the factionalization that plagued Elizabeth's court.

The third quarto was printed in 1602, the year following the Essex Rebellion. Apparently believing another Richard play would be timely and profitable, Philip Henslowe hired Ben Jonson to write one called *Richard Crookback*, using the by-then familiar derogatory label (Greg 168). Cecil continued to be a part of the discovery and investigation of anti-government plots. His wide network of informants and spies served him well but also contributed to his public image as a schemer and manipulator. Over the next three years, Cecil and his network helped to expose three more conspiracies: the Bye and Main Plots in 1603, and the Gunpowder Plot in 1605. Although no one has substantiated the charge, rumors persist to the present that Cecil may have staged the Gunpowder Plot and then exposed it in order to discredit Catholics in the eyes of James and to further his own career (Gardiner 11, Nicholls 213-14). The

fourth quarto was printed in 1605, and in 1606, John Day's *The Isle of Gulls* was performed featuring a character named Dametas who acts as a corrupt counselor to a king. Dametas is described as "the monstrous and deformed shape of vice" (Induction 58–59) and "a little hillock, made great with others ruines" (1.2.25–26).

Cecil's death in 1612 coincided with a revival of *Richard III* and the printing of the fifth quarto—the first in seven years. If there had been any doubt that Cecil was associated with Richard in the public eye, the flurry of libels that appeared after his death put it to rest. Both John Chamberlain and John Donne noted the large numbers that appeared (Chamberlain 351, 362, 364; Donne 89–91). Many of which survive:

Heere lieth Robin Crookt back, unjustly reckond
A Richard the third, he was Judas [the Second] . . .
Richard, or Robert, which is the worse?
A Crookt back great in state is England's curse. ("Early Stuart" D4)

Not only is the connection between Cecil and Richard assumed here, the libel implies that Cecil was worse than Richard the tyrant; he was more akin to Judas the traitor. Another libel contends that Cecil actually and disastrously ruled England:

Two R:rs twoe Crookebacks of late ruled Englands helme
The one spilte the Royall bloode, the other Spoylde the Realme. ("Early Stuart" D5)

Chamberlain sent a version of this rhyme to Dudley Carleton in June of 1612 with a marginal note identifying the two crookbacks (Chamberlain 1.356n34). Several others refer to Cecil as hunchbacked and characterize him as a scheming manipulator ("Early Stuart" D8, D16, and D18). In December 1612, Chamberlain noticed another more subtle attack on Cecil. Bacon's expanded collection of essays was printed, including for the first time the chapter entitled "Of Deformity." Chamberlain writes that "in a chapter of deformitie the world takes notice that he paints out his late little cousin . . ." (Chamberlain 397). Although Bacon was Cecil's first cousin, he also had been a close friend of the Earl of Essex. Bacon may not have even intended the essay to point directly to Cecil, but Chamberlain writes that readers—"the world"—had made the connection without prompt.

Though Hotine's correlations between the staging and printing of *Richard III* and Cecil's life by no means constitute proof, when com-

bined with Croft's evidence from the verse libels, they demonstrate that from the 1590s to his death, Robert Cecil was connected with Richard in the public's imagination. From the context of the libels in particular, the connection between Cecil and Richard functioned on the one hand as a form of warning or political critique and on the other as a personal attack that may have had political implications. The censure would have suggested that since Cecil was similar to Richard, he would become as destructive as Richard if not curbed. An element of social critique may also be present here, recalling not only Richard's tyranny as a king but also the corrupt system that allowed him to displace a legitimate king. It was a similar situation with Cecil, who manipulated a system that rewarded cunning rather than noble virtue. More so under James than Elizabeth, this sense of the Ricardian attack on Cecil foreshadows James's tendency to lavish attention and gifts on personal favorites such as Robert Carr or George Villiers. Another aspect of the class-based critique of Cecil is his illegitimacy; as a commoner, Cecil could be seen as undeserving of the honors and the power he was given, especially when compared to a genuine aristocrat such as Essex. Cecil's rise exposed a system that neglected nobility in favor of Machiavellian ambition. The attack on Cecil may also be seen as a criticism of the policies that he pursued, such as the ruthless recusancy laws established at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 or the negotiations that brought peace with Spain that same year.

