

“My Kingdom for a Horse”: The Biblical Source of the Bestiary in Richard III

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Abstract

The animal kingdom is well represented in *Richard III*, a play which abounds in repulsive, venomous, unclean creatures associated with the protagonist's insidious behaviour and predacious nature. On a literal level, these infernal beasts are emblematic of his hellish character which is underscored throughout the play. The metaphorical animals, however, also intimate in allegoric significance the rejection of his spiritual vocation and the choice of a damnable life of which the play as a whole can be seen as a dramatic illustration. Shakespeare emphasizes Richard's election of evil in a theological perspective showing how he willfully identifies with the animal features of his human nature to the exclusion of spiritual regeneration according to Pauline terminology. Whereas the horse he requests on the battlefield stands for the brittleness of his temporal power which doesn't rely on God's authority, the earthly kingdom he is willing to swap is the inverted figure of the spiritual promise of another world where peace and justice will prevail again for ever. The Antichrist's spurious kingship must go so that God's kingdom may come. In this scriptural light, Richard's call for a horse to fight the wrong fight to the last corroborates the apocalyptic dimension of a conclusive play fraught with eschatology and full of irony.

Keywords: animal nature, antichristic parody, hostility of the beast to the innocent lamb, counterfeit identity, flesh, Pauline theology, pity, scriptural animals, spiritual regeneration, temporal power.

“My kingdom for a horse!”: the biblical source of the bestiary in *Richard III*

“The bloody dog is dead.” (5.5.2).¹ Anticipated by Margaret's hope that Richard's “bond of life” be cancelled, Richmond's victorious statement fulfills the Queen's prayer “That [she] may live and say ‘The dog is dead.’” (4.4.77-78). These words close a long list of animal terms linked with the protagonist by his accusers: *adder, spider, toad, hedgehog, dog, hog, tiger, boar, cockatrice, wolf, hell-hound, cur, swine*, to which the *dragon* may be added when Richard himself, before the decisive battle is fought, appeals to both of the legendary antagonists so often represented in religious art: “Our ancient word of courage, fair Saint George, / Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons!” (5.3.350-51). As this copious enumeration indicates, the animal kingdom is well represented in *Richard III*, a play which abounds in creatures associated with the poison secreted by Richard and inoculated into his victims². Anne's lamentation as she mourns Henry VI incidentally reminds the spectators of the original sin which did not spare the nature of the animals coexisting with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.³

The apocalyptic dimension of Shakespeare's play cannot be denied once we realize “there is achieved in *Richard III* a profound sense of a great episode concluded, and a great opportunity beginning.”⁴ In the last book of the Scriptures as in Shakespeare's play animal metaphors signify evil and destruction but whereas Satan's confrontation with God is conveyed in the former through the repeated image of the lamb-shepherd tending his flock in the temple-paradise, in the latter the earth has been turned into hell by a wolf-shepherd killing the sheep of his flock.

¹ All the references to the text of the play are to the following edition: William Shakespeare, *King Richard III* ed. Antony Hammond. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1997 [1981]. For the quote, see 329.

² Richard's connection with several of these animals goes back to John Rous' *Historia Regum Angliae*. A full-length translation of the section of Rous' manuscript on Richard III can be found in Alice Hanham's *Richard III and His Early Historians 1483-1535*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975. For a comparison of Richard with various animals, see 118, 120.

³ An allusion to the garden of Eden is discernible in Richmond's final speech when he vows “to unite the white rose and the red” (5. 5. 19). The floral imagery superseding the previous animal metaphors expresses a nostalgic yearning for paradise which Richmond offers to fulfill with the restoration of peace, justice, and unity.

⁴ Antony Hammond, *op. cit.*, 119.

To the apocalyptic vision of Christ's final triumph as He rules over the heavenly Jerusalem among His people, the play opposes the dismal spectacle of an isolated tyrant oppressing his people until God's wrath is poured out "upon the throne of the beast".⁵

Animals from Hell

The animals with which Richard is associated are repulsive, venomous and unclean in the biblical sense of the word. All of them are negatively connoted and have a demonic aspect connecting Richard to forces of evil. The polarization of the animal imagery found in the Scripture highlights the ruthless enmity of Satan and the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.

When Richard concedes his responsibility in the killing of Henry VI, Anne calls him a hedgehog (1.2.104). Several editors explain the term as a reference to the heraldic boar of Richard's crest.⁶ The hedgehog, however, is mentioned on several occasions in the Holy Writ as an animal that will inhabit the devastated land of impious nations after God's judgment. Whether the target of God's wrath is Babylon (Isa 14: 23), Edom (Isa 34: 11), or Assyria (Zeph 2: 14), God's vengeance will set ablaze the earth and grant the possession of the resulting desolation to the hedgehog which, among other animals, is described as a creature acclimatized to the barren environment of impiety and sin.

Another animal whose name is hurled at Richard by Anne is the toad (1. 2. 151). Christian artists looked upon the toad as a symbol of impiety and it was often considered from an emblematic standpoint as the antithesis of the frog with which it was often confused⁷. A loathsome animal eliciting disgust, the toad was also the symbol of lechery represented throughout the Middle Ages by sculptors, painters and engravers inside and outside churches.⁸ Given the dramatic situation where Anne finds herself, after Richard has made his sexual suggestion and mused that her bedchamber is the right place for him, she could not have employed a more suitable term of abuse to spurn the dissembling lover's courtship.

From a biblical viewpoint, the "bottled spider" Margaret sees in Richard, when she blames Elizabeth for her credulity and foresees the day when both women shall jointly "curse this poisonous bunch-backed toad" (1.3.242, 246),⁹ evokes the fallacious trust put by the wicked into a feeling of false security offering a poor substitute for God's protection.¹⁰ Elizabeth fails to recognize how dangerous Richard is so that she ensnares herself in his deadly web (1.3.243). The appropriate spider image is here employed by Margaret to suggest how Richard's victims contribute to their own doom. By contrast, Richard's rise and fall is put before the audience as a warning to those who rely on themselves and reject God to achieve objectionable goals: "Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, & maketh flesh his arme, & withdraweth his heart from ye Lord." (Jer. 17: 5). In a cynical manner, Richard admits to masking his falsehood by quoting from the Bible so that he can deceive his victims and "seem a saint" (1.3.338).¹¹

In act 2, scene 4, the Duchess sees the looming danger as the consequence of the War of the Roses while Elizabeth foresees "as in a map, the end of all." (2.4.54), and conveys her forebodings in symbolic images. This is when an animal metaphor is once again applied to Richard: "The tiger now hath seiz'd the gentle hind" (2.4.50). In the Bible, where no mention of the tiger can be found, it is the lion which is the emblematic predator endowed with a symbolic meaning. The image of the tiger in the play pictures Richard's tyranny as a beast of prey threatening the throne. If the tiger is unknown to biblical writers, the hind, on the contrary, occurs frequently in contexts where it is associated with Christ.

