

Daring Dynasty

Daring Dynasty:

Custom, Conflict and Control in Early-Tudor England

By

Mark R. Horowitz

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For my father

A NOTE TO THE READER

This book came about from two different but related directions. For one, over time colleagues suggested that I pull together some of my articles, unpublished conference papers and essays into one volume for easy access. More recently, for four years I taught an upper-level course entitled *The Tudor Kings* at the University of Illinois at Chicago as a Visiting Professor. Students made a similar proposition with the addition of asking me to include “mini-Introductions” with anecdotes concerning how each piece materialized. I had assigned them several of my articles and essays to read as part of the class and they often asked about the process, the relationships between historians and how a project even came into being—interesting tidbits that usually never see the light of day.

I endeavor to do these things. Books of collected scholarship are usually just that, and they are meant for a specific academic readership. My hope is to reach broader audiences. While the scholarly articles are, predictably, scholarly in nature, I tried to write them using an explanatory narrative for those unfamiliar with the topics. That did not eliminate the “language” historians use in discussing their research, euphemistically called jargon. The papers were for audiences that included those with limited knowledge of English history or the research; hence, less jargon.

The result, hopefully, appeals not only to scholars and students of the period but also to those interested in the Tudors or English history. Indeed, I begin with a paper on the “war of words” between Richard III and Henry VII that cost the former his crown at the expense of the latter who seized it. Even the Bard was enticed to learn about them and pen a play. I put the chapters in a particular order to provide an overview of Henry and England and how people conducted every day affairs, working up from minister and citizen and town to the government and the king, along with a view of his son, Henry VIII. The addenda include two approaches to the historical method and how well-researched historical novels can be an enticing entry point to the real thing.

Finally, I pay tribute to graduate students, disclosing the trials and “fibrillations” of what they encounter when attempting to pass the dreaded Oral Exam for a PhD. It is the least I could do for these brave souls.

NOTE. The reader can continue this early-Tudor exploration at: www.daringdynasty.net or send an email to daringdynasty@aol.com.

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PREFACE

“The king is dead! Long live the king!” Thus the son and heir ascended the throne of England on 22 August 1485 as King Henry VII. He did so amid the cheers of well-wishers vocalizing the eight words of an age-old English tradition—or rather a “borrowed” tradition begun by their arch-enemy the French more than a half century earlier. Those words illuminated a seamless succession ordained by God. They proclaimed the new king on the very day the old king met his earthly demise and heavenly reward. It was followed by a magnificent royal burial of respect and pageantry. Order endured. Life continued. And the immutable world held forth its hope of a good reign and a good king amid peace and prosperity.

That is not how it happened. In fact, what actually occurred boggles the mind and shatters the fairy tale of succession and kingship. Uncovering the real story of what transpired in the reign of the first Tudor king would capture both my imagination and a desire to come as close as possible to figuring it all out after the passing of half a millennium. I could not speak with the man who would become king on that fateful August day. I could not talk to those who served him, supported him, revolted against him or feared him. But I could seek out contemporary writings and records that might divulge what ensued with the hope of trying to sort out what those remnants of the past were truly saying, and maybe what it all meant.

Henry Tudor was not the heir to the throne. In reality, he had perhaps the most anemic claim to the English monarchy since William the Conqueror in 1066. Prior to defeating Richard III in battle on 22 August at Bosworth Field, this twenty-eight year old fugitive spent the last fourteen years of his life in exile. When he invaded England with the aid of foreign soldiers, he claimed he was already king. As if to dare those supporters of Richard to renounce their allegiance to him, the new king, now Henry VII, claimed he was the rightful ruler of England on 21 August, the day *before* the battle. That made all those who fought for Richard at Bosworth Field traitors to the true monarch on that day! They now had to make a choice.

Henry was telling the courts of Europe, the Pope and his own people that he did not usurp the throne by killing the king—he reclaimed his throne from an imposter who rebelled against King Henry VII of England.

Far from the dead king being laid to rest in majesty, Richard III’s naked body was tied to a horse and taken to the city of Leicester where it

was displayed in public as proof of his death. His burial place there in Greyfriars church was eventually lost to memory, only coming to light in 2012 under a parking lot. After the battle, Henry VII could not even celebrate his victory in London for very long—a disease called the sweating sickness soon began to ravage the city, killing thousands.

Many of Richard's followers and relatives did not go gently into that good night. They fomented revolts and spawned "pretenders" to the throne for much of the reign in the guise of Richard III's two nephews, whom he purportedly murdered to seize the throne for himself. Moreover, Henry was well aware that of the nine previous English kings, five had been murdered so they could be replaced. He was responsible for the death of the last one. His fanciful claim of descent from King Arthur or his joining of the red and white roses of Lancaster and York did little to quell dissent or danger for his dynasty.

And yet, when the first Tudor king died in 1509 he left behind a very different England than the one he found in 1485. He transformed the realm from an insolvent, often divided country in the waning years of the so-called Wars of the Roses into a stable, emerging modern state, a legacy inherited by his larger-than-life heir, Henry VIII. How did this happen?

Much of my research, and many of the publications and papers based on it over several decades and found in this book, involves my attempt to answer this question. These endeavors represent an ongoing immersion into national and local archives and secondary sources, as well as enjoying innumerable discussions over the years with fellow historians and students regarding different points of view and various paths of inquiry.

One outcome of this pursuit was being named Guest Editor for a special volume of the peer-reviewed journal *Historical Research* devoted to Henry VII to celebrate the 500th anniversary of his death (1509-2009). I contributed the Introduction and two articles, chose the scholars and gave it the enigmatic title "Who was Henry VII?" I thought it fitting since it offered a query about a monarch who was nothing if not enigmatic.