The plays and the libels combined would have effectively publicized these ideas, reaching a large audience of varied literacy in London and beyond. Alastair Bellany has argued that because of their brevity and simple rhymes, libels were easy to memorize, recite, or sing, and this made them accessible to the non-literate (286–89). He goes on to detail how the sophisticated and extensive libel circulation via letters regularly reached the provinces (291). Cecil was probably aware of the libels' attacks. Via his spy network, he had libels collected for his inspection (Bellany 291). If we regard the libels, the revivals, and the reprintings of *Richard III* as enacting a personal attack and at times a critique of the policies Cecil advocated, the mixture of media would have made those messages accessible to an unusually heterogeneous audience throughout England. The criticism would be short-lived, however, because of the ephemerality of manuscript and oral media at the time.

Because of his notoriety, this audience may well have expanded upon Cecil's death. The number of posthumous libels demonstrates the depth and breadth of the fear of and disdain for Cecil. The posthumous libels, in contrast to the earlier ones, would have deployed the charges of moral

crookedness as a warning to the general populace against the influence of a single councilor, such as Cecil, or his father. Similar to Milton's invocation of Richard to characterize Charles, the libels that appeared after Cecil's death would have announced his death and expressed relief that this dangerous man was no longer a threat.

After 1612, *Richard III* remained out of print for ten years and we have no word of its being performed. Interest in the character and the play remained, however, as evidenced by the printing of the sixth quarto in 1622 and the lost play *Richard III or the English Prophet* by Samuel Rowley, which was performed in 1623 by Palsgrave's Players (Adams 24). The seventh quarto was printed in 1629, the year Charles dissolved Parliament. The last quarto was printed in 1634, the year after the King's Players performed *Richard III* for the king and queen (Adams 53). During this period, there do not appear to have been any similar correlations with other figures as there were with Cecil. With the closing of the theaters in 1642, professional performances ceased.

Despite his absence from the professional stage, Richard III remained a character employed in identifying villains and contrasting good monarchs. The dating makes it difficult to know for certain, but the prologue to an unknown performance of Shakespeare's *Richard III* staged sometime after 1661 somewhat ambiguously invokes a dictator, probably Oliver Cromwell but conceivably Charles I: "Tyrants . . . Puft up with pride, still vanish in despair. / But lawful Monarchs are preserv'd by Heaven" (A.B. 13). Richard the villain was popular on stage in the 1660s, 70s and 80s, though not in Shakespeare's play. In 1667, *The English Princess, or the Death of Richard the Third* by John Caryl was performed by the Duke's Company (Van Lennep 104; Wood 67; also Pepys 100–102). The play emphasizes the romance and marriage of Elizabeth and Richmond, taking Richard away from center stage. Printed in 1667, 1673, and 1674, the play seems to have taken advantage of a hope for a new, robust reign after the tyranny of Cromwell. The next stage manifestation of Richard was politically sensitive in the context of the Exclusion Crisis, though not necessarily because of the character of Richard. He appeared in the first of John Crowne's two anti-Catholic adaptations of Shakespeare, *Henry the Sixth the Second Part or the Misery of Civil War* performed in 1680 at the Duke's Theatre and printed the same year (Van Lennep xxix; also Maguire 70–92). Richard's future villainy is more pronounced in Crowne's adaptation than in the source. He is described as "crookbacked" and largely plays a misogynist counterpoint to his adulterous brothers, Edward and George. The heavy emphasis on philandering in the play

seems to be reflective of the behavior of the current monarch and other members of the aristocracy (Murray *passim*).

Richard III remained popular on stage throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As numerous stage histories have demonstrated, the succession of actors who played Richard and the history of revisions of the text, from Cibber's to the more or less successful revisions by Edmund Kean, Charles Macready, Samuel Phelps, and Henry Irving are a good source for the study of the evolution of Shakespearean editorial practices, stage interpretation and character (c.f. Colley, Donohue, Hankey, and Wood). On stage and over time, Richard's character became more general and less particular. Actors from David Garrick to Kean may have used contemporary analogues to seek greater realism or a greater sense of tragedy, but they do not seem to have used Richard on stage as a means to attack specific public figures. Visually, the character of Richard seems to have remained, in one way or another, a figure of the past. Wood describes the approaches of some of the most notable productions. Garrick's costume was Elizabethan in style. Kemble's production in the late eighteenth century used an Elizabethan construction of the medieval, attempting to evoke visually the original production. For Charles Kean's ambitious 1857 production, "medieval" entailed efforts to provide some measure of historical authenticity using scores of carefully tailored costumes to bring to mind the late fifteenth century (Wood 108-12, 127-29). This tendency to look backward characterized British and American approaches to Shakespearean history plays that fixed them in a medieval past. Because of this relatively static method of staging Richard and the preference for revised versions of Shakespeare's play at the time, this study will forgo a discussion of the performance history of *Richard III* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to focus on specific instances of the play's production in the twentieth century.

