



Excerpts from *Dark Sovereign*

(Formatted for North American 8.5" x 11" Letter size)

“Dark” in the title means what it means in the sixteenth century phrase “dark horse”: it suggests unknown qualities. Papers on my URL give background about *Dark Sovereign*, so I do not duplicate that information here. This paper provides excerpts in context and cites the footnotes that appear in the normal Arden-style edition of the full text.

The first thing *Dark Sovereign* deals with is the death of the princes in the Tower of London. They die in the first minute. Or do they? No sooner do the “murderers” flee, than Rumour enters—and the audience begins to doubt. Rumour’s sequins dazzle her audience while her words scatter indiscriminately, far and wide. She begins by addressing the princes, who may or may not be dead...

RUMOUR: Edward the fifth, child-king sans crown,
that never more shall crown beget;
and Richard, duke of York: *Requiescatis in pace*

– if ye truly be dead! Were these or agents n¹
 for o’erween’d ambition rid ye this? n²
 or night-born phantasms do serve the time,
 th’occasions of my tongues? If these were ghosts,
 their work was woven of the many’s mind
 and you shall live long years beyond tonight.
 Be you in this world, or in another, brothers, sleep! 10
 It is not given me to understand
 whether this work were done, or no.

“If these were ghosts, their work was woven of the many’s mind.” Four centuries of “the many’s mind” have been inculcated by William Shakespeare’s great work of Tudor propaganda, *Richard III*. Is the prince’s violent death a rumour? At this point, Rumour detects the audience.

I, friends, am Rumour. Ye still still tell my fames: n³
 Men say! They say! ’Tis said! Holla, now you discern me:
 I am each man his concubine, the envy and report of every she.
 I am whatever company I keep.
 As for this tale, wonder if be true. n⁴ 40
 I wot not if these carcasses reek vital heat,
 or lie in death. Ne aught I care,
 for Rumour’s task is but to trumpet that I hear
 till grey-beards write down me in learned books,
 where I am taken for a gospel that is – *curtsies* – History!
 Whereinsoever the presumption in me has no bounds.
 Know, that seeks for truth, I thwart wi’ thee,
 charming, with such Siren-sounds
 as they should set thee to blind rocks. n⁵
 Be ware, lest zeal-blind
 thou not run upon the stony shoal of falsehood. n⁶

¹ Ind.2.4. *or...or*: Note the construction: “Were these or agents...or night-born phantasms...?” Modern English drops the first use of the word, and several centuries of editors have cut it from Period texts. Notwithstanding, this usage was commonly used to set up a dramatic alternative.

² Ind.2.5. *this*: thus (only when in post-position). See *Venus and Adonis*, 206

³ Ind.2.15. *still still*: on every possible occasion, all the time

⁴ Ind.2.40. Note the construction after *As for*, common in the Period. The pronoun one expects to find later in the sentence, in this case *it*, is missing.

⁵ Ind.2.56. *blind rocks*: submerged rocks, sunken reefs

⁶ Ind.2.58. *thou not run upon*: The redundant *not* often accompanied verbs of warning or threat.

Rumour will return. She is never far away. And we will soon meet her twin sister, Truth. But not yet.

At eighteen years of age, Lady Anne Neville is already the widow of the late Edward Prince of Wales, the Lancastrian heir to the throne. Edward was killed by Yorkists at the battle of Tewkesbury. Rumour says he was taken prisoner, then murdered by Yorkist nobles. With no husband, Lady Anne and her inherited wealth are chattels, claimed by her brother in law, George Duke of Clarence. If she is to reclaim her inheritance and status she must marry a man powerful enough to challenge Clarence's claim: that leaves only the youngest surviving brother of King Edward IV, Richard Duke of Gloucester. Anne may detest Gloucester and the victorious Yorkist faction, but she needs his power. For his part, Gloucester, the youngest son, needs wealth. Lady Anne stands along in a wintry garden, expecting Gloucester. We hear horsemen approach. In a British performance, she would speak with a Yorkshire accent:

LADY ANNE, *speaks Northern*: Ha, Richard Gloucester comes at last!

