

William Shakespeare

*The Third Part of Henry the Sixth*

Week 1

Santa Cruz Shakespeare 2020

Dramaturgy Resources  
prepared by Ashley Herum

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## **A Note on This Document**

As we continue with Acts 2.3 - 5, I intend to add to and modify this document with information about the new characters and relevant topics.

## Characters in Act 1 and Act 2, scenes 1-2

### LANCASTRIANS

#### KING HENRY VI

Descended, like his arch-rival Richard of York, from Edward III, Henry VI is the grandson of Henry Bolingbroke (later Henry IV), who deposed Richard II. Henry VI is also the sole son of the heroic, warlike Henry V. Yet Henry VI is himself most unwarlike. Nor is he good at political negotiations. He even expresses the wish that he were not king.

#### QUEEN MARGARET

The only character in Shakespeare's tetralogy to appear in all four of its plays, Margaret is a Frenchwoman. She is the daughter of René of Anjou, a French nobleman with a royal French lineage and himself the King of Naples.

This play may be named after Henry VI; Henry VI may officially be the leader of England; he may ostensibly be the leader, at least, of the Lancastrian faction, but in reality, it is his wife, Margaret, who emerges by the time represented in *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* as the Lancastrians' leader, both in negotiations and on the battlefield.

Near the play's opening, Richard of York refers to the parliament as an assembly overseen not by King Henry VI, but by his queen, saying:

The queen this day here holds her parliament.  
1.1.35<sup>1</sup>

Highlighting the fact that Queen Margaret holds more authority than her husband on the battlefield, too, the character Clifford asks Henry VI to "depart the field [of battle]," adding, "The Queen hath best success when you are absent" (2.2.73-4).

#### PRINCE EDWARD

Prince Edward is the only child of King Henry VI and the Queen. In Act 1, scene 1 of this play, Prince Edward's father, King Henry VI, agrees to make Richard of York or his heir, rather than his own son, Prince Edward, the heir to the throne.

<sup>1</sup> References to line numbers are from the Folger edition, which Santa Cruz Shakespeare is using for this production.

**Lord CLIFFORD, John**

A Lancastrian whose father—also called Clifford—was killed by Yorkists in the battle that took place just before the start of this play—and with which *The Second Part of Henry Sixth* ended. In the play, Clifford is consumed by desire for vengeance against the Yorkists. As Clifford tells Richard of York's son, Rutland, before killing him:

Had I thy brethren here, their lives and thine  
Were not revenge sufficient for me.  
No, if I digged up they forefathers' graves  
And hung their rotten coffins up in chains,  
It could not slake mine ire nor ease my heart.  
The sight of any of the house of York  
Is as a fury to torment my soul...

I.3.26-32

**Earl of NORTHUMBERLAND. Given name: Henry Percy.**

A Lancastrian whose father—also called Northumberland—was killed by Yorkists in the battle that took place just before the start of this play—and with which *The Second Part of Henry Sixth* ended.

**Duke of EXETER. Given name: Henry Holland.**

A committed Lancastrian, despite his being married to Anne Plantagenet, Edward IV's sister.

## YORKISTS

### **Richard Plantagenet, Duke of YORK**

Descended, like his arch-rival, Henry VI (unless we should consider Richard of York's actual arch-rival to be Henry VI's wife, Queen Margaret!), from Edward III, Richard of York is the son of Richard, Earl of Cambridge. Richard, Duke of York, founds his claim to the throne on his mother Anne's second marriage, to Edmund Mortimer, whom the deposed Richard II had named as his heir. As you may recall, Richard, Duke of York, is told of this claim to the throne by the dying Mortimer in *The First Part of Henry The Sixth*, Act II, scene 5.

Richard of York's Four Sons:

### **EDWARD, Earl of March, later KING EDWARD IV**

The eldest son of Richard of York. Warwick declares that Edward will be king in Act 2, scene 1, lines 194-9, while in Act II, scene 2, Edward himself informs Henry VI and Queen Margaret that he (Edward) is king. By Act 3, Edward becomes more assertive in terms of his own destiny.