⁵ Rev 16: 10.

⁶ Antony Hammond, *op. cit.*, 141, n. 104 ; James R. Siemon ed., *King Richard III*, The Arden Shakespeare. London: Bloomsbury, 2014 [2009], 156, n. 104.

⁷ Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Bestiaire du Christ. La Mystérieuse Emblématique de Jésus-Christ*. Paris: Albin Michel, 2006, 826.

⁸ Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, *op. cit.*, 827.

⁹ A later occurrence of these terms of abuse is found in 4.4.80-81, when Elizabeth takes up a previous situation and remembers Margaret's prophecy in 1.3.245-246. The "toad" insult is used once more in the scene by the Duchess of York when she faces Richard (l. 145).

¹⁰ Job 8: 13-15.

¹¹ Richmond Noble, *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge and Use of the Book of Common Prayer, as Exemplified in the Plays of the First Folio*. New York, Octagon Books, 1970 [1935], p. 132, where the author claims that "Richard[...], like Satan tempting Christ[...], quotes sufficient Scripture to suit his purpose and conceal his real intent."

From ancient times, Christian symbolism has considered the hind as the principal emblem of the spiritual combat fought by Jesus as adversary and victor of the infernal serpent.¹² From Gen 49: 21 to Hab 3: 19 the hind represents the Christian virtues and spiritual aspirations of the faithful.

In Psalm 42, we find the complementary symbol of the hart which stands for the human soul and its yearning after God: “As the harte brayeth for the riuers of water, so panteth my soule after thee, O God. My soule thirsteth for God, euen for the liuing God: when shall I come and appeare before the presence of God?”¹³ The association of the hind with the tiger at line fifty can be apprehended in a symbolic light as representing the spiritual aggression of evil forces besieging the bastion of the soul. Like Satan, Richard is a tempter and a seducer who appeals to his victims’ vulnerability to lead them astray and take possession of their souls in order to impose a relentless domination resulting in perdition. This is what Anne alludes to in act 1, scene 2, when she is intercepted by Richard. The implicit reference to Matthew’s gospel draws attention to the spiritual dimension of Richard’s hostility: “And feare yee not them which kill the bodie, but are nor able to kill the soule: but rather feare him, which is able to destroy both soule and bodie in hell.”¹⁴ Anne’s assumption is that whereas Richard killed Henry’s body, he did not get at his soul so that the late king is likely to be saved. Anne’s statement is consistent with Shakespeare’s characterization of the Lancastrian king in the three plays dealing with his reign. Henry’s piety set him apart from the English aristocracy when he was alive so that it is reasonable for Anne to surmise that his unharmed soul is bound for heaven (or purgatory).

Another predator with which Richard is associated in act 3, scene 1 is the bear. Richard’s conversation with young York brings to light the mental agility of the latter who does not hesitate to deride his uncle. In his taunt, the young prince imagines himself as an ape carried by a bear, the resemblance being warranted by York’s size and Richard’s ungainliness. Editors clarify the meaning of these images by a reference to popular entertainments featuring bears or fools carrying an ape on their shoulders.¹⁵ However useful and enlightening this explanation may be, the biblical source should not be overlooked. The unconscious irony of York’s gibe is echoed in the second book of Kings where Elisha, on his way to Bethel, is met by children who mock him because of his baldness. The story ends with a frightening twist: “And he turned backe, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And two beares came out of the forest, and tare in pieces two and fourtie children of them.”¹⁶ The parallel with Richard is all the more striking as York targets his uncle’s deformity. Like God, whose throne Richard usurps, he cannot bear being mocked.¹⁷ Nor can he suffer his nephew’s outstanding rhetorical skills. Richard has found his match and his pride will not endure it. Richard’s voracity, already hinted at by York’s ‘biting jest’ (2.4.30), is further strengthened by the connection with the second beast of Daniel’s vision: “And beholde, another beast which was the second, was like a beare and stood vpon the one side: and hee had three ribbes in his mouth betweene his teeth, and they saide thus vnto him, Arise and deuoure much flesh.”¹⁸ The biblical verse which summarizes Richard’s appetite for power and lust after evil can be found in the book of Proverbs: “As a roaring lyon, and an hungrie beare, so is a wicked ruler over the poore people.”¹⁹ As these biblical references indicate, young York’s pun has an unsuspected meaning that his jovial uncle may well grasp (3. 1. 154)²⁰ before he takes action against his unfortunate nephew.

The biblical animal epitomizing the struggle between good and evil is beyond contest the wolf whose predacious nature is significantly applied to Richard. In the longest scene of the play, Elizabeth addresses a question to God: “Wilt thou, O God, fly from such gentle lambs, / And throw them in the entrails of the wolf?” (4.4.22-23). Later, when Richard seeks her daughter’s hand, the distressed Queen evokes Richard’s “murderous knife” (4.4.227) which ripped “the entrails of [her] lambs” (4.4.229). The voracious wolf which preys on lambs and revels in their entrails was identified by Jesus himself, in the parable of the good shepherd, as the foe of his flock:

¹² Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, *op. cit.*, 258-259.

¹³ Ps 42: 2-3.

¹⁴ Matt 10: 28.

¹⁵ Antony Hammond, *op. cit.*, 217, n. 131 ; James R. Siemon, *op. cit.*, 255, n. 130-1.

¹⁶ Kings 2: 24.

¹⁷ Gal 6: 7. Cf *King Richard III* (4.4.284-285).

¹⁸ Dan 7: 5.

¹⁹ Prov 28: 15. It should be noted that the lion mentioned in this verse is not the emblem of Juda, royalty, and Christ occurring so often in the Scriptures and lavishly represented by Christian artists. Like any symbol, it is marked by ambivalence, and evokes here the adversary of Christ. For an indisputable representation of Satan as “a roaring lyon”, see Ezek 22: 25 and 1 Pet 5: 8.