How must I receive him? Until as now I thought to hold back,
for hate, cold as the frost that gripes this winter'd garden;
to greet proud Gloucester wi' th' ice-dagger
is the loathing of a woman dispossess'd. n⁷

The space of a twelvemonth – two moons less! – 10
twixt troth and mourning gowns. O might I loose
th'embowell'd powers of Hecate against that son of York
which slew my prince at Tewkesbury! Lost! Give me lost! n⁸
My heritage; my Prince of Wales; and my ambition! n⁹

Nay. Heart, be still; head, be in calm;
whatever pass, tongue say not nay, unless thou cast me
on a still more stony ground of my preparing.

Our Lady, hear me! Take off my woman frailty;
instead whereof do on my heart an hedge of thorn
cloak'd all wi' flowers: 20
I'll treat this hell-fiend with vixen guile.

⁷ 1.1.5. The word *that* is omitted (*ellipsis*) from the beginning of the line.

⁸ 1.1.13. *Give me lost*: Give me up for lost

⁹ 1.1.14. *prince of Wales*: King Henry VI's heir, Edward of Lancaster, Prince of Wales, and Lady Anne Nevill were 17 when they were betrothed at Angers Cathedral on July 25, 1470.

Or Lancaster, or York, it matters not. n¹⁰
It stands my life upon to marry to the royal house.

Lady Anne may loathe Richard Gloucester and the Yorkists, but she is determined to marry him. Lady Anne and Gloucester play parts of this scene as asides. He enters. She is turned away, pretending she has not seen him. His opening expression, “sighing weeds,” refers to mourning clothes.

GLOUCESTER, *aside*: What careful snares she lays.

Accoutred in her sighing weeds she chides at me.

ANNE, *aside*: When shall he speak? how give me to discover him?

La you, my lord, the lowest hell have not more hating in’t
than I for thee! My heart-grudge stops my mouth still.

GLOUCESTER, *aside*: Perhaps those weeds denote but only piety. n¹¹

Half a year has gone about since Lancaster was brought to die. 40

ANNE, *aside*: Speak to me, Gloucester, speak! Hot temper
born of action’s easier borne than is th’expecting on’t.

GLOUCESTER, *aside*: I’ll treat with her
like one whose passage threads a mire.

ANNE, *aside*: Speak, Gloucester, speak!

I cannot bear silence out more. n¹²

GLOUCESTER: Hem hem.

ANNE, *aside, panic*: He will I should discover him!

GLOUCESTER: Hem hem. My Lady Anne...

ANNE, *turns, unruffled. Speaks Southern*: O, how doth your grace? 50

After greeting Gloucester, Lady Anne turns away again to conceal her anger.

GLOUCESTER: May I not see your face? 70

ANNE: I crave a further moment of indulgence for my grief.

GLOUCESTER: Your woman’s reason bodies forth Lancaster’s death.
My very presence speaks it.

¹⁰ 1.1.22. See note at Ind.2.4 for construction.

¹¹ 1.1.39. *weeds*: mourning garb, clothing. Hence the modern expression “widow’s weeds”.

¹² 1.1.46. *bear silence out*: pretend to silence; be responsible for keeping silent

'Tis paradox: y'are with quick memories;
and yet, wherein they feed time-was, n¹³
they do supplant you of what life *shall* be.
He died, my lady...

ANNE: My lord, you did him slay!
[*Fast mood shift*] How well your person I may fairly quit, 80
but well the house of York shall stand to time
attainted of his life. n¹⁴

GLOUCESTER: What, will you have me to put it up without retort?
Lancaster lacks not less innocence from blood! n¹⁵
At Wakefield was my father slain; and more than so,
my elder brother Edmund, earl of Rutland,
– scarce had a' seen yet seventeen years.
At York, their heads adorned were with paper crowns
and bodied with a stake.

ANNE: In likewise fell my sire at Barnet,
and my prince at Tewkesbury.

GLOUCESTER: These were not prick'd upon poles,
to be in death dishonour'd. 99

The Wars of the Roses decimated both families. Or should I say “factions”? (It reminds one of Shakespeare’s phrase, “The nearer in blood the bloodier.”) How does a man propose to a woman who despises him? It is Lady Anne who brings matters to a head, reverting to her broadest Yorkshire (in a British context):

ANNE *turns to confront him.*

What wouldst tha then?

GLOUCESTER: Why, what should I else? I would thee wed.

ANNE: What mock be that?