By the early twentieth century, Anglo-American productions of *Richard III* still chiefly reflected nineteenth century actor-centered, historically oriented practices, though continental influences had begun to have an effect. This was the case in Britain, where Harley Granville-Barker and others were introducing modernist elements to some stagings of Shakespeare, while *Richard III* was still performed as a type of "museum Shakespeare." Productions of history plays in particular tended to be less innovative than those of the tragedies or the comedies. Although European Shakespeare had become political, Dennis Kennedy writes that "British Shakespeare generally in this period, but particularly in Stratford and London, backed away from connecting the national dramatist to the conditions of the contemporary world," a situation which persisted into

the 1930s (29). Hankey echoes this, writing that through the 1920s and 1930s, the character of Richard began to "flatten out" because of the persistent influence of Irving and the lack of innovation (65). Contributing to this stagnation of the history play was the historical, political, and social distance that audiences had to cross in order to access the play. The monarchs of the Middle Ages and the early modern period tended to be more oppressive and to hold greater absolute power than most early twentieth century European governments, few of which, if any, were functioning monarchies. Understanding the plays as history lessons was easier than seeing them as commentaries on contemporary social or political conditions. This eventually changed, most notably in Germany.

One of the most influential continental stagings of *Richard III*, directed by Leopold Jessner, was presented in the autumn of 1920 at the National Theater of Berlin. Jessner already had a reputation for productions that were critical of German militarism, and he believed that plays must be timely rather than historical (Grange 92; Höfele 141–43; Hortmann 57–58). Reflecting this belief, his stage interpretation was non-realistic and allegorical. Richard's crown was enormous, he wore a great red cloak and most of the action after the coronation took place on a red staircase that led up to the throne. Fritz Kortner played Richard as visually grotesque, invoking a bunch-backed toad (Speaight 210). The colors and the staircase emphasized the play's hierarchies, Richard's ascension through them, and the bloody cost of that climb. Kortner's Richard did not recall a particular person, nor did it look to the distant past for its contexts. Rather, the production itself suggested the damage caused by the ambition of Karl Liebknecht, an executed leader of the Spartakist Rising in 1919, and Wolfgang Kapp, a leader of the Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch in 1920, two men who had attempted to seize the German government (Grange 92). This *Richard III* might also have recalled the abdicated Kaiser Wilhelm II, who had a withered left arm.

Seventeen years later, Jurgen Fehling gave *Richard III* an unambiguously contemporary setting and a clear commentary on the oppressive political and social conditions in Germany at the time. The costume design apparently featured Clarence's murderers wearing SA uniforms.⁴ Though conflicting accounts exist about these uniforms and the audience's response, the production angered both Joseph Goebbels and Hermann Göring, suggesting that those in power perceived some sort of criticism in the play (Hortmann 137–41). Reflecting on drama and the social realities of the 1930s and early 1940s, Hortmann writes, "During the Third Reich . . . there was no need to give the Histories . . . any additional twists. . . .

Richard III could here be played straight and still understood as a parable referring to a clique ruling beyond the border" (166). Here the critique is systemic, emphasizing the social conditions that allowed tyrants or cliques to reach power.

Regarding these stagings as products of their times accounts for their popularity and their reception. Jessner's production seemed to eschew any clear evocation of the men who had recently threatened the government, opting for a more general implication of the dangers of political ambition, unlike the Jacobean use of Richard to attack Cecil. Rather than focusing on the figure of Richard, the entire play functioned as a broad assessment and would be cited by Jan Kott in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1961). Fehling's approach also seemed not to connect Richard to a particular person, instead alluding to current events. Whatever Fehling's intentions, at least some in the audience had seen a connection between the play and contemporary events. Distinct from Anglo-American productions of *Richard III*, these German stagings did not solve the problem of historical distance by staging plays set in historical periods. Because of the instability of the inter-war years and the rise of National Socialism, the play seemed contemporary and Fehling took advantage of that fact. At the time, *Richard III* was not a piece of medieval history; rather, it was being used as political commentary in a way that had not occurred since the seventeenth century. British and American productions of the play would begin to recognize, engage with, and represent contemporary events, but much more slowly and sporadically than those in Germany or the rest of continental Europe.