²⁰ Editors have “parlous” or “perilous” here (see Hammond, *op. cit.*, 218, and Siemon, *op. cit.*, 257). Both words clearly suggest courage and cunning, two qualities that Richard will not bear to detect in anyone but himself.

“But an hireling, and he which is not the shepherd, nether the shepe are his owne, seeth the wolfe coming, & he leaveth the shepe, and fleeth, and the wolfe catcheth them, and scattereth the shepe.”²¹ The ferocious killer of sheep is also the animal figure which stands for artfulness and violence. In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet denounces the tyranny of the rulers of Jerusalem who have no concern for the common good nor any respect for human life: “Her princes in the middes thereof are like wolves, ravening ye pray to shed blood, and to destroye soules for their owne covetous lucre.”²² Richard is not merely portrayed by Shakespeare as a temporal ruler whose government is predatory. He is above all an avowed false prophet (with the active complicity of Buckingham) who propagates a doctrine inverting all Christian values and spreads rumours to damage the reputation of his victims. The spiritual dimension of his role is too often dismissed as the outcome of his determination “to prove a villain” (1.1.30) seen itself as the result of personal frustrations and social resentment. His motivations for doing evil are not rationally intelligible and the best approach of his character, in a theological perspective, is purely negative.²³ Richard is the false pastor and the false prophet of the Scriptures who deludes his victims through a fallacious discourse and is bent on the destruction of God’s flock: “Beware of false prophetes, which come to you in shepes clothing, but inwardely they are ravening wolves.”²⁴ Margaret’s complaint offers a striking vision of Richard, “That excellent grand tyrant of the earth” (4.4.51), and of his vocation on earth as “foul defacer of God’s handiwork” (4.4.53). Richard is a paragon of tyranny and the enemy of mankind to whom he has declared a ruthless war “knowing that he hathe but a short time”.²⁵ The satanic wolf, like so many other predators in the play, has no other goal in this world than to devour the divine Lamb.

Natural man

The animal imagery relating Richard to satanic forces also conveys in allegorical fashion his denial of the spiritual vocation of mankind, and the ungodliness of a world infected with evil. As a result of the civil war represented by Shakespeare in *3 Henry VI*, a moral vacuum and religious crisis has affected the characters who confuse vengeance and justice or blame God for His apathy (4.4.24). God’s apparent sleep is more than counterbalanced, however, by Satan’s ceaseless bustle which is the focus of the play. Richard’s murderous behaviour has turned England into a slaughterhouse where cruelty is everywhere and mercy nowhere to be found.²⁶ The prevalence of the image of blood is not merely the expression of Richard’s predacious nature. It symbolises a conception of earthly life whereby the blood of the victims is the food of death precluding its redemptive quality. What is revealing in this association of blood with nourishment is the implicit construing of blood as the essence of natural life by contrast with the soul viewed as the spiritual part of a person, capable of redemption from sin through divine grace.

This conception of blood as the principle of corporeal life that must not be eaten on pain of spiritual death is asserted on several occasions in the Bible: “For the blood is the life of the flesh”.²⁷ Whereas Richard’s obsession with blood narrows down his apprehension of life to an equation with the vital fluid, the psalmist extends the identification to God’s breath which infuses His creatures (animals and humans alike) with life.²⁸ This is why the bloody sacrifice of an animal substituted for the sinful acts of Israel was regarded as a religious necessity for the atonement of guilt. Throughout the New Testament, the sacrificial blood of animals is viewed as the type of Jesus’ perfect and final sacrifice: “And almost all things are by the Law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission.”²⁹ Although Christ’s blood is both sacrificial and redemptive, the blood of Richard’s victims, resembling Abel’s, is antithetically sacrilegious and vindictive.

²¹John 10: 12.

²²Ezek 22: 27.

²³See Daniel (12: 10) : “but the wicked shal do wickedly, & none of the wicked shal have understanding; but the wise shal understand.” This biblical verse manifests the theological mystery of evil and applies unreservedly to Shakespeare’s chief villains (Richard of Gloucester, Iago, Aaron) whose deep motives are unexplained and remain unexplainable at the end of the play where they belong.

²⁴Mat 7: 15. Cf Acts 20: 29.

²⁵Rev 12: 12.

²⁶ See *King Richard III*, 4.1.43 ; 4.3.5-6 ; 4.4.200-201 ; 5.2.7-10.

²⁷Lev 17: 11. See also Lev 17: 14 ; Deut 12: 23. The Creator’s permission to eat the flesh of animals and corollary prohibition to eat their blood is a consequence of the Flood which entails a new mode of existence for mankind. On this see Gen 9: 3-4 ; Acts 15: 20, 29.

²⁸Ps 104: 29-30. See the marginal note (q): “As the death of creatures sheweth that we are nothing of our selves: so their generation declareth that we receive all things of our Creator”.

²⁹ Heb 9: 22.

As several speeches testify, death is more sacred than life to the tyrant bent on depleting the kingdom's population (4.1.43-44) in order to provide hell with fresh souls (4.4.71-73).³⁰ While the Saviour's blood purifies and saves, Richard's butchery contaminates the kingdom and damns the perpetrators. Notwithstanding its assumed providential origin, Richard's cleansing of the tainted past debases grace into race and demeans the status of humanity. Richard's claim to the English throne is articulated through Buckingham's plea to the Mayor and the Citizens as a defense of his ancestry. Gloucester is presented in this piece of propaganda as a prince of the blood to whom kingship belongs by right of birth more than by God's grace (3.7.129-135).

The images of bestiality pervading the play signify more than the alignment of Richard's tyranny with a predator-prey relationship. Most of them remind the spectators of the savagery of the civil war which has hardened the hearts of the survivors. They also reflect a conception of life (and history) where human agents have been deprived of any ideal, aiming to satisfy basic appetites related with power, vengeance, and lust. The characters' motives are ascribed to instinctive impulses where reason or reflection plays no part. In act I, scene 4, the discussion on conscience between the Murderers and Clarence hinges on the relationship between political action and theological precepts. Clarence asserts the traditional conception of temporal action subject to spiritual authority as he urges the hired assassins to reform their ways and save their souls (1.4.246). The First Murderer is a callous man who will not be disturbed by his conscience (1.4.247). Clarence's response is simultaneously a comment of the brutality of a despotic order and a testimony to the blind acceptance of depravity: "Not to relent is bestly, savage, devilish" (1.4.248).