### **GEORGE, later (as of Act 2, scene 6) Duke of CLARENCE**

During Acts 1 and 2, George is loyal to his elder brother, Edward, and supports his claim to the kingship.

### **RICHARD, later (as of Act 2, scene 6) Duke of GLOUCESTER**

Upon the death of his father, Richard of York, Richard eventually is seen to take on his dead father's determined striving for the English crown, even at the expense of his own immediate family members.

### **RUTLAND**

Rutland (given name: Edmund) is historically Richard of York's second eldest son, but Shakespeare presents him in this play as his youngest son.

Rutland is killed by the Lancastrian Clifford near the battle of Wakefield in Act 1, scene 2. Although historically Rutland was seventeen at the time of his death, Shakespeare portrays him as twelve years old. This, together with Shakespeare's portrayal of him as the youngest of Richard of York's sons, is in keeping with a motif throughout *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* of the vulnerability of the children of members of warring factions. This motif is part of a larger theme of the play—that of cyclical vengeance.

**Marquess of MONTAGUE. Given name: John Neville**

Warwick's brother. Like Warwick's, his own allegiance will shift throughout the course of the play.

**Earl of WARWICK. Given name: Richard Neville**

Thanks to Shakespeare's depiction of Warwick in this play as a nobleman whose political and military support and machinations help to put another person in power, Warwick came to be popularly known by the epithet "The Kingmaker." Throughout Acts 1 and 2 of this play, Warwick is on the side of the Yorkists. But will he remain on their side?

**OTHER CHARACTERS from Acts I and II.1-2**

**A SON that has killed his father**

**A FATHER that has killed his son**

**MESSENGERS**

## Cyclical Blood Vengeance

Designated as an history play in the First Folio (1623), *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* was in its first printings in 1595 and 1600 called a tragedy: more precisely, *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*. The term “tragedy” implied that the play was both historical and tragic. Indeed, the play bears a hallmark of Ancient Greek and Roman tragic plays—the theme of cyclical blood vengeance.

### Seneca’s *Thyestes*

Although published for the first time in 1595, *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* was first performed by 1592. Shakespeare appears to have written the play around the same time as he composed *Titus Andronicus* (1591-92), a revenge-tragedy of remarkable gruesomeness and violence, featuring acts of murder, dismemberment, and cannibalism. In writing both of these plays, Shakespeare took as one of his sources of inspiration the Roman playwright Seneca’s tragic play *Thyestes*.

### “Cannibals”

Like Seneca’s *Thyestes* and Shakespeare’s own *Titus Andronicus*, *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth* also features murder and dismemberment—the latter, notably, in the form of beheadings. It could additionally be argued that, figuratively speaking, cannibalism is a feature, too, of *The Third Part of Henry the Sixth*. At least, it is worth noting the two occurrences in the play of the word “cannibals” and the word’s association, in both its occurrences, with the slaughter of a boy (Rutland, portrayed in the play as a twelve-year-old) or a young man (Prince Edward).

When York, weakened and already near to death, is captured in battle by Queen Margaret, she taunts and torments him, at one point wiping his face with a cloth stained with the blood of his recently murdered son, the twelve-year-old Rutland. York responds by telling her that even cannibals would not have behaved with such cruelty as she does toward him:

That face of his [of his son, Rutland’s] the hungry cannibals  
Would not have touched, would not have stained with blood;  
But you are more inhumane, more inexorable,  
O, ten times more, than tigers of Hyrcania.  
See, ruthless queen, a hapless father’s tears.  
This cloth thou dipped’st in blood of my sweet boy...

