

The Food Fight Over Richard III



by Lee Duigon

February 8, 2024

Who's the biggest villain in the history of Western drama? So very many candidates—but certainly one of the all-time bad guys has to be King Richard III... as depicted by William Shakespeare. The monster who murdered the little princes in the Tower of London. Or so they say.

[The Globe Theater has announced plans to stage a production of *Richard III*](#)—with a woman in the title role. The production has already been hit with a wave of protest by an assortment of “disabled activists” who say you have to “live the experience” before you can play the part: only disabled actors need apply.

King Richard's problem is that the history of his reign was written by his bitterest enemies. Shakespeare was a man of his time: the Tudor dynasty had cast Richard as a villain, and Shakespeare was not about to risk getting beheaded for bucking that narrative. So he wrote up Richard as a scheming, murder-happy hunchback who got what was coming to him.

Some 2,000 years earlier, the Greek historian Thucydides confessed that it was almost impossible for any historian to get down to the absolute truth. He could only do the best he could—because not only are people addicted to self-serving lies, but honestly believe “facts” that aren't true.

So history is full of fairy tales. Richard did not murder the little princes. He did not betray his brother, King Edward IV.

His remains—recovered from burial under what is now a parking lot—show that he did suffer from curvature of the spine. But he was not, in fact, disabled. He lived a rigorous life, taking part in hand-to-hand battles and riding on horseback up and down England in all kinds of weather. And he died fighting.

Yeahbut, yeahbut! He was Richard Crookback, traitor and murderer! Shakespeare said so! Shakespeare's Tudor propaganda came down to us as "history." But such evidence as we have strongly indicates the story was not true.

They're still fighting over it today.

Imagine, if you can, trying to write an accurate history of the time we're living in today, here and now. Sorting out the truth from all the lies. How do you think Donald Trump would fare, at the hands of Democrat historians? Richard was presented as a deformed monster. Trump would be lucky if that were all they did to him.

But does it matter if "history" simply isn't true? If it's nothing but rehashed politics? Some of us still think so! Our beloved leaders argue, "We have to do this now because *that* happened then!" And then they do exactly as they please and insist they're on the right side of history.

Another ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, said the Persians became a great nation, builders of an empire, because they taught their children only two things: to shoot straight, and to tell the truth. Some call him "the Father of History." Others, "the Father of Lies." Both he and Thucydides would feel at home in today's melee over "mis-" and "dis-."

History can guide us, but only if we let it—and only if it's true. It can tell us what kinds of policy succeed and what kinds of policy fail. And why, and how. The career of Kaiser Wilhelm II, for instance, can tell us exactly how NOT to stumble into a world war. But it's up to us to learn the

lesson, isn't it?

Poor Richard. His reputation is almost surely not deserved. We know more about this now than Shakespeare ever did... but you can't fight The Bard.

Even so, I agree with the ancient Persians: the truth is always better than a lie.

I have discussed this and other topics throughout the week on my blog, <http://www.leeduigon.com/> . Click the link and visit, before we all wind up in the Tower. My articles can also be found at www.chalcedon.edu/ .

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