Similarly, Richard's hatred of his kith and kin is not accountable to a rational paradigm. As the image of entrails applied to the intestine feud opposing members of the same family demonstrates, Richard's enmity and his parents' spite are visceral more than cerebral.³¹ As Richard himself acknowledges when he conspires with Buckingham against Hastings, there is nothing vicious that he cannot stomach (3.1.199-200). Food and death are once more intermingled in Richard's oration to his army as he paints a horrifying picture of the enemy depicted as the scum of the earth vomited by their country (5.3.318-319) or as "famish'd beggars" (5.3.330) hungry for land and women. Richard's vision of others as animals is not confined to adversaries. He extends this debasement to his friends and family and does not hesitate to instruct Buckingham to deliver a speech where he should urge King Edward's "bestial appetite in change of lust" (3.5.79). Besides, the corruption of the flesh so prevalent in the play leads to the inexorable dissolution of the body which becomes food for fishes, as in Clarence's dream of drowning (1.4.25-26), or for worms, as in Elizabeth's accusation of homicide (4.4.384-386). Altogether, the corporal imagery of the play substitutes a gruesome picture of decapitation and decomposition for the Christian belief in the resurrection of the flesh.³²

That Richard exclusively considers "the life of the flesh" at the expense of the life of the Spirit is made clear by the many references to the natural condition of man excluding spiritual renewal. Richard's vision of man is in complete contradiction with the Christian (Catholic) belief that God's grace regenerates. In a Christian context, baptism is regarded as the ritual of initiation through which man undergoes a rebirth replacing natural generation by spiritual regeneration. This idea is clearly asserted and illustrated in Paul's Epistles. In the Middle Ages, baptism was universally understood as the incorporation of natural man in the divinely founded (Catholic) Church. Baptismal rebirth replaced the natural instincts, those propensities which man has in common with animals, by norms of supernatural origin. The spiritual rebirth bestowed upon a recipient who becomes a new member of the Church through the sacrament of baptism is what Richard rejects from the outset in the opening soliloquy where he describes his appearance and discloses his plans. Richard's statement that he is "Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature" (1.1.19) draws attention to his physical imperfections as the main object deserving examination.³³ Far from holding the twisted body imparted to him by nature responsible for his criminal inclinations as a modern reading of these lines would suggest,³⁴

³⁰ When the ghosts visiting Richard on the night before the battle curse him, their words have a strong theological sense which compounds the usual meaning and may easily be overlooked. "Despair" implies loss of hope for eternal life which leads to spiritual "death" as outlined in the Scripture. See John 5: 24 ; 1 John 5: 16 ; Rev 2: 11 ; 20: 6 ; 20: 14 ; 21: 8. See also the marginal note (r) for Rev 2: 11: "The first death is the natural death of ye bodie, the seconde is the eternal death: from the which all are fre that believe in Iesus Christ."

³¹ In the Bible, entrails are the symbolic location of mercy and malignity. See Pss 17: 10 ; 73: 7 ; Prov 12: 10 ; Song 5: 4 ; Luke 1: 78 ; Col 3: 12 ; 1 John 3: 17.

³² Cf Rev 20: 4.

³³ Nowhere in the play does Richard give himself up to soul-searching or introspection of any kind, his main concern being to observe himself as he deludes his victims through false appearances. In the same way as he subjugates others, he is fascinated by himself as a result of his unfathomable narcissism.

³⁴ To Elizabethan audiences, Richard's deformed body would be seen as a moral symbol not as a justification for his behaviour.

Richard acknowledges in this speech his denial of the supernatural regeneration of his natural body and simultaneously asserts his exercise of free will in choosing to be a villain who turns away from God's law (1.1.30). It is significant that Richard's scornful tone, when he makes fun of the lover's role in peacetime, mistakes love for lust (1.1.12-13). The everlasting love of God which inspired the creation of the universe and is reflected in man's divine aspirations is here degraded into sexual games (1.1.14). The bestial motif is unambiguously associated with the sinful condition of man's fallen nature which only the grace of God can redeem through a spiritual regeneration. Margaret's fitting description of the protagonist brings home this point when she calls him "The slave of Nature, and the son of hell" (1.3.230).

Paradoxically, Richard's assertion of free will, unhindered as it is by any moral or religious scruple, induces him to reject Anne's accusations of bestiality and to claim his essential humanity:

Anne. Villain, thou know'st no law of God nor man.

No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.

Rich. But I know none, and therefore am no beast. (1.2.70-72)

This exchange, which gives expression to a seemingly lame argument,³⁵ probably encapsulates the theological purport of the play. Richard's argument is that only a human being is capable of casting aside mercy as a worthless affection once he has renounced his spiritual vocation and wilfully embraced godlessness. Shakespeare emphasizes Richard's choice of wickedness in a theological perspective showing how his identity is forged exclusively with the animal features of his human nature according to Pauline terminology³⁶.

The animal with which Richard is coupled to display his uncleanness and his impiety is the dog which carries sinister connotations in the Scripture. Used as an insult by Richard to signify the inferior status of the halberdier (1.2.39), the term is later hurled at Richard by Margaret who expresses her contempt (1.3.216).³⁷ The scriptural occurrence which is most enlightening in the context of the play is the picture of a dog licking human blood.³⁸ The image of the "bloody dog" explicitly condenses Richard's carnality as "life of the flesh" and death of the spirit. As Elizabeth's accusation makes clear with an unmistakable biblical allusion to the heart and the entrails, Richard's stony heart is debarred from regeneration because of his spiritual blindness and personal obduracy.³⁹ As if to bring out Richard's unrelenting impiety and the resulting pitilessness that sets him apart,⁴⁰ Tyrrel reports that the two murderers "Melted with tenderness and mild compassion" (4.3.6) after the deed was done.

The "carnal cur" (4.4.56) blamed for preying on his own race by Margaret is not only meant to be a carnivorous animal related in blood with the Duchess of York.⁴¹ It is above all an evocation of the biblical dog which is incapable of appreciating what is sublime and holy,⁴² which propagates false doctrines and is a metaphor of the pagans who violate God's law and live an unclean life.⁴³ Jesus Himself uses the term to refer to the doctrine of His redeeming grace.⁴⁴ Unlike Paul who worships "God in the Spirit" and has "no confidence in the flesh"⁴⁵, Richard worships Satan in the flesh and has no confidence in the Spirit.