The results of my sojourn to date into the first Tudor's reign suggest a few emerging themes that have made things clearer to me about Henry VII and early-Tudor England. For one, through sheer tenacity and force of will, as well as a pragmatic approach to kingship, Henry discovered how to be king and what succeeded and what failed. He fortuitously received guidance and support from a cadre of financial and legal professionals connected to his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, countess of Richmond and Derby. She was a formidable force who used all means to protect and promote her only son, including marrying three husbands (possibly four) for political advantage and outliving them all.

After the first few years of learning and doing, Henry then took over the reins of his reign personally. He came to comprehend how English men and women functioned peacefully in everyday life at the local level, and then imprinted those important lessons on a national scale of royal administration and royal policy.

At the center of his policy was an understanding of the transactional lifestyle of English men and women founded on the customs and laws of the land since “time out of mind”. This included entering obligations (in effect, contracts) to buy and sell goods and land, borrow money, keep the peace, appear in a court of law or make promises for future good behavior. Henry was blessed with ministers well-versed in how this way of life worked, and they established a bottom-up approach to ruling the realm based on it. It was therefore the law, in my view, that helped create the nation of England—a national law and the evolving institutions to promote it and serve it. Henry VII made customary and statutory law the cornerstone of his monarchy to mitigate conflict and to control the political winds.

However, there was a dark side to his policy of law and enforcement, one that would tarnish his reputation and forfeit the lives of two of the ministers who followed his lead. Being a master politician like his mother, Henry was the true exemplar of politics, which I define as the pursuit of self-interest and self-preservation through the use of power. Such pursuits could become abusive and harmful, and they did.

Nevertheless, the fact that young Henry VIII retained many of the policies and procedures of his father while resolving some of its defects attested to the success of the dynasty’s progenitor. Respect for the law, if not always adherence to it, advanced the melding of the populace and its political players into a modern state. I explain how this came about through the actions of Henry VII and his government, which resulted in the founding of a most daring dynasty.

FOREWORD

SIR JOHN BAKER

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DOWNING PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF THE LAWS OF ENGLAND
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Tudor history has never been more popular than it is at present, thanks to a flood of historical novels and plays, both on television and at the cinema. The dynastic aspect of the story, beginning with the “Wars of the Roses”, and enlivened by the bloodthirsty disposal of queens and princes who found themselves in the way, have all the stuff of soap operas, combined with the fascination of knowing (as in Madame Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors) that much of it actually happened. It is more difficult to make the public, or even the average history student, interested in how countries actually functioned over the longer term.

No doubt to ponder whether modern England began with the Battle of Bosworth on 22 August 1485—which is when Englishmen traditionally believed the Middle Ages to have ended—is a futile exercise, since any conclusion would require some arbitrary definition of modernity. But there is no doubt that the Tudor period feels increasingly different from what went before, or that—for all its horrors—its features are more readily recognizable and accessible to the modern observer. Nor is there much dispute that some kind of transformation either began or accelerated rapidly under the remarkable monarch who, at the age of only twenty-eight and with the flimsiest of titles to the throne, defeated the last of the Yorkist kings at Bosworth.

In the following articles and essays Mark Horowitz sets out to identify and explain the nature of those changes. The story is largely about money, that is, about Henry VII’s financial achievements in restoring the royal fortune while at the same time making his subjects generally feel that they were better off. And it is also about law. England had long been a constitutional monarchy, and the king’s ordinary courts of law in Westminster Hall had gone about their daily business, with the same judges, throughout the upheavals of the fifteenth century. The feudal revenue of the crown was based on a sophisticated law of real property,

fossilised from an earlier world. Henry VII made sure that the old system worked even better than before.

But he also harnessed the processes of the common law to the establishment of effective government in a new way, through the use of bonds and recognizances (with monetary penalties) to bring counties, towns, officials, and all people of substance, into line. In place of aristocrats and clergy, he filled the government offices with lawyers, men like Thomas Lovell of Lincoln's Inn, Richard Empson of the Middle Temple and Edmund Dudley of Gray's Inn. They proved very good at augmenting the revenue, and they made the mistake of overdoing it.

The king acquired in his own time a reputation for avarice, and after his death Empson and Dudley lost their lives for an imaginary treason—the first horror of Henry VIII's reign, intended no doubt to reassure the public that the new king would be less oppressive. How Henry VIII proceeded to deal with his legacy, and to what extent he introduced his own revolution in government through Thomas Cromwell (another Gray's Inn man who ended a career of royal service on the scaffold), is the other big story tackled here. And there both the author and I share a deep respect for the work of the late Sir Geoffrey Elton, even if we may disagree with some of it.

I do not suppose these stories will be turned into another film script, since their essence resides in the ingenuity of the main actors, the detail of their schemes, and the doggedness with which they were pursued, rather than in dramatic events and set-piece scenes for which riveting dialogue can be invented. But they are at the core of any understanding of the transition from medieval to modern England—whenever that may be thought to have happened.

ABOUT THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Introductions

As explained earlier in A Note to the Reader, I have written short Introductions to each chapter and addendum. They are anecdotal as opposed to discussions of the historiography of a topic. Nonetheless, I offer explanations for where the topic fit into the scheme of historical scholarship.

Spellings/Abbreviations

Most of the articles in the book appeared in British journals. Therefore, I preserved the British spelling (behaviour, skilful). The remaining articles, papers and reviews retain their original American spelling (behavior, skillful). Abbreviations for the two major document repositories in the UK varied by journal or by time frame when published. I have settled on Brit. Libr. (British Library) and T.N.A.: P.R.O. (The National Archives: Public Record Office). L&P is short for Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII. J.P. is a justice of the peace; M.P. is a member of parliament.