In Britain, performances of *Richard III* began to reflect the rise of fascism on the continent, but without making overt connections. For example, in the 1939 performance at Stratford-upon-Avon, John Laurie's Richard reminded reviewers of Hitler and Mussolini, though they also apparently felt the performance made no sustained connections to either dictator (Colley 167). In his autobiography, Donald Wolfit describes playing Richard in 1942: "I had only wanted to add *Richard III* to my leading roles, and the more I studied him the greater grew his resemblance to Hitler. . . . The withered left hand, the limping left leg, the hump on the shoulder, the scarlet tunic trimmed with fur—this was my picture of Richard III. My wig of long red hair with a cowlick across the forehead gave a most curious resemblance, in an impressionistic way, to the Fuhrer" (205). The word "impressionistic" indicates that Wolfit recognized similarities between Richard and Hitler but chose not to engage with them directly for his performance. Because of the timeliness

of his production and his performances for military personnel, it is quite possible that Wolfit's audiences saw the connection to Hitler regardless of Richard's appearance and the absence of direct references. But for Wolfit, the play was an opportunity to exercise his talents as an actor rather than use the stage as a forum for political statements or personal attacks. Audiences apparently found both these productions, one on the eve of war, and one during war, reflective of current events. There is little evidence, however, that they were staged with a particular contemporary association in mind or that they functioned as anything more than broad anti-Nazi propaganda.

Laurence Olivier, perhaps the best-known Richard of the twentieth century, first performed the role in London in 1944–45 at the New Theater, then in Australia and New Zealand in 1948, at the Old Vic in 1948–49, and a last time in 1955 for film. His approach to the role was similar to Wolfit's, seeing it as a star vehicle. He did, though, claim to show some awareness of the contexts in 1944. In an interview in the mid-1960s, Olivier remembered, "One had Hitler over the way, one was playing it definitely as a paranoiac, so there was a core of something to which the audience would immediately respond" (Burton 24). He goes on to cite as another influence the character of the Big Bad Wolf from Disney's *Three Little Pigs*. Olivier's goal seemed to have been to make Richard familiar to audiences by invoking well-known figures. He did not see the role as a means to communicate something about current events. Instead, he saw it as largely apolitical, removed from contemporary history and in need of a more distinctly historical context.

Olivier and Wolfit both saw references to Hitler as a means of connecting with their audiences, yet their conceptions of Richard and the play still centered on the performer. For lead actors, this preference is understandable, but still indebted to nineteenth century conceptions of *Richard III* and perhaps reminiscent of Burbage's reputation. The primary goal alluded to by the museum-Shakespeare metaphor was bringing the audience to the historical past rather than delivering a social or political warning or personal condemnation. In contrast, Jessner and Fehling's productions attempted to bring the play to the audience in the historical present. In so doing, the play became a means of commentary on fascism's rise and perhaps a warning about its political consequences. Ironically, however, this fascist contextualization of the play would eventually become less and less effective as commentary.

After the war, continental productions continued to be politically engaged. In his survey of postwar productions of *Richard III* up to 1984,

Langdon Brown attributes this to audiences' lack of knowledge of British history, which required the play "to be raised to a more universal level" (Leiter 594). This may be true but perhaps overstates the case. It is hard to imagine anyone in Europe unable to find contemporary relevance in the play in the late 1940s. At the time, knowledge of British history was not necessary to understand the events portrayed in *Richard III*. The play did not become universal as much as specific. Swedish director Alf Sjöberg said as much about his 1947 production: "[Richard] was not hard to identify while Europe was still living in the rubble of the world war, and we continually watched great ideological con-men rise up and try to seize power" (qtd. in Leiter 601). Sjöberg seems to imply that not only was the play seen as timely, but the character of Richard and his rise to power served as a warning, alerting people to the dangers of ambitious postwar ideologues. The focus on Richard's rise and the conditions that allowed it demonstrates how the world of the play can be perceived as social commentary. This recalls early modern England, where the character of Richard was used to target individuals, such as Cecil or Cromwell, in order to comment on the political situation.