The last mention of dogs to be found in the Holy Writ has direct bearing on Richard's character and destiny. In the book of Revelation, dogs stand for those who shall be forbidden access to heaven as unclean animals unworthy of entering the City of God: "For without shall be dogges & enchanteres, & whoremongers, & murtherers, & idolaters, & whosoever loveth or maketh lyes."⁴⁶

³⁵ See Hammond, *op. cit.*, 140 ; Siemon, *op. cit.*, 154.

³⁶ 1 Cor 2: 14. See also the marginal note for this verse (n): "Whose knowledge & judgment is not cleared by Gods Spirit."

³⁷ Regarded as unclean because of its eating habits, the dog is consistently represented in the Bible as a despicable animal. See for instance 1 Sam 17: 43 ; 2 Kgs 8: 13.

³⁸ See 1 Kgs 22: 38 ; Ps 68: 24.

³⁹ Ezek 11: 19: "And I wil give them one heart, and I wil put a newe spirit within their bowels: and I will take the stonie heart out of their bodies, & wil give them an heart of flesh." See also the marginal note (i). This verse is repeated in a slightly different form in 36: 26.

⁴⁰ It should be noted that "piety" and "pity", both derived from the Latin *pietās* ("dutifulness", "compassion"), were not fully differentiated in Shakespeare's time so that Richard's lack of compassion would be seen as a feature highlighting his ungodliness.

⁴¹ Siemon, *op. cit.*, 338, n. 56.

⁴² Matt 7: 6.

⁴³ Phil 3: 2. See also the marginal note (b).

⁴⁴ Matt 15: 26 ; Mark 7: 27.

⁴⁵ Phil 3: 3. See also the marginal note (d).

⁴⁶ Rev 22: 15 ; 21: 27. See also the marginal note (i).

Horseman of the Apocalypse

The apocalyptic overtones of the play have been aptly summarized by Edward Berry.⁴⁷ Interwoven as it is with plot and characterization, the animal imagery drawn from the Holy Scripture brings out unsuspected aspects of this conclusive revelation. The idea that Richard may be an antichrist can be traced back to the medieval writer John Rous.⁴⁸ Although Thomas More does not borrow the suggestion in his *History of King Richard III*,⁴⁹ Shakespeare obviously found the comparison attractive from a theological and theatrical standpoint. As a matter of fact, Richard is explicitly identified with an antichrist as defined in the First Epistle of John.⁵⁰ In Richmond's oration to his soldiers, Richard is presented as God's enemy, the expression articulating one of the two senses of antichrist.⁵¹ As Antony Hammond remarks, Richard's "behaviour is as relentlessly anti-Christian as he can manage" while "he determinedly inverts all Christian values".⁵² The spiritual path he follows is the reverse of Paul's whose name he invokes recurrently although Shakespeare found only one instance in More's *History*. Richard's habitual oath in the play draws attention to the apostle's biography, as recounted in the book of Acts,⁵³ and to his theology, which deals primarily with the essential role of grace to attain salvation.⁵⁴ Whereas Saul's conversion results in the sudden transformation of a persecutor of Christians into a zealous evangelist whose works will become a pillar of the new faith, Richard's regressive change leads him to invert the baptismal cleansing of sin into a ruthless persecution of sinners. While Paul's intent is to preach the gospel to the Gentiles so that Christianity becomes a universal (Catholic) religion, Richard's ambition is to subvert the teaching of Christ and enforce a perverted rule. Paul's theology springs from his conversion when he suddenly realized that his personal efforts were of no avail to gain eternal life. By contrast, Richard's anti-Christology stimulates his activism to gain a crown which is proposed to him after he has brought into a state of submission those who might resist his usurpation. The primacy of faith in Paul's system is replaced by the supremacy of fear in Richard's strategy.

The feeling of alarm caused by Richard throughout the play is appropriately conveyed by the image of the boar. In act 1, scene 3, when Margaret curses and insults him, historical and supernatural overtones make themselves felt: "Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog" (1.3.228). The allusion to the white boar, Gloucester's heraldic emblem, links Richard with a destructive animal uprooting plants for food. In Stanley's dream recounted by a messenger (3.2.10), the heraldic emblem expresses Stanley's fears for his worldly life and the future of his lineage. Belying the story of the unprovoked animal that will not charge (3.2.27-29), Richard pursues his desires with the same undaunted energy as the boar confronts a threat. In act 5, scene 2, Richmond's exhortation expands the metaphor of the savage boar, familiar from previous scenes, and enriches it with biblical overtones. Richmond's portrayal of his opponent as "The wretched, bloody, and usurping boar, / That spoil'd your summer fields and fruitful vines" echoes the devastation of God's vine in Psalm 80.⁵⁵ If we bear in mind that Israel is likened to a vine and that, in the New Testament, the Lord compares Himself to a vine and the members of His Church to the branches, Richmond's allusion to the parable of the vine acquires a symbolic import whereby the uprooting boar stands unambiguously for God's adversary.⁵⁶

⁴⁷ Edward I. Berry, *Patterns of Decay. Shakespeare's Early Histories*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1975, 101-102.

⁴⁸ See Hanham, *op. cit.*, 123-124.

⁴⁹ Sir Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III*, ed. Richard Sylvester, in *The Complete Works of St Thomas More*, 21 vols, vol. 2. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963.

⁵⁰ 1 John 4: 3. See also 1 John 2: 18; 2 John 7: 11. Whether Richard represents an antichrist or the Antichrist can be determined by the profile of his opponent in the play who is not an antagonist in the ordinary sense of the term but merely the agent of a destiny unconnected with his own person. It is God who wins the day (with the help of Richard's suicidal drive) more than Richmond who can by no means be identified with the Saviour.

⁵¹ It is not appropriate here to associate "God's enemy" with Satan himself (although the name is derived from a Hebrew term which means "adversary") since Satan is more likely to be Richard's master than his duplicate or his peer.

⁵² Antony Hammond, *op. cit.*, 102.

⁵³ Acts 9: 3-22; 22: 1-16; 26: 1-20.

⁵⁴ See in particular the Epistle to the Romans and the Epistle to the Galatians which deal with the question of salvation. The centrality of Paul's message is the sinner's complete dependance on God's supreme grace and the perfection of Jesus' redemptive work accomplished through his death and resurrection. This aspect of Paul's theology is more relevant in my opinion to a theological approach of the play than his demand of "obedience to authority" (Rom 13: 1-5) put forward in Siemon, *op. cit.* 15.