Shall deep-affected night roll down her stars,
translating all to glorious day within a word?

Look well to my apparel, lord.

Thou! from forth malevolents, wert Edward’s fellest foe.

¹³ 1.1.76. *wherein*: to the extent that

¹⁴ 1.1.81. *How well...but well*: Although...on the other hand. Having in effect just accused Gloucester of murder, Anne recalls her own advice to herself (lines 15-23), and backs off in a hurry, absolving Gloucester of personal responsibility (*your person I may fairly quit*).

¹⁵ 1.1.84. *not less*: Though this usage of *less* is not identical to those in 2.1.15 and 4.1.6, comparison with those examples will help illustrate how the word evolved through negative senses to the point where it actually seemed to indicate the opposite.

GLOUCESTER: I offer to horse thee again. n¹⁶

Or will'st thou to be bruis'd beneath shod hooves?

ANNE: You proffer her rare charity, whose troth of hand
bestoweth on her husband four thousand pound yearly!

GLOUCESTER: When you are mine!

ANNE: Such husband as I choose have right!

Thus much the so-commanding law.

GLOUCESTER: The law's a sword, an iron thing, and cold.

She cuts no deeper than the might of him who would uphold her. 170

The scene ends with a wordless betrothal. Gloucester extends his hands from beneath his cloak. Lady Anne hesitates, then takes them. They go—into what becomes a more or less happy marriage.

Richard's brother, George Duke of Clarence, is livid. Retainers of the two dukes come to blows in the streets of London. Meanwhile their brother King Edward has made preparations for war against France. Now he finds his plans thwarted by his brothers' struggle to possess Lady Anne. King Edward summons his Council...

K. EDWARD IV: How now, my lords. And brothers! At a strife?

Never any difficulty was, but some discourse might resolve. 30

Endue our mind with that affair, which,
ringing in our night-stopp'd ears,
doth murder care-bestridding sleep.

This six months past,
our Chamberlain reduced Calais to our will.
Waits Hastings now upon our pleasure to take ship,
with men at arms, for France.

All's made in a readiness;
except it is not France doth blow the bellows to our weal;
it is our brothers! Clarence. Gloucester.

We do lovingly embrace you as our blood. 50

But that ye fall, two fighting-cocks,
the tone on tother, brings me out! n¹⁷

¹⁶ 1.1.162. *horse thee*: put you back in the saddle. Were Gloucester intending to be coarse, the figure might be taken as a *double entendre*, as in contemporary expressions like “to put the mare to the horse”, or “to take the horse”.

¹⁷ 1.2.52. *brings me out*: makes me mad as hell

At this point Truth tries to bring us up to date. Truth is at a disadvantage because the audience mistakes her for her twin, Rumour. And why not? They are dressed identically except that, where Rumour flashes sequins, Truth's dress is plain. Truth notices the audience's confusion, and starts to explain...

TRUTH, *to the audience*: But stay, you are uncertain of me!

You wrong me, mortals, every way. Bear me good mind:

I am a spirit, whole, in most men's heart.

I have you! Ha! About the eyes, whereat you speak,

make I no doubt t'assign the doubt that I must answer:

10

Your doubting answers to one only name.

Such a one came at you in your way: She mock'd you,

bid you quest to truth chastis'd with lies, wi' falsehood.

Sweet didymists! W'are twins. She was my sister, Rumour.

n¹⁸

I am Truth. Where she is gaudy, I am plain.

Where she would put impediment to history,

I, without dissembly, answer truly,

when the course gives me to understand.

At this point Queen Elizabeth Woodville enters. This lady has much to answer for—twenty years of unrest, actually, as she has promoted her relatives over and above the Old Nobility, including the king's brothers, Clarence and Richard Gloucester. Truth describes the queen...

TRUTH: Since the fore-end of Edward the Fourth his reign,

this lady hath rent England into parts.

n¹⁹

Her kin have too much; other hath too little;

n²⁰

most all have set their heart to enmity to her.

And all because King Edward stew'd in coming passion
of the male kind.

Yet notwithstanding, here she stands,

Elizabeth Woodville, wife to King Edward, queen of England.

RUMOUR, *off*: She's voic'd to be a witch!