Although Anglo-American productions of *Richard III* were not overtly political in the 1940s, since World War II, the characterization of Richard has consistently recalled European fascism. Hugh Richmond writes of seeing Marius Goring as Richard in Glen Byam Shaw's 1953 performance at Stratford and recognizing a military bearing in the black-leather-clad characters, which reminded him of Erwin Rommel (67). Critics saw Richard Whorf's Richard in New York in 1949 as inspired by Goebbels (Colley 183). When José Ferrer played Richard in New York four years later, swastikas and hammer-and-sickle images were projected onto the set (Colley 184). Christopher Plummer's 1961 RSC Richard evoked the Second World War and contemporary events for at least one critic. Richard Muller wrote: "That even now, at the very time of the Eichmann trial, some people should still find Richard of Gloucester too ruthless and too bloody to be a convincing protagonist is something I find hard to understand. . . . [Richard] is of the exact same historical mode as Hitler or Himmler" (qtd. in Richmond 71). The cultural work that these productions seem to be performing is that of reassurance. As was perhaps the case with the posthumous Cecil libels, the evocation of Nazism at this point in time can be seen as an expression of relief that the danger was safely in the past.

However, as Muller contends, the memories of the World War II experience with tyrants and the tensions of the Cold War were a constant and

continuing influence on the characterization of Richard. With the rise of fascism, with Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin all in living memory, and with the presence of new dictators, including Castro and Stalin's successors, there was no shortage of models for Richard. The appearance of Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* in the early 1960s provided a theoretical framework for understanding Shakespeare as modern and for staging productions in modern times. Under the influence of Kott's ideas, live performances of *Richard III* began to shake off the remnants of eighteenth and nineteenth century ideas of the play's being performed in a strictly historical setting. In the eyes of the audience, the character of Richard became strongly linked to recent European experience with dictators and contemporary experiences in places such as the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, South America, and Africa (though rarely in Britain or the US). The events of the play—Richard's manipulations and his opponent's weaknesses—also brought these experiences to mind.

In the 1960 RSC season, Peter Hall and John Barton acknowledged these factors and attempted to contextualize *Richard III* as the culmination of *The Wars of the Roses*, a cycle of plays based on the three *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*. The series was revived in 1964 as part of a staging of all eight history plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III*. Though they were set in the fifteenth century, by the 1960s the plays were "taken for granted as a comment on contemporary European politics" with pictures of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini featured in the program (Fay 166). There is no evidence that the company considered linking Richard to a specific figure, in part because of his position at the end of a series of plays rather than at the center of his own play (Richmond 77). A young (twenty-nine years old) and short (five feet, six inches) Ian Holm was cast against type to make Richard look "boyish" (Potter, "Bad and Good" 45). Critics, however, saw Holm's Richard as "a paranoiac, a sort of Hitler" (Colley 227). Having read Kott's book, Hall regarded the plays and the RSC as producing drama relevant to the present, despite their historical settings. Trevor Nunn later recalled that Hall insisted on "one simple rule: that whenever the Company did a play by Shakespeare, they should do it because the play was relevant, because the play made some demand on our current attention" (qtd. in Berry 58). Speaking specifically about *The Wars of the Roses*, Hall commented, "I realized that the mechanism of power had not changed in centuries. We also were in the middle of a blood-soaked century. I was convinced that a presentation of one of the bloodiest and most hypocritical periods in history would teach many lessons about the present" (Hall and Barton xi). As had

Jessner and Fehling, Hall saw Shakespeare's history plays as a means of social change, reminding audiences of the conditions of their own times. This was accomplished through the events of the play itself, the staging of the rise of a violent, destructive figure that people were powerless to stop. Where the pre-war Germans seem to have let their audiences make the connections for themselves, Hall directed his audience by including the dictators' portraits in the program.

A similar use of the play and the character to make a demand on current attention occurred in the U.S. with the rise and fall of Richard Nixon in the early 1970s. In February of 1973, the Theatre Company of Boston staged *Richard III* with Al Pacino in the lead role. The timing of the production was propitious. The previous November, Nixon had been re-elected in a landslide. In January of 1973, two former Nixon aides were convicted of conspiracy and burglary connected to the Watergate Hotel break-in. The production utilized a semi-modern setting with Richard and Buckingham using a microphone to speak to the Lord Mayor and crowd (Colley 209). Not surprisingly, in her review, Barbara Hodgdon describes Richard's first soliloquy as "delivered as voice-over documentary, a state-of-the-union message in underplayed, Nixon speech rhythms" (374). Her account ended by making the contemporary connection: "Richard seemed neither innocent nor guilty, just very good at manipulating power. The parallels come uncomfortably close to the age and body of our time, making our roles as spectators doubly significant" (375). This production appears to have escaped the shadow of Stalin and others. Rather than using historical figures to illuminate Richard, the production used Richard to illuminate, if not impugn, Nixon. Pacino's Richard III provided insight into political events of the moment similar to, as Hotine and Croft conjecture, the use of Richard in early modern England or to how Jessner and Fehling felt about the relationship between their productions and their audiences. The play achieved an active topicality. Audiences might have seen Pacino's Richard as a warning or even a prediction about the current president, but this topicality was fleeting. The ability of the character of Richard to censure Nixon vanished as soon as Nixon resigned.

