



Royal Blood: Richard III and the Mystery of the Princes

Bertram Fields

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With his hunched back and withered arm, Richard scuttles across the stage like a huge spider, spewing out his venomous thoughts. "Since I cannot prove a lover," he confides to the hushed audience, "I am determined to prove a villain."

And he means it. As the drama unfolds this grotesque villain kills the youthful Prince of Wales and the aged, saintly Henry VI. Then, he schemes to drown his brother in a vat of wine, to poison his wife, and worst of all, to murder his two young nephews, the older of whom was the rightful king.

Deserted by subjects so appalled at his bloody conduct that they will not fight beside him, Richard the usurper is defeated by the heroic Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Surrounded and about to die, he cries out in desperation: "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

But was this all true? Notoriously immortalized by Shakespeare and historians, he is history's most infamous royal villain: Richard III, King of England from 1483 to 1485. Shakespeare's portrait comes ultimately from an unfinished manuscript by the sainted Sir Thomas More, who's assessment has generally been supported by chroniclers of the period and down through our own time. Yet some revisionists have offered a far different portrait, of a man they describe as the victim of a deliberate campaign of slander devised by the Tudors, who took the throne on Richard's death. Revisionist historians present Richard as a brave and valiant soldier, a loyal brother and an intelligent, able king popular with his subjects who was defeated only through treachery.

In this comprehensive, meticulously researched new book, renowned litigator Bertram Fields goes back more than 500 years to offer a compelling look at the case of Richard III. Applying the same modern techniques he successfully uses in the courtroom, Fields outlines and evaluates the arguments on both sides, weighs the evidence, and offers the definitive truth about this extraordinary man.

Fields examines the earliest biographers of Richard, exposing the political, cultural, and geographical biases inherent in their portrayals and reveals how much "fact" was actually gossip and disinformation, including that given the world by More and Shakespeare. He sets the stage for the coming drama with a lucid and colorful picture of the War of the Roses, the long struggle between the houses of York (white rose) and Lancaster (red rose), that put Richard's family on the throne. He vividly brings to life the key players, including the weak but saintly Henry VI, used and deceived by everyone, including his rapacious queen; the womanizing soldier-king Edward IV, bribed into inaction by the French king's gold; his conniving wife, Elizabeth Woodville; the charming but treacherous brother Clarence; Richard's loyal wife, Anne Neville, kidnapped and hidden away as a kitchen maid; and Henry Tudor, the exile with virtually no legitimate claim to rule, who schemed at Richard's betrayal and replaced him on the throne. Setting them against the rich tapestry of the period, the author conveys a fresh and insightful view of the many players in this royal drama and analyzes their motives and machinations as they vie for the power of the crown.

Clearing away the dust of time, *Royal Blood* attempts to answer the intriguing questions inherent in the drama: Was Edward IV's marriage truly legal? Were his sons, Edward, Prince of Wales, and Richard, Duke of York illegitimate? What role did Richard play--or not--in his brother Clarence's death? Were the bones found in the Tower of London those of the young princes? Was there even a murder--were the boys instead removed from the Tower and raised in secrecy? And if they were cold-bloodedly killed who else would have

wanted them dead? The neurotic, mercurial Buckingham? Henry VII himself? *Royal Blood* ends with a stunning reenvisioning of British and world history: what if Richard had never accepted the crown? What if he had instead insisted his young nephew reign as Edward V? How would our lives be changed?

Breathtaking in its scope and depth, this brilliant, provocative volume, a complex melding of history, biography, and mystery, is a powerful argument that sheds new light on common belief, showing that virtually everything we know about Richard III is wrong.

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