⁵⁵ Ps 80: 13-14. See also the marginal note (i) explaining the meaning of "The wilde bore out of the wood": "That is as wel they that hate our religion as they that hate our persones."

⁵⁶ For the comparison of Israel with a vine, see Ps 80: 9-16, and for the parable of the vine likening Christ to the vine stock and the Christian flock to the branches, see John 15: 1-2: "I am the true vine, and my father is an husband man. Everie branche that beareth not frute in me, he taketh away: & everie one that beareth frute, he purgeth it, that it may bring for the

In medieval bestiaries, the boar stood for envy and brutality while the sow was viewed as the image of lechery and wrath. These sins held the best claim to represent the opposite of everything the divine Lamb was associated with from a symbolic standpoint.⁵⁷ The “foul swine” which “makes his trough” in the “embowelled bosoms” of his victims (5.2.10, 9) has lapped the “gentle blood” of lambs (4.4.50) with a vengeance, as befits the implacable enemy of innocence and purity.

The fabulous creature related to God’s enemy, who rebelled against his creator and assessed that it is “Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven”,⁵⁸ is the dragon that Richard mentions when he invokes Saint George. As the patron saint of England, whose patronage extends to soldiers, it is quite appropriate that both antagonists invoke him before the battle.⁵⁹ Asking that his troops be inspired by the fury of the beast, Richard evidently distorts the story of George and his foe, invoking the saint as intercessor of the Devil. His petition betrays his allegiance to the Prince of Darkness as the mask of piety he wears reveals his religious hypocrisy. In the New Testament, the dragon is undeniably the other name of Satan.⁶⁰ Like Satan, who was defeated in heaven and exiled onto the earth, Richard has turned England into a battlefield where he beguiles his victims and subjugates them. The “olde serpent”, associated in the Scriptures with the basilisk or the cockatrice,⁶¹ is the chief enemy of God’s people, represented in the book of Revelation by the pregnant woman, and of Christ, who is symbolized by the male child to be born. Like Richard, who savages the offspring of Elizabeth and the descendants of his own mother, the biblical dragon persecutes the woman and makes war to “the remnant of her sede”.⁶² The parallel can be extended further to the Trinitarian conception of Christian theology whereby God is the union of three persons. In the same way as the book of Revelation suggests the existence of a diabolical anti-Trinity consisting of the dragon (Satan), the beast (the Antichrist), and the false prophet, the play pictures Richard as a beast enabled by the dragon whose anti-doctrine is propagated by a false prophet who can reasonably be identified with Buckingham.⁶³ As Shakespeare reminds his audiences through the theological implications of his protagonist’s action and the conclusive function of the play within the sequence, in the last days, the Prince of the World is to bring into being a false Christ in his own likeness and to endow him with his power and his throne so that “there was given unto him a mouth, that spake great things and blasphemies”.⁶⁴

Richard’s congenial lust for inordinate power and perverted order finds expression in the famous words ejaculated on the battlefield of Bosworth where the undaunted usurper is ready to exchange his kingdom for a horse (5.4.7, 13). The memorable line indirectly echoes several biblical books, notably the book of Acts where the conversion of Saul is recounted.⁶⁵ I would like to suggest that Shakespeare may not only have had the story of Paul’s life in mind when he composed the play but also the iconographic tradition dealing with the conversion of the saint when he makes Richard blurt out the celebrated line. Although the scriptural account of Saul’s conversion is not explicit on this point, in the sixteenth century a well-established tradition prevailed among painters who represented the conversion of the future saint as he suddenly fell from his horse and heard a supernatural voice.⁶⁶

more frute.”

⁵⁷ Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, *op. cit.*, 174-175.

⁵⁸ John Milton, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, *Paradise Lost*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004, Book I, line 263, 11.

⁵⁹ Known in England from the 7th-8th century, the cult of George became increasingly popular during and after the Crusades. Richard I placed himself and his army under George’s protection. In 1415, after the battle of Agincourt, George’s feast was one of the main religious festivals of the year. The cult of the saint reached its highest point in the later Middle Ages, when he was regarded as the personification of the ideals of Christian chivalry. Hence the irony of Richard’s ambiguous appeal. On the history of George, see David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004 [1978], 213-215.

⁶⁰ Rev 12: 9. See also Rev 20: 2.

⁶¹ Prov 23: 32 ; Isa 11: 8 ; 14: 29 ; 59: 5 ; Jer 8: 17. Cf *King Richard III*, 1.2.154 ; 4.1.54-55.

⁶² Rev 12: 17. See the marginal note (r): “Satan was not able to destroy the head nor the bodie, and therefore sheweth his rage against the members.”

⁶³ This inverted Trinity comprises Satan as God the Father’s opponent, the beast of Revelation as the Antichrist, and the false prophet as the counterpart of the Holy Ghost. For Buckingham as Richard’s (false) prophet and oracle spreading rumours and propagating allegations, see *King Richard III*, 2.3.151-153. Cf John 14: 7-9. On the Holy Ghost’s mission relatively to Jesus Christ and the obvious parallel with Buckingham and Richard, see John 16: 14: “He [the Comforter] shal glorifie me: for he shal receive of mine, and shal shewe it unto you.”

⁶⁴ Rev 13: 1-2, 5.

⁶⁵ Acts 9: 1-22.

⁶⁶ Acts 9: 3-4 : “Now as he iourneyed, it came to pass that as he was come nere to Damascus, suddenly there shined round

The portrayal of an unhorsed Saul assumes a symbolic meaning that Shakespeare would have perceived and remembered when he contrasted the behaviour of his protagonist on the battlefield with that of the Jewish zealot on his way to Damascus. In the Scriptures as in the play, horses stand for military force and physical action which can be put in the service of a just cause or perverted by a mind bent on iniquity.⁶⁷ A common feature of the symbolism attached to the horse in Christian or pagan civilizations is to view the rider as the intellect mastering and guiding the lower tendencies represented by the animal.⁶⁸ In a Christian context however, the horse carries additional connotations associated with pride, self-reliance, and evil which can be discerned in the occurrences of the word in the play. Before Hastings is taken to the block, he tells Ratcliffe about the ominous stumbling of his “foot-cloth horse” (3.4.83) and broods on the danger of false security which threatens those who rely on their own judgment in the face of an imminent peril. When Richard exhorts his soldiers to spur their “proud horses hard, and ride in blood” (5.3.341), he not only evinces the unremitting fierceness of a war lord resolved to complete destruction rather than conditional surrender; he betrays also the haughty feelings of a presumptuous commander whose “trust in the ‘strong arms’ (5.3.312) of human forces directly opposes the ‘powerful arm’ (1.4.206) of the Lord.”⁶⁹