The Watergate scandal engendered other uses of *Richard III* as commentary, often in a comic vein. In 1972, two plays, *Richard Thirddtime*, by Steven Bush and Richard McKenna, and *T'e tragedy of King Rich'rd t'e T'ird: "my kingdom for a bomb,"* by Charles S Preston used humorous adaptations of Richard to poke fun at Nixon. The following year, the musical *Dick Deterred*, written by David Edgar used punning Shakespear-ean dialogue (of which the title is an example) to retell the Watergate

events. Along with political cartoons of the time, which also made the Nixon/Richard connection, *Dick Deterred* is a particular sort of adaptation of Shakespeare that seems alternately to invoke the gravity of a canonical play and the levity of humor by exaggeration. Similar to the verse libels attacking Cecil, such forms enabled the Ricardian critique of Nixon to reach a much larger audience than those who had seen Pacino's Richard in Boston, though the Nixon parodies have a much greater sense of levity than do the Cecil libels.

Robin Phillips's 1977 production with Brian Bedford at Stratford, Ontario, attempted to find a middle ground between an actor-centered, historical approach and the Kott-influenced approach of Hall and Barton. The production resulted in an interpretation that portrayed Richmond as another schemer rather than a national hero. The cynicism of the well-reviewed production prompted numerous critics to refer to the setting as a "post-Watergate world" (Knowles 38). Other productions attempted to invoke Kott by staging the play in historical, but not English, settings. Michael Moriarty's Richard for the American Shakespeare Theater in 1980 used an eclectic production method, setting the play in Napoleonic France but citing Nixon and Hitler as well. Picking up on the latter allusion, critics felt some characters looked similar to Nazi officers (Cooper 239; Colley 212). This approach was evident in other productions. Reviewing the 1983 Colorado Shakespeare Festival production, Michael Mullin found a mixture of allusions in the casting. He noticed that "Buckingham . . . looked like Robert S. McNamara . . ." and Richard's "henchmen sometimes appeared in Nazi SS uniforms, then in Green Beret camouflage, later in crimson Napoleonic tunics" (230–31). In these productions, history has overwhelmed the character of Richard. By employing a range of historical figures and periods for reference points, such stagings neither enact a historical Richard nor make him topical.

Topicality was rare in British productions as well. Even in otherwise innovative performances, cast members and audiences have continuously invoked Hitler and Stalin. For example, in 1975, at the Other Place at Stratford, Ian Richardson played Richard in a production that set the play in an insane asylum. Richardson claimed that part of his sense of the character came from the figures of Stalin, Hitler, and Idi Amin (Cook 42–43). The drawback of this characterization of Richard as both a tyrant and a mental patient was its reduction of Richard's and Hitler's complexity (Colley 206). Actors who portrayed Richard for the RSC continued to struggle with the topicality of Hitler and other tyrants in their approaches to the character. In his memoir, Antony Sher describes his preparation

for portraying Richard in 1984. He refers to a television program that featured Hitler, Goebbels, and Mussolini. Sher was conscious of, and resistant to, the connection to Richard, writing that "Hitler . . . seems too obvious . . ." (106). He finally decided on a Freudian interpretation, emphasizing Richard's physical deformities. In his account of playing the role for the RSC in 1995, David Troughton describes how he drew on the text, Richard's deformity, and a history book about Richard III to prepare for the part. Troughton's allusions are brief: one to Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and another that occurs in his description of the production's unconventional conclusion, wherein Richard's ghostly figure sits on the edge of the stage watching Richmond's final speech. At this point Troughton imagines Richard thinking, "You people may have won this time, but what of Cromwell, Hitler, Stalin, Hussein, et al.?" (99).