Late-medieval English

In most cases, I retained the original spelling found in the documents being quoted: “to cause my wyeff to be brentt & I to be hangyd” (to cause my wife to be burned and I to be hanged). I believe that keeping the spelling intact allows scholars a closer view of what the writer was communicating and even the possibility of discovering different meanings from what is being discussed. C.J. Harrison’s critically-important article and transcription of a 17th century copy of Edmund Dudley’s “petition” suggested a question to me from one entry that led to a different interpretation simply based on spelling. (Chapter Five). Contractions were common at the time and are mostly retained; for example, c^ten (certain), y^t (that), matt^r (matter), y^e (the), w^t (with), ov^r (over), o^r (our).

Footnotes

Many footnotes seem to go on forever. My sincerest apologies. They were often constructed to provide scholars with expanded or tangential information that might prove useful for their own research, or for greater clarity of an argument. The reader may peruse or pirouette over the footnotes as befitting one's interests. I have also updated certain information where relevant, always with the thought of maintaining the original footnote text throughout the book.

Currency

Currency (species, coin) was in pounds (L or £), shillings (s) and pence (d). These were borrowed loosely from the Roman currencies and symbols of libra (which actually meant "weight" in Latin), solidus and denarius. There were 20 shillings to a pound, 12 pence to a shilling and 240 pence to a pound: £8 11s 3d is eight pounds, eleven shillings, three pence. A mark was two-thirds of a pound: 60 marks equaled 40 pounds (60m, £40). Often unhurried in changing customs and traditions, the British did not "go decimal" with their currency until Decimal Day on 15 February 1971. The shilling disappeared and 100 pence (or pennies) now equaled one pound.

Formats

Some publications and papers originally had spaces or sub-headings or asterisks between sections. I have retained the original format for each work. Quotation marks were a big challenge, whether for quotes, titles or emphasis. The British usually put them inside a comma or period. Americans do not! I have retained what was published by each source. Numbers one through ninety-nine are spelled out; percentages and monetary amounts always use numbers. Other things were modified for continuity and consistency.

Original work

These articles and papers were written over the course of more than three decades except the essay on the PhD Oral Exam, which I view as painfully timeless! Hence, they are reflective of secondary sources and scholarship available and used when they were written. The text is as it appeared in the years noted.

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Cover image	“Blood Roses”. Photograph by Mark R. Horowitz.

Illustration

Add 2.1	“Dorothy’s Dilemma”. Illustration by Becca Hardying (Barbi Horowitz).
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* Tables 8.1-4 were tabulated by Mark R. Horowitz from data found in all the printed entries in the *Calendars of Close Rolls 1468-1509*.

CHAPTER ONE

RICHARD III AND HENRY VII: A CASE OF ROYAL PROPAGANDA*

Introduction

Today we are learning what many believe are new and disturbing concepts related to mass communication such as “fake news” and so-called “alternative facts”. To the historian, of course, such notions are anathema to the discipline of seeking the truth, even though history is replete with fake news and alternative facts! With technological advances over the last century, it is easier to deceive enormous numbers of people in a short amount of time. Governments are just now experiencing the consequences of being on both the sending and receiving ends. One can only wonder if 20th century dictators would have been more successful had they possessed “weapons” such as Facebook, Twitter and email.

The goals for targeting large numbers of people with propaganda for political purposes are nonetheless the same regardless of the modes of dissemination. It can be to curry favor for a particular cause, action or belief. Conversely, it can be used to tarnish or harm a reputation or even the functioning of a government. Truth often takes a back seat because it is perception that becomes the current reality.

This was the case more than half a millennium ago when Richard III seized the throne of England from his nephew, the uncrowned Edward V,

* Paper presented at *The Mid-America Conference on History*, 21-22 Sept. 1984, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas. A subsequent paper on a variation of the theme was read at the *29th Irish Conference of Historians*, 12-14 June 2009, Centre for Historical Research, University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland. Finally, a related paper on the use of Arthurian legend and creative genealogy as propaganda to justify the legitimacy of rule by Henry VII and Henry VIII—“The heir of King Arthur: Henry VII’s ‘historical’ claims of kingship and their influence on Henry VIII”—was presented at *The Royal Body Conference*, 2-4 Apr. 2012, Royal Holloway College, University of London.

in 1483. That violence against a rightful king alone gave pretext for a rebellion led by an unlikely rival, Henry Tudor. However, in the context of what was written, spoken and circulated to large numbers of English citizens, it is instructive to explore how messages were crafted and perceived during the short reign of the last Plantagenet king, Richard III.

Because of my background in a parallel life as a marketing communications executive, I have always been curious about how Henry Tudor “pulled off” his revolution. Most scholarship up to the early-1980s centered on the events of 1483-85, usually with a venture into that most famous of mysteries: the murders of the Two Princes in the Tower. I thought it might be interesting to focus on what information Richard and Henry were providing to both their followers and enemies, and how they went about reaching those audiences. That was the basis for this paper.

Those messages did not cease after Richard III's demise. Henry VII continued to marginalize Richard in documents. He also dated his reign the day before the 22 August battle at Bosworth Field, thereby making himself the rightful king on the battlefield and Richard an imposter. Some historians believe the 21 August dating denoted a means to seize legally the lands of traitors. But Henry could have done that with parliamentary attainders or simply declaring his enemies outlaws: he created a ministerial position to pursue outlaws late in his reign. I think he was communicating his right to the throne because, in truth, he barely had one.