1.4.156-62

Pitiable as York’s sorrowing words over his son are, York does not suggest in anything that he says that, in his final moments, he sees himself, and the Lancastrians, too, as seemingly inextricably caught up in a cycle of violence. For he ends his speech by calling down vengeance upon Clifford, who slew his son Rutland, and upon Queen Margaret, who has taunted him with the news of Rutland’s death:

These tears are my sweet Rutland’s obsequies,



And every drop cries vengeance for his death,  
'Gainst thee, fell Clifford, and thee, false Frenchwoman!

1.4.15-52

In her use of the word “cannibals,” Queen Margaret does seem, however, to critique a society that is based on an endless round of revenge killings. At least, through her words, Shakespeare invites us to critique such a society. Near the play’s end, in a grief-wracked speech over the body of her own dead son, Queen Margaret resorts to the term “cannibals” to encapsulate the sense of a form of violence by which parents, lineages, or whole societies destroy their own offspring—whether individually, or collectively—by implicating them in inherited patterns of interrelations and behaviors that are designed to sustain further vengeful violence, until the end of time. Although herself a bloodthirsty character throughout the play until this point, she does not just refer to Edward IV and his brothers, the murderers of her only son, Edward (“Ned”), as “cannibals” (5.5.61), but she frames her claim more broadly than this, referring generally to grown men’s murder of children as the act of “cannibals”:

O Ned, sweet Ned, speak to thy mother, boy.  
Canst thou not speak? O traitors, murderers!  
They that shed Caesar shed no blood at all,  
Did not offend, nor were not worthy blame,  
If this foul deed were by to equal it.  
He was a man; this, in respect a child,  
And men ne'er spend their fury on a child.  
What's worse than murder that I may name it?  
No, no, my heart will burst an if I speak—  
And I will speak, that so my heart may burst.  
Butchers and villains! Bloody cannibals!

5.5.51-61

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (“*OED*”) cites Shakespeare’s use of “cannibal(s)” in this scene, categorizing it as a “figurative” use. According to the *OED* the word as it is used in Margaret’s speech means, “A ruthless and destructive person...; a bloodthirsty or savage person” (*OED* 1c). While this is undoubtedly true, Shakespeare deploys the word to even subtler effect than the *OED* allows. Taken together, the implication of both Margaret’s and York’s usage of “cannibals”, I would suggest, is that, when adult members of a society murder a young member in a retaliatory act, they, in a figurative sense, “eat,” or “cannibalize” their young, consuming their young’s potential not just for longer lives, but for lives lived differently, without the insatiable urge for revenge dictating their choices.

In Week 2’s installment of this dramaturgy packet, your trusty dramaturg will discuss King Henry VI’s vision (2.5) of a gentler way of life, in which time is measured out not by battles and revenge killings, but by the pregnancies of ewes and the births of their lambs.

## Some Notes on the Animal Imagery

The play contains a great deal of animal imagery—imagery that oftentimes is connected to killing of some kind, such as hunting, or butchery (King Henry’s vision of the life-cycle of ewes and lambs, mentioned in passing above, is an exception). Characters describe themselves as hunting other characters, or refer to armed human conflict as butchery.

### Hunting as Practice for Warfare:

In the West, the hunting of animals has, since ancient times, been portrayed as practice for the killing of humans in warfare. While some of Shakespeare’s (near-)contemporaries, including the philosophers Erasmus and Montaigne as well as many Puritans, deplored the practice of hunting, royal and noble people of Shakespeare’s own day routinely would justify their hunting of animals by referring to it as training for war.