As the performance decisions of Richardson, Sher, and Troughton reveal, thinking about one of a small number of twentieth-century dictators is inevitable when preparing to play Richard. For audiences too, seeing black leather costumes alone is enough to connect a production to Nazism. Both actors and audiences seem inclined with the smallest of prompts to understand Richard as a fascist and the play as somehow an allegory about the rise and fall of European fascism. But this inclination has actually come to limit Richard's topical potential. As the actual threat of fascism (at least for Anglo-American audiences) faded, regarding Richard on stage as a means of social and/or political commentary, as did Jessner and Fehling and as Hall attempted, became problematic. Thus the image of the fascist Richard became attached to a historical past rather than available to the present, akin to the museum-Shakespeare Richard of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this way, *Richard III* is different from most of Shakespeare's history plays, the events of which are largely unfamiliar to audiences who need to have them contextualized through program notes or other extra textual exposition. Since the 1930s, American and British audiences have not needed such exposition for Richard. They bring a knowledge of the events surrounding WWII with them as a means for understanding him. This is in part the result of Hitler's remarkably visual propaganda programs which generated images of military dictatorship that remain inescapable. The postwar spread of durable, mass, visual media such as film and especially television has enabled this imagery to become iconic. The presence and the permanence of this iconography of tyranny have reversed Richard's early modern displacement from the page to the stage. Since the Second World War, Richard has become reattached to history, and the permanence of the

visual historical archive perpetuates this attachment (Hoenselaars 111). No matter how a production attempts to reinvent Richard, be it as a patient in an asylum or Napoleon, audiences (and actors and directors) will tend to see him in terms of Hitler or Stalin first. This tendency can thus short-circuit attempts to connect him to more recent or more topical figures. A reinvention of Richard's stage potential as a means of social or political critique seems to have required the emergence of a figure that could, at least for a moment, eclipse the image of the European black leather tyrant.

The use of figures such as Hitler or Stalin in a production of *Richard III* establishes a bridge between the play and an audience's presumed lack of knowledge of the play. Such a play does not comment on current or recent events; rather it assumes a general knowledge of those events in order to make events that are distant in time, the fifteenth or sixteenth century, more knowable and accessible. As a result, the production tends to be conservative and uncritical. Once Watergate's historical moment has passed, for instance, evocations of Nixon cease to be topical. A topical performance seeks out current analogues and uses the play to criticize, expose, or warn, not just about tyrants but about the circumstances that allowed their rise. This seems to be what occurred in early modern England with the revivals and reprintings of the play and their relation to Cecil.

The challenge of topicality can be illustrated in the 1987 production *Wars of the Roses* directed by Michael Bogdanov for the English Shakespeare Company. Bogdanov and Michael Pennington worked all eight history plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III* into a cycle, as Hall and Barton had done in 1964. They attempted to politicize the plays by gradually introducing modern settings (Crowl 146–47). The cycle began with a Regency-era *Richard II* and concluded with *Richard III* largely in modern dress, though the final battle featured armor and swords (Bogdanov and Pennington 103). Rather than a medieval monarch, Richard III was the bald, suit-wearing, corrupt CEO of an England that seemed like a giant corporation (Potter, "Recycling" 171–76). The topicality here is clear, as is the commentary on the growth and power of national and multinational corporations. Richard, however, seemed to be a non-specific executive rather than a particular figure, with the play addressing the political system more than the individuals who ran it. The production did manage to shake the influence of the fascist model in ways that earlier productions had not. Fascism was not absent however. It was invoked in Cade's speech (*Henry VI* part 2) staged as "National Front propaganda"

(Potter, "Recycling" 180). Another attempt at an unconventional Richard appeared on stage again the following year when the RSC presented *The Plantagenets*, a cycle of the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*. Potter notes that it too claimed to be "radical" or "subversive" but failed partially because audiences were distracted by the length and complexity of the plays, finding their topical effects novel and amusing but not recognizing any political or social message ("Recycling" 178).