There is absolutely no way to quantify the effect of their messages or how many people they reached. I would argue we still have the same problem today. Internet traffic is measured in “clicks”, which tells us nothing about how many people actually read or paid attention to what was on a web page, let alone if it encouraged them to act or react a certain way. This was already true for measuring “impressions” in newspapers: just because one million people obtained a publication does not mean they read a particular advertisement or article on a specific page, let alone remembered it or responded to it. It is the same with television, where on demand viewing and storage force advertisers to embed ads despite the fact that viewers easily ignore them.

In 15th century England, the sheriff read a proclamation in the village; the parish priest informed his flock of something he read, since few were literate; the traveling merchant told people in a northern tavern what he had seen or heard in London—three weeks earlier. In the drama leading to Bosworth Field, all we can do is learn what the participants hoped people were hearing and perhaps believing. The two rivals to the throne of England were purposefully using propaganda to win adherents and dishearten their enemies. It seems to have worked well for one of them.

The reign of Richard III has been scrutinized by historians, poets and dramatists alike since its abrupt ending almost 500 years ago on 22 August 1485. The Tudor dynasty—which supplanted this last Yorkist king—made good use of Richard's ill fortune to discredit his reign, his claim and practically everything connected with his twenty-six months as king of England. Not only is it true that to the victor go the spoils, but also the last word.

And it is precisely words that helped undo Richard's swift usurpation and reign, in part from his actions—imagined or real—in part from the enterprises of an alternative to his throne: Henry Tudor. How this was accomplished is instructive to historians not only for understanding the events of 1483 to 1485, but the subsequent special kind of paranoia that plagued the first two Tudor monarchs: Henry VII and Henry VIII. Moreover, while propaganda was clearly not new to English history or English politics by 1483, the first Tudor king employed a unique posture for rallying support: that of a rival king, as opposed to a rival to the throne *per se*. Ironically, it was this very ploy that was to cause Henry Tudor so much grief—and almost cost him his throne—after Richard was dead and Henry began his nearly twenty-four year reign as Henry VII.

By the time Richard III assumed the throne of his young nephew, Edward V, in 1483, England had witnessed several usurpations. Henry Bolingbroke began his unwitting march to the throne in 1399 as a persecuted lord seeking redress from an unjust king, his cousin Richard II. But what started out as a quest for justice ended with the overthrow and subsequent murder of the rightful ruler, with Bolingbroke seizing the throne as Henry IV. A half century later, Henry IV's grandson, Henry VI, would face the prospect of losing his throne to another wronged lord, Richard, duke of York, the father of two future kings, Edward IV and Richard III.

In the cases of both Henry IV and Henry VI, however, there was a great reluctance to put forth a rival claimant to the throne, despite the various possibilities emerging from the descendants of the numerous sons of Edward III, who died in 1377. Monarchy was above all sacrosanct in England; one need only recall the angry magnates who forced King John to sign Magna Carta, rather than simply overthrowing him. Attempting to mend the king's ways was an action that the lords—and the politically emerging House of Commons—could live with regardless of the situation.

Even when Richard, duke of York was appointed protector to the enfeebled Henry VI in March 1454, the lords were disinclined to be part of

his council because it smacked of royal pretensions.¹ It was only when the Duke saw his power and life threatened by the ruling regime that rebellion became the last resort. Yet even after the Duke's supporters captured Henry VI at Northampton in June 1460, the plan was to call parliament for the reversal of the rebels' attainders. Henry VI was to be left on the throne.

It was Richard, duke of York who perhaps planted the seeds for how successful usurpations might take root in the turbulent 15th century. On 16 October 1460, he decided to claim the throne. He had been protector of the king twice, a forced exile and a man with a bleak future so long as Henry VI's supporters remained in power. Richard claimed descent through one of Edward III's sons, Lionel of Clarence. Lionel was an elder brother of John of Gaunt, the great-grandfather of Henry VI and founder of the Lancastrian line of nobility. Duke Richard also adopted the surname Plantagenet to emphasize his "royal" ancestry.² This all was undoubtedly news to many people, since the Duke bore the arms of the founder of the Yorkist line of nobility, Edmund of Langley, the first duke of York. Edmund in fact was a younger—and lesser—royal brother of Lionel of Clarence and John of Gaunt. Richard was clearly changing his lineage and public relations program in mid-air to gain a hereditary advantage.

The Duke may have thought of this move at an earlier date. He was already supporting a steady stream of propaganda by sending letters all over England recounting the grievances suffered through the inept rule of Henry VI.³ Before invading England from Calais, Richard, his son Edward and other supporters issued a manifesto on the failures of the government and the greed of those Lancastrian lords who seized the rebels' lands after their attainders—this latter lamentation similar to that of Henry Bolingbroke fifty years earlier.

Richard hardly needed to manufacture problems for Henry VI. There was Cade's Rebellion in 1450; the constant rivalry and fighting among roving bands of soldiers; bellicose magnates, with the Percys and the Nevilles slugging it out for the control of Northern England; the disastrous ending of the Hundred Years War for England in the 1450s, losing all of France except for the port of Calais; and the temporary insanity of Henry VI in 1453. The Duke also obtained a useful propagandist in Francisco Coppini, bishop of Terni, who was on a papal mission to sign up Henry VI

¹ See R.A. Griffith, "The King's Council and the first Protectorate of the Duke of York, 1453-54," *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, Vol. XCIX, no. 390 (Jan. 1984), pp. 67-82.

² Charles Ross, *Edward IV* (1974), p. 16; J.R. Lander, *Conflict and Stability in Fifteenth Century England* (1969), p. 73.