### Beheadings and the Hunt:

Much may be said about the several beheadings and the subsequent quite literal “handling” of some of the severed heads in this play. And the same is true of the previous play, *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixth*, in which, for example, Queen Margaret grieves for her lover Suffolk while holding his severed head. In his talk after Episode Two of Santa Cruz Shakespeare’s production of *The Second Part of Henry the Sixth*, Sean Keilen, Professor of Literature and Director of Shakespeare Workshop, both at the University of California, Santa Cruz, discussed beheading as the punishment during Shakespeare’s own day for treason. The decapitations that figure in this play in some cases also recall the ritual beheading of the deer in a deer hunt. Both in Shakespeare’s own day and in the time of the play the hunting of deer was an activity reserved for the nobility. As a sign of his, or her prestige, a high-ranking hunter—in some cases this would be the monarch—would have the privilege of beheading the already-killed deer.<sup>2</sup>

### Butchery:

King Henry is such a poor warrior that his wife, or a courtier sometimes will tell him to stay off the battlefield; they would rather fight without him. Perhaps he is too aware of the horror of armed conflict to be a good soldier. Shortly after the play opens, Henry refers to the carnage that may result from armed fighting within parliament as potentially turning the space into a “shambles” (1.1.72)—that is, a slaughterhouse. He frames fighting not as manly, aristocratic hunting, but as the unseemly butchering of wholly domesticated animals.

And, here, one might add that the deer which royalty and members of the nobility hunted were arguably semi-domesticated. They were kept in “forests” owned by the king, or in “parks” owned by noblemen. Both “forest” and “park” had different meanings in this context than we would typically understand them to have today, as they referred to places set aside for hunting.

<sup>2</sup> The information about hunting is from Edward Berry, *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge, 2011).

**Battles**  
 Scripted in  
*The Third Part of Henry Sixth* (“3H6”),  
 Acts 1-5<sup>3</sup>

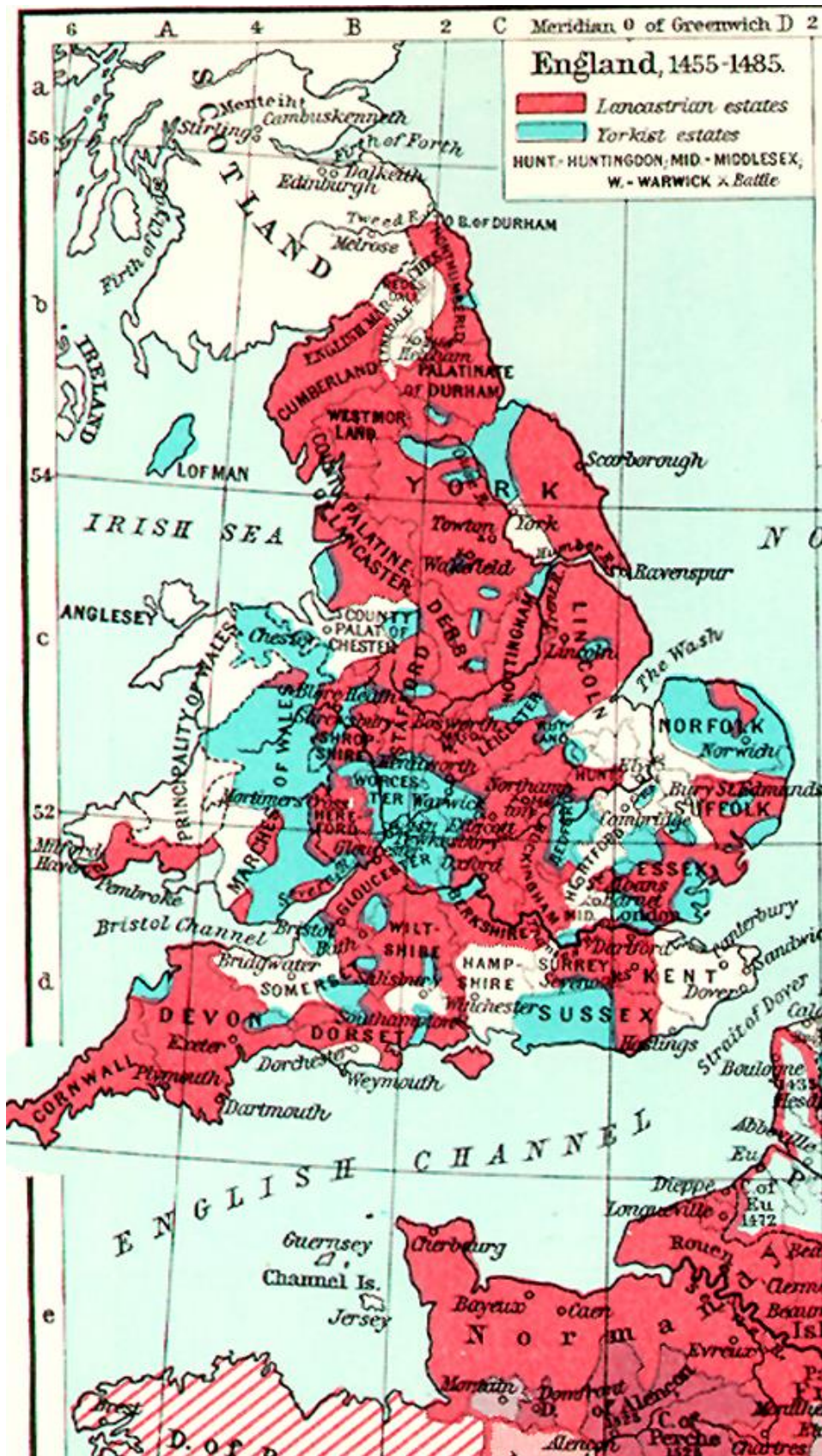
<b>Battle Site</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Won by</b>	<b>Scripted in</b>
St. Albans (1)	22 May 1455	York	2H6, 5.1 – 5.2
Northampton	10 July 1460	York	omitted (conflated with St. Albans (1) in 3H6 1.1)
Wakefield	30 December 1460	Lancaster	1.3 and 1.4
St. Albans (2)	17 February 1461	Lancaster	2.1 113-43 (line number are from the Folger edition)
Ferrybridge	28 March 1461	Lancaster	2.3
Towton	29 March 1461	York	2.3-2.6
Barnet	14 April 1471	York	5.2
Tewkesbury	4 May 1471	York	5.4