The opposition between temporal power and spiritual authority is manifested in the Bible through various references to the horse. When Moses leads the Hebrews out of Egypt,⁷⁰ God wins a victory over Egyptian horsemen who symbolize the godlessness of pagans as well as trust in the flesh.⁷¹ As the psalmist reminds the faithful, the power of a horse only confers a deceptive superiority that can be annihilated at any moment by God’s will: “The King is not saved by the multitude of an hoste, nether is the mightie man delivered by great strength. A horse is a vain helpe, and shal not deliver anie by his great strength.” (Ps 33: 16-17).⁷² The book of Proverbs takes up the same idea and stresses the fact that only God bestows victory (Prov 21: 31). Horses and horsemen consistently represent in the Bible the power of the flesh that challenges God’s domination and rests on man’s illusions. Only God is capable of turning His people into a horse for the day of the Lord⁷³. While the horse demanded by Richard stands for the brittleness of his temporal power which does not rely on God’s authority and is doomed to inexorable failure, the earthly kingdom he is willing to swap is the inverted figure of the spiritual promise of another world where peace and justice shall prevail again for ever⁷⁴. The Antichrist’s spurious kinghip must go so that God’s kingdom may come. In this scriptural light, Richard’s call for a horse to fight the wrong fight to the death corroborates the apocalyptic strain of a conclusive play fraught with eschatology and full of irony.

The beast and the Lamb

The multifarious animal imagery which permeates Shakespeare’s text sustains the apocalyptic meaning of the play and the antichristic function of its protagonist in congruence with history and tragedy. As Edward Berry cogently argues, “One must view Richard’s role within a tradition of evil specifically temporal in orientation—that of the Antichrist” and “examine the extent to which the play as a whole is shaped by a conception of history that can justly be called apocalyptic”.⁷⁵ To conclude this paper, I would like to focus on Richard’s role as Antichrist and contribute a tentative explanation which may shed additional light on the nature of the play and the elusive identity of its villain protagonist.⁷⁶ That Richard is a self-confessed adversary of God and His doctrine is obvious from the play and needs no emphasis.⁷⁷

about him a light from heaven. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice, saying to him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Among the painters who represented Saul’s fall from his horse in the Early Modern Period, the most representative are probably Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Caravaggio, Albrecht Dürer, Michelangelo, and Peter Paul Rubens whose works get hold of the conventional image and offer an idiosyncratic vision of the theme.

⁶⁷ *King Richard III*, 1.1.10 ; 1.3.122 ; 3.4.84-86 ; 5.3.341 ; 5.4.4, 7, 13.

⁶⁸ Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, *op. cit.*, 207-222. The symbolic significance of the rider and his horse is very close to that of the centaur which is more synthetic by comparison.

⁶⁹ James R. Siemon, *op. cit.*, 407, n. 309-310.

⁷⁰ Exod 14: 15.

⁷¹ See Isa 31: 3 : “Now the Egyptians are men, & not God, and their horses flesh and not spirit”.

⁷² See also Pss 20: 8 ; 147: 10.

⁷³ Zech 10: 3. See the marginal note (d).

⁷⁴ Isa 11: 6. See the marginal note (c): “Men because of their wicked affections are named by the names of beasts, wherein the like affections reign but Christ by his Spirit shall reforme them.” See also Isa 65: 25.

⁷⁵ Edward I. Berry, *op. cit.*, 83-84.

⁷⁶ Siemon, *op. cit.*, 1.

⁷⁷ For a reading of the play enacting a central conflict between Richard and God, see William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann. Harmondsworth, Penguin Books Ltd, 1977 [1968], 31-33.

What has been ignored by critics, however, is that Richard's opposition to God is only one aspect of his character. As the Greek prefix of the word indicates, the Antichrist is not only he who fights against God and shows hostility to his teaching but, above all, he who supplants Christ and pretends to be God in order to be worshipped. That Richard strives to be considered as Christ and is represented by Shakespeare as a false christ is intimated on several occasions by the ambiguities of the text.⁷⁸ When Richard is confronted by the accusing mothers of act 4, scene 4, he refuses to listen and silences them with flourishes, which would have reminded Elizabethan audiences of the book of Revelation where John the Divine hears a voice similar to a trumpet and God's angels are depicted blowing the same instrument.⁷⁹ When he calls himself the "Lord's anointed" (4.4.151), the expression refers of course to the ritual of coronation whereby Richard of Gloucester has become king of England after a prelate has anointed him to infuse God's grace into his person and qualify him for the regal task he is to perform. But there is more to it. The phrase also refers to Christ, who is called the Lord's anointed in the Old and the New Testament.⁸⁰ In his condescending response to the "tell-tale women" (4.4.150), Richard insinuates no less than his divine nature. The hint is carried further when he answers his mother's question about the nature of their relation: "Ay, I thank God, my father, and yourself." (4.4.156)⁸¹. To my knowledge, no scholar or editor has proposed a grammatically acceptable reading of this line which decodes "my father" as a predicate of "God".⁸² This nondescript assertion identifies the king of England with the Son of God so that the spectators are invited to apprehend the protagonist's counterfeit identity as a gross parody of Jesus Christ's life and works. Finally, before the battle of Bosworth, Richard's assurance that "the king's name is a tower of strength" (5.3.12) achieves a blasphemous confusion of kings and God unwarranted in the Scripture.⁸³ Like the biblical model he caricatures, Richard "exalteth him self against all that is called God, or that is worshipped". Most of all, he usurps God's throne so "that he doeth sit as God in the Temple of God, shewing him self that he is God." (2 Thess 2: 4).⁸⁴

Richard's travesty presents an inverse analogue displaying several features of the Saviour's life as narrated in the Gospels. Prominent among the miracles which are put to Jesus' credit is the resurrection of the dead.⁸⁵ When Richard pleads with Elizabeth for the hand of her daughter, he pledges to perform a kind of resurrection that will revive her sons in a new guise (4.4.423-425).⁸⁶ The allusion to the nest of the phoenix from which the new bird arises out of the ashes of the old one conveys a symbolic meaning associated with immortality. In the Middle Ages, the fabulous bird was a major symbol of the resurrection of Christ and sometimes of his divine nature as well.⁸⁷ Moreover, in a manner befitting the Antichrist, the end of the tyrant provides a distorted imitation of the Passion of Christ, with the agony of Richard on the troubled night before his death (5.3.119-207), the last supper from which he abstains (5.3.50), the bowl of wine which is disconnected from any ritual (5.3.64, 73),

⁷⁸ On false christs, see for instance Matt 24: 24.