³ Ross, *Edward IV*, pp. 16ff.

for a Crusade. His ambition got the better of him, and he threw in with the Yorkists and wrote letters to Pope Pius II, telling of the impolitic rule of Henry VI and the just cause of the Yorkists, led by the duke of York.

The ending to the Duke's story marks the full-blown internal strife of what much later generations referred to as the Wars of the Roses. He was killed at Wakefield in December, 1460, and a year later, after several battles, his claim was reiterated in parliament, casting the Lancastrians as usurpers and declaring the rightful king as Edward IV, eldest son and heir of the Duke. Proclamations went out to tell the people of this change in the monarchy and to warn against aiding any of Edward IV's enemies, notably the deposed Henry VI and his entrepreneurial wife, Margaret of Anjou. Edward IV thus began a reign lasting from 1461 to 1483, with an interruption in 1470-71 when Henry VI temporarily regained his throne. Henry would lose it again along with his life and that of his only heir, Edward, Prince of Wales. The lesson of the danger of keeping a "past king" around would not be lost to Edward IV or to his younger brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester and the future Richard III.

It is difficult for any historian to view this period without coming to grips with those undocumented, intangible attributes that crop up in history time and again: fate and luck. That Henry Tudor was fated to become king of England can be dismissed with certainty, despite Polydore Vergil's apocryphal story of young Henry meeting Henry VI for a session on Tudor destiny.⁴ Tudor's bloodline was anemic at best, and there were other potential claimants with closer links to the crown.

Luck is another story, and perhaps a bit too unpalatable for the tastes of sober historians. If nothing else, we can say quite comfortably that Henry Tudor's ability to survive, to be supported by cunning relatives and friends, and to take advantage of the prevailing political winds constituted a fortitude that stood the best chance of that most daring of political gambles we call usurpation: the seizure of the crown and rule from the current monarch. And since most usurpers publicly point to Divine Will as the source of their success, we can only guess at what Henry felt when he looked back at the first twenty-eight years of his life that took him from hostage to fugitive to conqueror and king.

We know very little about Henry Tudor from his birth in 1457 to the accession of Richard III in 1483.⁵ These were the years of battles between

⁴ *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil*, ed. and trans. by Denys Hay (1950), p. 5.

⁵ See S.B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (1972), Chapter 1.

the supporters of York and Lancaster, and Henry was little more than a noticeable pawn because of two facts about his parentage: 1) His mother, Margaret Beaufort, was the great-great granddaughter of that prolific progenitor, Edward III, through one of his sons, John of Gaunt, thus occupying a branch on the tree royal, if a gnarled one since her great grandmother, Gaunt's third wife, was his mistress; 2) His father, Edmund Tudor, was the son of a liaison and probable marriage between Henry V's widow, Queen Catherine of Valois, and Owen Tudor, a page and keeper of the queen's wardrobe in the royal household. This latter lineage made Owen's sons, Edmund Tudor and his brother Jasper, half-brothers to Henry VI, and young Henry Tudor a half-nephew of that unfortunate king.

Before Edward IV's usurpation in 1461, things were looking up for these Tudor parvenus. In 1452, both Edmund and Jasper were created earls of Richmond and Pembroke respectively, and three years later Edmund married the intrepid Margaret Beaufort. But on 3 November 1456, Edmund died of natural causes in his mid-twenties; not three months later—on 28 January 1457—his son Henry was born at Pembroke Castle to the thirteen-year-old Margaret. Further disaster befell the Tudors four years later when, at Mortimers Cross, the Lancastrians were routed, Owen Tudor was beheaded and William Lord Herbert took Pembroke Castle, keeping young Henry Tudor and his mother in ward. Jasper Tudor escaped his father Owen's fate and became a fugitive in Brittany and France, where he skillfully made alliances and friends for what was to prove welcome, if precarious, havens for Lancastrian exiles.

The next year, Lord Herbert purchased the wardship and marriage of five-year-old Henry, and it was probably expected that the young Tudor would one day become a Yorkist peer if he behaved himself. The new king, Edward IV, was still not taking any chances. That summer, Henry was deprived of the lands and honor of Richmond, held by right of his father. What the king did with the title is something Shakespeare would have relished had he done a little homework: it was eventually bestowed upon Edward IV's younger brother, Richard, duke of Gloucester, the future Richard III, who would die at the hands of Henry Tudor's armies. Henry, however, continued to use the title "Richmond" for most of his life before becoming king, and there is evidence that this began within three years after losing his earldom.⁶

⁶ Westminster Abbey Muniments, MS. 6660, document naming Margaret Beaufort, her (second) husband Lord Henry Stafford, and "Henry Dominus de Rychemonde."

During Henry VI's Readeption ("recovery") in 1470 and 1471 when he obtained the throne again, Jasper Tudor was back in England. He supposedly brought his nephew Henry, then fourteen and residing at Raglan Castle, to London to meet the hapless king. By this time, many of the nobility descended from Edward III's offspring had died or had been killed in combat. The battle of Barnet in 1471 and subsequent events dealt the final Lancastrian blow with the murder of Henry VI and the death of his only heir, Edward. Jasper was once again forced to flee, and this time he took Henry with him, probably because by the numbers alone Henry was now a "slight possibility" for the throne should Edward IV do something foolish, or the surviving Lancastrians something enterprising. Their destination was apparently France but a storm blew them into the hands of that moderate political chess player, Duke Francis II of Brittany, where they were to remain as polite prisoners for the next thirteen years. It was perhaps at this time that Jasper, and his former sister-in-law Margaret Beaufort, realized that any future Lancastrian uprising should necessarily put forth young Henry as a possible rival to Edward IV.