The final production this paper considers found topicality by exploring the factor that seemed to impair earlier politicized productions—that is, Richard's embeddedness in twentieth century history. The 1990 production of *Richard III* by the Royal National Theatre, directed by Richard Eyre and starring Ian McKellen, took full advantage of the audience's knowledge of fascist Europe to present an interpretation that used the play to propose a historical possibility rather than simply using history to contextualize the play. In his review, Peter Holland writes, "[T]he production single-mindedly saw in Richard's rise an analogy for a possible alternative history of Britain between the wars, a successful coup by a leader who adroitly perceived and utilized the efficacy of fascist militarism, overthrowing an atrophied aristocracy by the energy of populist thuggery" (187). Alluding to the rise of National Socialism in Germany, the production deployed recognizable propaganda techniques, such as armbands, public address systems, banners, iconic symbols, and rallies, to accessorize Richard's rise. He began the play in a British army-type uniform and exchanged it for a black one with jackboots as he increased his power. His accent was recognizable as from a British military education, though he also used a Nazi style salute (Colley 259–61). Potter describes McKellen's Richard as "quite specifically English" ("Bad" 53). In Holland's words, the play "used the more recent English fascist right's annexation of British nationalism with Richard's triumphant use of armbands and banners, mixing the red cross of St. George with a Gloucester-derived boar-motif" (187). In addition to functioning as a warning about contemporary English fascism, the play also reminded audiences that Great Britain had its own flirtation with fascism during the 1930s.⁵ Oswald Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists in 1932 and in 1937, the Duke of Windsor (formerly King Edward VIII) visited Germany and met with Hitler.

The production played in London and then went on a world tour that ran for over a year, finally ending in the US in 1992. The production's popularity led McKellen and others to rework it into a 1996 film directed by Richard Loncraine. Though shorter and more elaborate than the stage

version, the film retained the alternate history form of commentary. This shift in medium from stage to film enabled the production's critique to reach a much wider audience than the stage production. This is true not only for geographic but also for class accessibility, given that film tickets are cheaper than theater tickets. Film also brings a near-permanence to the critique, enhanced by the further shift to videotape and DVD media. What is more, because of their widespread classroom use, these media help make the film and its critique available to generations of teachers of Shakespeare and their students. And ironically, at least for those exposed to this Richard in the classroom, the near-permanence may result in yet another sort of stagnation of the image of Richard.

As far back as More, depictions of Richard III have had a political and ideological aspect that worked beyond the confines of the page. More could count on the readers of his biography of Richard III knowing about, some even remembering, Richard. Several generations later, Shakespeare could assume that some in his audience would be familiar with Richard as a deformed man and a symbol of deceit and tyranny. But the shift in medium from More's written representation of Richard to Shakespeare's and others' stage representations made More's Richard visibly iconic and accessible to the non-literate. This greater cultural familiarity with Richard meant that he became even more useful as a means for attacks on public figures such as Robert Cecil. But as stage representations of Richard became fixed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it would take a shift in theatrical practices coincident with the rise of European fascism and broadcast media before the stage Richard would undergo another transformation.

As a means of understanding the character of Richard III, the imagery of the twentieth-century fascist dictator has become dominant for modern audiences. Even in performances that do not explicitly engage with fascist iconography, audiences still tend to find references to figures such as Hitler. As a result, Richard often becomes a sort of museum piece as he had in the nineteenth century, only now revealing anxieties about Europe's fascist near-past. This concern with the near-past may suggest that as a culture we have attempted to cope with the legacy of fascism by generalizing it and displacing it to a comfortably distant time. The concern can also be seen in the complications of using Richard as a means of personal attack or topical commentary. Richard's usefulness in this way has not been foreclosed, but modified. Associating a current public figure with Richard can do double work: connecting that figure with Richard as well as with villains of the recent past such as Hitler or Stalin. So when

Kuwaiti writer and director Sulayman Al-Bassam presents *Bagdad Richard*, his adaptation of *Richard III*, for the RSC's Complete Works Festival in February of 2007, one might ask to what extent the audience will see the play simply as an attack on Hussein, or a geographical displacement of European fascism.⁶

Notes

¹The play includes a scene from Holinshed wherein Richard has a man executed for writing a verse libel.

²All quotations are taken from Hammond's Arden *Richard III*.

³All biographical information is taken from Pauline Croft's *DNB* entry.

⁴The SA (Sturmabteilung) were a Nazi paramilitary organization founded in 1920.

⁵Ton Hoenselaars makes a further point here about Hitler/Mussolini-influenced Richards and the innovation of Eyre and McKellen: "It was not until the end of the 1980s, however, that a director like Richard Eyre could relativize this rather facile British way of projecting Ricardian evil on the foreign other" (111).

⁶The RSC website describes the play: "Shakespeare's mesmerising portrait of human evil provides the doorway into the dark inner workings of Saddam Hussein's Iraq in the mid 1980s, an era when the Iraqi tyrant was still regarded as a hero incarnate of both Arab and Western worlds alike." *Royal Shakespeare Company*. "The Bagdad Richard." 16 June 2006. <<http://www.rsc.org.uk/news-and-events/events/3575.aspx>>.

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