¹⁸ 1.3.14. *didymists*: doubters

¹⁹ 1.3.22. *parts*: rival factions

²⁰ 1.3.23. *other hath*: *Other* is a valid plural form. *Hath* as a literary plural dies at the stake with Latimer, according to OED. However, it occurs in *Macbeth* III.i.109, and *Lear* III.i.27. (Both examples preserved in the *Cambr.* ed. but altered to *have* in many modern editions.)

TRUTH: Sister Rumour!

Enter RUMOUR.

RUMOUR: Sister Verity.

TRUTH & RUMOUR embrace.

TRUTH places RUMOUR on her left.

TRUTH: Stand by me, so. Thine advocacy's needful
for each malapert and prating head.

The part sinister shalt thou play. n²¹

To the audience: Rumour ushers in the darkest clearness. 40

RUMOUR: There is as darksome truth as talk;
more, rumour is oft the same that truth. n²²

All-telling talk will have the queen a witch,
that, by art magic, snared the king; and she,
well over-summer'd, is five winters elder than he is.

He wish'd to mistress her; but she, full ripe of woman cunning,
kept him from her bed, whereon, in 's lust, he burn'd.

When he besought her for her favour,
she did threat to thrust his dagger in her breast,
making vow as she would sooner die,
th'intemperate slave of chastity,
than Edward's other tool might prick her flesh.

50

n²³

TRUTH: Such a naughty talk of pricks!

RUMOUR: Please thee wit: There's more is just
in love than war, for love abides no chivalry.

Thy sister as I am, this is truth:

King Edward wedded her he would but bed.

Wherefore fames do noise abroad: The queen's a witch!

There was never any doubt that Queen Elizabeth Woodville was grasping. She asks her brother, the Earl of Rivers, how best to protect her boys from outside influence. Here we get biblical. Briefly, it was believed as late as the nineteenth century that what a mother saw during childbirth might influence her infant. This derives from Genesis Chapter 30, the story of Jacob, Laban and the straked [sic] and spotted goats. That conviction was

²¹ 1.3.39. *sinister*: The stress falls on the middle syllable.

²² 1.3.42. *the same that truth*: the same as truth (is)

²³ 1.3.51. *intemperate*: undefiled

at the core of the struggle following the death of Edward IV—the struggle to possess the person of his son, the boy king Edward V. (Tudor dramatists used this theory of infant imprinting: viz. Shakespeare’s “woolly breeders” in *The Merchant of Venice*; and in *Mother Bombie*.) We are about to hear advice on guarding young Edward against hostile influences (the in-laws), first from an ally, the queen’s brother; second, from an enemy. First, the queen’s brother, the Earl of Rivers...

RIVERS: If thou would rule the future, pray thy husband live
until thy son deserves the realm. Leave off to fear.

I know to keep the prince far hence, at Ludlow, safe from hurt, n²⁴ 160
from forth the far long fetch of London’s strifes. n²⁵

The boy attends no instance foreign from *our* only cause, n²⁶
but ours alone. When a’ comes in good time to his crown,
I promise thee, Edward first and foremost shall a Woodville be,
a son of York thereafter.

The same problem splits the Royal Council: who will gain control of the young king’s mind? Here is Lord Howard, of the Old Nobility faction... The phrase “threads of life” means nerves.

HOWARD: His mind, that rules the sapience of his tree;

his heart, whence airy, fiery vital spirits flow;
his threads of life, wherein attractive and repulsive powers run; n²⁷
those virtues in a king we hold most dear!

The common weal – moreover, the weal of our prince’s soul –
hath nobler interest than that the king thereof 140
should wait on his kinsmen’s trough!

Despite Rivers’ hope that “thy husband live until thy son deserves the realm,” King Edward IV dies. The gloves come off. Both sides seek allies and sharpen their tongues. In North Yorkshire, Richard Gloucester gets word of his brother’s death in a letter from Lord Hastings, the late king’s

²⁴ 1.3.160. Rivers was appointed Governor of the Prince of Wales’ house hold at Ludlow in 1473.

²⁵ 1.3.161. *strives*: strifes

²⁶ 1.3.162. *attends no instance*: gives thought to nothing

²⁷ 2.4.136. *threads of life*: nerves

Chancellor. Richard already had premonitions. He waves Hastings' letter, as if at the spirits...