This possibility was warily noticed by Edward IV. In a letter dated 28 September 1471, Sir John Paston noted the following:

It is seyde that the Erle of Pembroke [Jasper Tudor] is taken on to Brettayn; and men saye that the Kynge schall have delyvere off hym hastely, and som seye that the Kynge off France woll se hym saffe, and schall sett hym at lybertie ageyn.⁷

Although Henry Tudor is not mentioned, it is likely that the rumors focused on his uncle Jasper because of Jasper's known adherence to the Lancastrians and his involvement in trying to overthrow the Yorkists. Since, however, this seems to be the first interest in him expressed by Edward IV—the word "hastely" is telling—it is not unlikely that the king was now concerned about a viable rival in place of the deceased Henry VI, namely that of the former king's half-nephew.

Edward IV's final victory over the Lancastrians left him a more cautious monarch. He had been shocked by losing his throne after ten years of rule, and the defeat of his enemies at Barnet could easily have been followed by another attempt to overthrow him if he could not dissipate the ambitions of Lancastrian dissidents. In a proclamation on 27 April 1471, after Barnet, Edward declared that he was the rightful king by judgment given in parliaments past and by God giving him victories

⁷ *The Paston Letters*, ed. James Gairdner (1875), III, p. 17.

against Henry VI in battle. Yet in a strange elaboration of his title by battle in an otherwise commonplace declaration of legitimacy for a usurper, he went on to say “in such controversy moved between princes upon the high sovereign power more evident proof of truth will not be had than by the said means, that is reason, authority and victory battles.”⁸ Edward in effect denigrated his father’s hereditary claim in favor of a divine *de facto* rule, and this was to be emulated by the eventual destroyer of his dynasty, Henry Tudor.⁹

If Henry and Jasper were prizes to be had, Edward IV now seems to have made little effort to obtain them. We are told that Edward sought their return from Duke Francis, but this came to nothing.¹⁰ So long as he knew where they were and he could maintain power and authority at home, there was no reason to risk a political conflict by trying to take them prisoner. France, under the wily Louis XI, was longing for an annexation of Brittany, the last independent duchy in his sphere of influence. Duke Francis II of Brittany hoped for aid from England to keep France in check, but not at the expense of forcing Louis XI’s hand against the duchy. This situation changed little until the sudden and unexpected death of Edward IV on 9 April 1483, when one of the most famous—and infamous—chapters in English history commenced.

There is always a danger in getting stuck in the problematical murk that stretches across the reign of Richard III. If I may mix metaphors, it also requires us to temporarily tread into the historical firestorm involving the disappearance and likely murders of the Two Princes in the Tower. Few historians have emerged unscathed once they declared whether Richard III extinguished his nephews, or someone else did at his behest or without it—or if Henry VII directed the dastardly deed once he became king. I will attempt to stay on the fringes of the flames although it should be said that the truth in this matter, as in much of history, is often secondary to what people perceived to be the truth at the time. What contemporary or near-contemporary histories and documents we have can be interpreted in a variety of ways, adding to the mystery. Still, when one asks a few basic questions in the sober voice of reason—or at least reasonableness—an avenue or two emerges that can help explain why Richard III lost a throne and Henry VII gained one.

⁸ *Calendar of Close Rolls 1468-76*, no. 703.

⁹ See note 14.

¹⁰ *Paston Letters*, III, pp. 58-60.

We need to ask ourselves how a young exile, who spent half of his first twenty-eight years of life abroad, could become king of England. We must also explore the fragility of Richard's rule and ask what he did to secure it, jeopardize it and what he possibly could have done to avoid his demise. One illuminating observation does surface when looking at the years 1483-1485: Henry Tudor, either through his own devices or from the machinations of his mother and uncle and loyal supporters, chose a role to play which he performed all the way to Bosworth Field, and it seems to have worked. And unlike his usurping predecessors who feared talking of royal claims until the eleventh hour, Henry Tudor decided to wear the purple early and openly. If he would be king, he would be king before God decided the battle, and his rival would be deemed an impostor.

When exactly Henry styled himself king is not known. Nor can we ascertain what lifestyle he led while a virtual prisoner in Brittany. That it at least bordered on one of a special guest may be gleaned from a grant given to John Williams by Henry as king some six weeks after Bosworth Field. Williams is referred to as "grome [for] oure mouth, in our seller . . . unto us hertofore, aswele in the parties beyonde the see as within oure royaume."¹¹ Henry apparently had his own taster and a kitchen at his disposal, and given Duke Francis' use of Henry as a potential Lancastrian rival to the house of York, we can believe that the young exile was treated with great dignity, royal or otherwise.

Henry's decision to change his stance to one of royalty was undoubtedly influenced by what was happening in England. Surely he kept close watch on the events of the spring of 1483 after the death of Edward IV, when young King Edward V and his brother became the captives of their uncle, Richard of Gloucester, only to disappear from view while Richard declared himself King Richard III. These events—and rumors about Richard's behavior—encouraged Henry Tudor to assume a rival position to Richard III. There is evidence that the transformation from earl of Richmond to legitimate king was complete by the fall of 1483.