<sup>3</sup> This information is reproduced from Cox and Rasmussen, Editors. William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI, Part 3*, The Arden Shakespeare, 2001. Rprtd. 2018.

# Battle Sites: The Wars of the Roses



Image downloaded from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-\\_Wars\\_of\\_the\\_Roses.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map-_Wars_of_the_Roses.jpg)



Map of England, 1455-1485:

Lancastrian and Yorkist Estates

## Three Suns / Three Sons

### Omen

Richard of York is killed in the battle of Wakefield (1.4), and his youngest son, twelve-year-old Rutland, is murdered near that battle (1.3). As a result, only the three eldest of Richard of York's sons remain alive—Edward, George, and Richard. As Edward and Richard wait together to learn whether their father has survived the battle, Edward says he sees three suns appear at once in the sky:

Dazzle mine eyes, or do I see three suns?

2.1. 25

Richard seems to see three suns, too, and both brothers speak of seeing the three images converge into one. Both brothers, too, speak of the sight as an omen. Edward, in particular, interprets the three suns as representing “the sons of brave (Richard of York)” (2.1.35). Edward opines:

I think it cites us, brother, to the field,  
That we, the sons of brave Plantagenet,  
Each one already blazing by our meeds,  
Should notwithstanding join our lights together  
And overshine the earth, as this the world.

2.1.34-8

### Optical Illusion

Edward describes the sight as “wondrous strange, the like yet never heard of” (2.1.33). Our director, Paul Mullins, however, has unearthed the fascinating fact that—although Richard of York's son, Edward, had never heard of such an event before—three suns do sometimes seem to appear in the sky, under certain atmospheric conditions, in northern latitudes, a phenomenon scientists classify as an optical illusion. For your viewing delight, we provide a link, here, to a video about this phenomenon.

VIDEO LINK: <https://youtu.be/EMkE6HYig-4>