⁷⁹ Rev 1: 10. See also Rev 4: 1 ; 9: 1, 13-14 ; 10: 7. The trumpet is a favourite attribute and prophetic instrument of God's messengers (Matt 24: 31 ; Rev 8: 2, 13). It is also a signal of resurrection (1 Thess 4: 16). While trumpets usually signify in the Scripture God's presence and protection (Ps 89: 15), in the book of Revelation, the trumpets draw attention to the imminence of God's Judgment, the seventh trumpet proclaiming Doomsday (Rev 11: 15). The flourish heralding Richmond's triumphal return in act 5, scene 5 designates the victor as God's messenger and evokes the judgment of Richard before God.

⁸⁰ See for example Ps 2: 2 ; Matt 1: 1 ; Acts 10: 38 ; Heb 1: 9. The word Christ is derived from the Greek *Christos* translating the Hebrew *Māshiāh* which means anointed. In the Bible, the ritual of anointment, making use of holy oil, is applied to high priests, kings of Israel, and some prophets. According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ was anointed in a spiritual way by the Holy Ghost (Matt 3: 16 ; Luke 3: 21-22 ; Acts 10: 38).

⁸¹ The Duchess' reproof is oddly reminiscent of Matt 12: 48 and of John 2: 4 where the flesh is once more contrasted with the spirit.

⁸² Readers are invited to correct this claim if need be. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, the relation of Richard to his father is highly problematic in the play. As he reminds Anne in 1.2.163-168, the death of York called forth no expression of sorrow or emotional reaction. In *3 Henry VI*, Richard had vowed to reject brotherhood as a sign of likeness, and in the 1595 Octavo, his last soliloquy includes a line ("I had no father, I am like no father") where he renounces paternity and asserts self-generation. On this see *King Richard III*, ed. Janis Lull, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004 [1999], 3-4.

⁸³ In the Scripture, the "strong tower" is a refuge against the enemy exclusively afforded by the "Name of the Lord". See Ps 61: 4 ; Prov 18: 10 with the marginal note (g). For examples of kings of Israel who put their trust in themselves (their own names) and are punished by God for their pride, see 1 Sam 13: 8-14 ; 15 ; 2 Chr 26: 16-21.

⁸⁴ Siemon, *op . cit.*, 317, n. 3-4.

⁸⁵ See Matt 9: 18, 23-25 ; Luke 7: 11-15 ; John 11: 1-44.

⁸⁶ In *3 Henry VI*, on the battlefield of Towton, Richard had already threatened to resurrect Clifford so that the unconscious enemy could be taunted (tortured?) further (2.6.80-81).

⁸⁷ Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, *op . cit.*, 412-421.

The realization that his mind is weak while his flesh is willing (5.3.74-75), the cock crowing twice (5.3.210-211), the betrayal of Stanley (5.3.343-344), and finally, his twisted appeal to Godwhom Richard invokes in the guise of a dragon (5.3.350-351).

The dragon of the play has its apocalyptic value enhanced by the black sun (5.3.278-288) and the white horse (5.3.65). While the sun's absence, which seems to be Shakespeare's invention, is likely to be an allusion to the apocalyptic sun of Revelation "as blacke as sackcloth of heere", the white horse is an evocation of Christ's mount in the final battle against Satan⁸⁸. Until the very end of his dramatic career, Richard usurps Christ's identity and rides a white horse unveiling his deceptive appearance.⁸⁹ Whereas Saul's traditional fall from his horse led to his conversion as he was ready to give up man's power for God's grace, Richard's request of a fresh horse to fight it out signals the hardening of his heart as he renounces God's kingdom and gives way to worldly chance: "I have set my life upon a cast, / And I will stand the hazard of the die." (5.4.9-10). As the protagonist's unanswerable rejection of God paradoxically testifies, the biblical orthodoxy underlying the play is asserted in the end with a conspicuous reference to the book of Proverbs: "It is a passe time to a foole to do wickedly: but wisdome is understanding to a man." (Prov 10: 23).⁹⁰

The cluster of animal images found in the sources and expanded by Shakespeare with many ramifications and implications does not so much vindicate an identification of Richard with a "cacodemon" (1.3.144) or a "beast-man"⁹¹ through a process of demonization and bestialization stigmatizing his inhumanity and his brutishness. Nor does it unconditionally warrant a reading of the play founded on "contemporary polemical resonance" to make sense of Shakespeare's protagonist.⁹² The complex imagery points to an allegorical understanding of Richard as the beast of Revelation which shall rise at the end of the world to fight the Lamb of God and destroy His hopeful followers. The antagonism of the beast to the lamb pervades the play and reaches a climax when Richard perpetrates a crime which falls outside the chain of vengeful deeds. The killing of the two defenceless princes is a sacrilegious act which murders innocence and seals the tyrant's doom. The news of the death of her "gentle lambs" (4.4.22) bewailed by Elizabeth creates a united front against Richard and directly echoes the spiritual war depicted in the recondite visions of the book of Revelation: "But they [our brethren] overcame him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimonie" (Rev 12: 11). Transcending the play's historical and ideological background, Shakespeare's biblical inspiration manifests the eschatological significance of a historical tragedy which represents the death and damnation of a "bloody dog", and contrastingly suggests that the Lamb of God is alive and kicking.⁹³

⁸⁸Rev 19: 11. See the marginal note (l) for "white": "Whereby is signified that Iesus Christ our judge shalbe victorious, and shal triumph over his enemies." See also Rev 16: 10 for the darkness coming on the beast's kingdom.

⁸⁹ In the book of Revelation, the first occurrence of a white horse takes place after the opening of the first seal with the description of the rider who "went forthe conquering that he might overcome." (Rev 6: 2). For an identification of the rider with Christ, see the marginal note (d).

⁹⁰ See also Prov 14: 9: "The foole maketh a mocke of sinne: but among the righteous there is favour.", with the marginal note (f).

⁹¹ See A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2017, 47.

⁹² The topical interpretation is brilliantly illustrated by James R. Siemon in his edition, 30-39.

⁹³ A suggestion further relying on the fact that *dog* is the anagram of *God*.