In October of that year during Buckingham's futile rebellion against Richard, Henry signed a debt of 10,000 crowns owed to Duke Francis of Brittany to provision an invasion force. Henry signed his name "henry of Richemont", and though there are suggestions that he also signed documents "H R" for Henricus Rex while abroad, this debt should therefore not be construed as vacillating between reality and wishful

¹¹ *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII*, ed. William Campbell, 2 vols. (1873-77), I, p. 76.

thinking. Not only would it have been impractical to sign a legal debt as King Henry—one that couldn't be repaid until he won the realm—it was clear that he was writing the name the world had recognized since he was born. Moreover, his uncle Jasper co-signed the debt, showing a need for validity more than propaganda. Yet a suggestion of Henry's overt claim to the throne appears within the language of the debt, where he promises to repay Duke Francis "on the word of a prince."¹² From now on, Henry Tudor would be king *de jure* (by right), with the hope of one day becoming king *de facto* (in fact).¹³ This was a complete break from the past century of those who would be king.

Why Henry made this deliberate change can be understood in light of the events and rumors of the spring and summer of 1483. They involved not only Richard, duke of Gloucester's actions and usurpation of the throne but also Henry's own hand at the propaganda game. After Edward IV's death on 9 April, the royal family, represented by the Woodvilles, hoped to run the minority government in the name of the twelve-year-old son and heir of the late king and his wife, Elizabeth Woodville: Edward V. The dead king's brother, Richard of Gloucester, had no intention of allowing this to happen, most likely for fear of isolation, loss of power and lands, and even the loss of his life. Since the king's will provided for Richard to act as protector during his nephew's minority, he decided to test the waters and ask for total control of Edward V in a letter, which was made public. The Italian traveler and monk Dominic Mancini, in England until July 1483 and familiar with the letter, noted:

This letter had a great effect on the mind of the people, who, as they had previously favored the duke [of Gloucester] in their hearts from a belief in his probity, now began to support him openly and aloud; so that it was commonly said by all that the duke deserved the government.¹⁴

But the lords in the council, including the Woodville supporters, feared the consolidation of power in the Duke's hands. They therefore set a coronation date for Edward V to make a speedy end to the protectorate.

¹² *Brit. Libr.*, Add. MS. 19398 fo. 33.

¹³ In essence, "in fact" or "in reality" or "by deed". A *de facto* king is in actuality king because he is king, without need for further explanation.

¹⁴ Dominic Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard III*, trans. by C.A.J. Armstrong (1936), p. 89. His writings were first discovered by Armstrong in 1934 in the library in Lille, France.

This letter, and a previous circular letter telling of the Duke's intentions to support his nephew, Edward V, seems to have put him in good light with the people: a propaganda ploy to allay fears.¹⁵ If he hoped that the people—and especially the vitally important city of London—would support him against the council, he never waited long enough to play politics with the Woodvilles. He in effect canceled the good will he achieved by these propaganda letters because of his next actions.

By 30 April, news arrived in London that Richard and his then-ally the duke of Buckingham seized Edward V and arrested Woodville adherents, including the queen's brother, Anthony Woodville (Earl Rivers) and the earl's nephew, Sir Richard Grey, who was also the young king's half-brother. According to Mancini, rumors now spread through London that Richard apprehended Edward V to gain the throne, rather than to protect his nephew. Richard heard of these rumors before entering London and tried to quash them in a letter to the mayor justifying his actions. The damage, however, had been done, exacerbated by the queen, Elizabeth Woodville. She now fled quickly to sanctuary in Westminster with her daughters and second son, Richard, duke of York, Edward V's younger brother.

In a last ditch effort to ameliorate the negative perceptions of his seizure of the king and, in Mancini's words, "to arouse hatred against the queen's kin, and to estrange public opinion from her relatives", Richard sent wagons to London filled with weapons to show that the Woodvilles planned to overthrow him and his allies. The people, however, knew that these weapons were part of a store against the Scots, and Richard's damage control effort turned against him. (One might ask how they knew: did a rumor spread from Henry Tudor's supporters that Richard lied about the weapons?) On 4 May, Richard, Buckingham and the young Edward V with a retinue entered London, and a week later Richard was declared protector by the council. The young king's coronation date was now postponed to 22 June, and the duke of Gloucester retained custody of Edward V in the Tower of London.

Richard's capture of the king was the beginning of a series of mistakes that were to fuel the propaganda engines of his detractors and Henry Tudor's supporters. While it is true that inaction by Richard may have meant his doom at the hands of the Woodvilles, his violence upon his

¹⁵ Mancini, pp. 71-73; Charles Ross, *Richard III* (1981), p. 68 and n.18. Richard took no chances and had troops with him. (*Letters of the Kings of England*, ed. J. Halliwell, 2 vols. (1848), I, p. 150.)

nephew the king was something that could not be tolerated by even his most staunch adherents. Although historians have doubted that Lord Hastings, Thomas Rotherham, John Morton and Thomas Lord Stanley were plotting against Richard, duke of Gloucester once the young king was in custody, it was quite probable that these allies of Richard felt that he went too far too quickly. He may have sensed their hesitancy and questioned their loyalty. Morton was a political opportunist who had Lancastrian inclinations, and Lord Stanley, now married to Henry Tudor's mother, Margaret Beaufort, could not be seen as an unwavering supporter. Richard and Stanley had at least one falling out before the events of April and May 1483, and Richard now could ill afford counsel from a man related by marriage to a rival claimant, should Henry Tudor become one.¹⁶

With rumors of Richard's scheme for the throne in the air and the queen and her children in sanctuary in fear of their lives, the protector now decided the die was cast and there was no going back. His next move was more violent than the incarceration of his nephew, the uncrowned king. On 13 June—and some have argued for 20 June—Hastings was arrested and summarily executed. Rotherham, Morton and Stanley were imprisoned. Richard became the master of his destiny in the ensuing days. He convinced Queen Elizabeth to give up Edward V's younger brother, the duke of York, from sanctuary to attend the coronation, and once in custody Richard quickly canceled it.

