

Richard III

SYNOPSIS

The Tragedy of Richard the Third

After years of civil war with the families of York and Lancaster trying to keep the throne, the Yorkist Edward IV is now undisputed king, but his brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, a hunchback, would like to obtain the throne for himself and is prepared to remove anyone in his path. A third brother, George Duke of Clarence, is imprisoned because the King has heard a prophecy that he will be killed by 'G'. Richard meets Lady Anne, widow of the Lancastrian heir to the throne, and in spite of his physical deformity and the fact that he has killed her husband and father-in-law, Richard persuades her to marry him. He then arranges for murderers to kill Clarence in the Tower by drowning him in a barrel of wine. The old Lancastrian Queen Margaret warns the nobles against Richard and curses them for helping her enemies, but no one takes her seriously. When the sick King, who wants to reconcile the old nobles with his wife Queen Elizabeth's family, hears about Clarence's death, he dies.

Edward's sons are still too young to reign, so Richard becomes Lord Protector. He and the Duke of Buckingham imprison the young princes in the Tower, and have Queen Elizabeth's relatives executed. Richard decides to declare the two princes illegitimate and have himself crowned. When Lord Hastings refuses to support him, he has him executed. He then forces the citizens of London to ask him to be king, and appears to accept with great reluctance. He refuses to give Buckingham his promised reward for helping him to the throne because Buckingham is against murdering the two princes. Richard then finds a discontented man who will suffocate them. Fearing for his safety, Buckingham decides to join Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, who, as the heir of Lancaster, is leading an army from France to invade England. Richard's wife Anne dies under mysterious circumstances. Old Queen Margaret joins Queen Elizabeth and Richard's mother the Duchess of York in cursing Richard.

Richard now tries to persuade Queen Elizabeth to let him marry her daughter, also called Elizabeth, to strengthen his position. She pretends to consider the offer. Buckingham is captured before he can reach Richmond and is executed. Richard gathers an army and meets Richmond at Bosworth Field, in the centre of England. During the night before the battle the ghosts of all the people Richard has murdered appear to him in a dream and curse him, while Richmond dreams that they encourage him.

In the battle Richard is killed and his crown is found in a bush and given to Richmond, who becomes Henry VII. The new King announces he will marry Princess Elizabeth, thus uniting the two warring families (and the audience knows their granddaughter will be Queen Elizabeth I)

Media:

DVD:

Richard III (1955), dir. Laurence Olivier (famous performance, much parodied ever since)
An Age of Kings (BBC TV 1960), dir. Michael Hayes (a fusion of all the history plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III*)

Richard III (BBC TV Shakespeare 1983), dir. Jane Howell

Richard III (1995), dir. Richard Loncraine (with Ian McKellen)

Looking for Richard (1996), dir. Al Pacino

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales Act 4 (2007) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Richard III*

The Street King (2002), dir. James Bedford (the story set among gangsters in LA)

Not commercially available:

The Wars of the Roses (1965), dir. Peter Hall & John Barton (*Henry VI* & *Richard III* combined as a trilogy, excerpts on YouTube)

The Wars of the Roses (1990), dir. Michael Bogdanov (a filming of the 1987 English Shakespeare Company stage production, uploaded to YouTube)

CD Audio:

Richard III with Laurence Olivier

Richard III (Naxos) with Kenneth Branagh (abridged)

Richard III (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

[Michael Mitchell]