Dr. Ralph Shaw then preached Richard's claim to the throne at St. Paul's Cross—which was tantamount to a broadcast to the realm—and Edward IV's children, the two princes and four daughters, were declared bastards because of a pre-contract agreement for marriage between the late king and Elizabeth Butler. On 25 June, Earl Rivers and Richard Grey were executed. The next day, 26 June, Richard, duke of Gloucester was proclaimed King Richard III; he was crowned at Westminster on 6 July.

News spread rapidly of the arrests, executions and subsequent events. In a strange list of memoranda among the Cely letters, written in June of 1483 about the purported deaths of some of Richard's councilors, there is perhaps the earliest mention of the fate of Edward V: "If the King, god save his life, were deceased."¹⁷ This was more definitively declared in an annual list of mayors in the town of Lincoln, where for the year 1483 it was recorded "This yere the kynge sons were put to silence." Beneath this

¹⁶ For the falling out, see *Cal. Close Rolls 1468-76*, no. 535.

¹⁷ *The Cely Papers*, ed. H.E. Malden (1900), no. 200.

entry it was noted that now began the first year of the reign of Richard III, which would have been 26 June.¹⁸

Rumors began to swell in July that both brothers, Edward V and the duke of York, were dead. Mancini, who left England in July 1483, wrote that the two princes lived in the inner apartments of the Tower, “and day by day began to be seen more rarely behind the bars and windows, till at length they ceased to appear altogether.”¹⁹ The diplomat and French chronicler Philip de Commines recorded that Louis XI of France was not pleased with Richard III because of the murder of the princes and the breach of oath Richard swore to Edward V.²⁰ Since Louis died on 30 August, he probably heard the rumors in July or early August. The *Croyland Chronicle* noted that stories of the murders were around by October 1483.²¹ Worse for Richard III, everyone believed he was responsible for their deaths. These rumors would not be lost to Henry Tudor.

Richard’s immediate concern, it seems, was to establish his authority and protect his newly-acquired throne. To that end he issued a proclamation for the ships under Sir Edward Woodville, a potentially less-than-loyal person to Richard and a member of the royal clan, to return to England. Richard viewed this fleet under Woodville as a threat to his security. Furthermore, he was well aware that Henry Tudor remained abroad in Brittany, and a fleet in his hands could become a formidable invasion force. Fortunately for Richard, his proclamation worked since the captains were Genoese and feared endangering their fellow merchants. Only two ships, one with Woodville aboard, failed to return to England.²²

Richard also turned to the problem of Henry Tudor, and here we can merely wonder how both felt about their individual situations. The only two people standing in Richard’s way to the throne had been his nephews, and at least the public believed that those obstacles had been removed

¹⁸ *Anno regni Regis Ricardi tercij primo*. (J.W.F. Hill, “Three Lists of the Mayors, Bailiffs and Sheriffs of the City of Lincoln”, *Reports and Papers of The Architectural Societies of the county of Lincoln, county of York, archdeaconries of Northampton and Oakham, and county of Leicester*”, Vol. XXXIX (1927-29), p. 238.) Richard apparently visited Lincoln on 11 Oct. where he received word of Buckingham’s rebellion.

¹⁹ Mancini, p. 113.

²⁰ *The Memoirs of Philip de Commines*, ed. Andrew R. Scoble, 2 vols. (1880-82), II, p. 63.

²¹ *Croyland Chronicles*, p. 568.

²² Mancini, p. 105.

forever. The same can be said for Henry Tudor, who would have needed to overthrow not only Edward V but secure the next heir in line, his brother, Richard, duke of York. This Richard III did for him, and it may have been the single event that decided Henry's course of action for the next two years.

Something must have been brewing in Brittany for Richard to instruct his ambassador, Dr. Thomas Hatton, in July 1483, to find out what Sir Edward Woodville was doing, and the inference is that Woodville was in or off the coast of Brittany. A further instruction does not mention Henry Tudor by name, but we cannot doubt that the fugitive is who Richard had in mind: "[find out] if ther be entended eny enterprise out of land upon any part of this realme, certifieng with all diligence all the newes and disposicion ther from tyme to tyme".²³

Instructions from Duke Francis to his own ambassador to England one month later suggest that, indeed, Henry was on Richard's mind. Francis observed that ever since Edward IV's death, Louis XI tried on several occasions to get the Duke to deliver the "lord of Richmond" to him, with the promise of large payments. The duke of Brittany, however, had refused, probably believing that he could use Henry to gain support from England against France. Francis therefore instructed his ambassador to ask for what amounted to a small army from Richard to defend Brittany. Whether Henry Tudor was the price for this army was vaguely inferred but not definitively stated.²⁴

Buckingham's rebellion and its failure in October 1483, and Henry's abortive landing in England at the same time, is more instructive for how it came about than for its consequences. It also shows that Henry Tudor was a real threat to the throne for the first time in his life and that, after the death of Buckingham—who had his own claims to the kingship—Henry had become the major viable claimant for the Lancastrian dynasty.

Our main source for the insurrection is the rolls of parliament, written several months after the rebellion, which recounted the uprising, the conspirators and the punishments.²⁵ It began by stating that the "greate and singler movers, sterers, and doers" of the rebellion were the duke of Buckingham and John Morton, bishop of Ely, who had escaped imprisonment. The roll stated that besides armed rebellion, the rebel leaders were responsible for "diverse false and traiterous proclamacions

²³ *L&P*, I, pp. 22-3.

²⁴ *Letters . . . Richard III and Henry VII*, I, pp. 37-43.

²⁵ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, VI, pp. 244-50.