GLOUCESTER: Vile spirits, from a starless inward dark,
you mute, unquiet visitors, in fine I place you – albeit too late! n²⁸
Each night you stole my quiet death of sleep
to speak disquietly of death, to lead me to a world
of far imaginings, beyond the usual frame. 6
Dead! These two days since he's dead;
howbeit he lived ghostly in me two days beyond his span.
Till now. For now my king, that was of woman born,
of words on paper hath been slain. You prescient wraiths,
here is your writ of affirmation come at last!

Both factions march on London: the Woodvilles with 2,000 men and firmly in possession of the boy-king, Edward V; the Yorkists of the “Old Nobility” with 600 men and a case of justifiable paranoia. At a tavern in Northampton, Harry Duke of Buckingham—the real villain in *Dark Sovereign*—suggests they should overpower Rivers, seize the young king and order his escort of Welsh troops back to Wales. Richard and Buckingham drink long into the night. Richard is no tyrant. In fact his problem was that he was too decent a man to make a good tyrant. But to save his skin he has to stage a *putsch*. It's almost dawn. The dukes are running out of time. A rooster crows:

GLOUCESTER: False bird to herald the deceiving light. n²⁹
The rising of the lark stays yet an hour.
BUCKINGHAM: Ware, Gloucester, unless the real morrow
prove as false. Our hurt's not small;
no more is the common griefs of England. Spare for no cost,
no more than if it were the cause of all.
'Twere the devil's undeserving profit, did your father 111
– his three sons withal – untimely fall in grave.
For nothing!
To sway the diadem doth mitigate abominations.
To lose the rule were death. And treason. n³⁰

²⁸ 2.3.2. *in fine*: in the end, at last

²⁹ 3.3.101. *deceiving light*: zodiacal light (Brit.), false dawn (U.S.)

³⁰ 3.3.115. *treason*: the word attacks Gloucester from two opposite points of view: first, Buckingham

Standing: I'll take me out a pissing while.
I'd purge the wine of fellowship on daisies. *Exit.*

So Buckingham, fed up with Gloucester's restraint, takes himself out "a pissing while," leaving Gloucester alone...

GLOUCESTER: Alone. At last alonely and alone.

The nighted hours pass, a quiet wilderness without,
contrary to the noise keeps coil within. n³¹ 120

How should I think? nor why, with voice of word,
lend mettle and substantial form to thought?

I might as well with plummet sound the bottoms of this cup
as plumb the well of conscience. n³²

Certs, it is the Málaga that speaks. n³³

Lights: Dawn breaks.

Buckingham enters silently. He listens. What he hears is a philosophical point widely debated in the early modern world since Dante wrote it into his *Divine Comedy*...

GLOUCESTER: Speaks Reason to my Will?

or doth proud Will to Reason speak?

O, would I wist which captain order'd thought,
prescrib'd it me, dictated every deed.

Whether doth the Will or Reason urge me fasten on occasion 150
of this night to sway the rule on England?

If either door gaped wide, mankind would wholly righteous be
– or damn'd. How stony is the way 'twixt Reason and the Will,
to judgment.

Buckingham intervenes, knowing exactly what pressure to exert. He does so in a two-line couplet that forms the fulcrum of the play...

suggests that Gloucester's inaction is a betrayal of his family; second, as the charge which must surely await both dukes in the event of a Woodville supremacy.

³¹ 3.3.120. *noise*: is used as it appeared in the original Folio edition of *Richard III* V.iii.104: "I'll strive with troubled noise to take a nap". The 1597 Quarto and modern eds. give *thoughts* instead of *noise*. The expression *keeps coil* means to keep up a disturbance.

³² 3.3.126. *conscience*: state of mind, consciousness

³³ 3.3.127. *Málaga*: The port of Málaga in southern Spain from which white wine (sack) was exported; hence the name of the wine.

BUCKINGHAM *pretends a noisy entrance*: A wink ago
 I catch'd th'odd ends "To judgment". Clear dawn is sprung,
 and time's no more by night delay'd. n³⁴
 The question's so brief, needs the answer were briefer:
 Shall you sit in judgment? or be judg'd?

A reluctant Gloucester is forced to act. He seizes the king, orders Rivers
 marched off to Yorkshire in chains—and remorse sets in!

GLOUCESTER: Why so, it's done. The end was here begun.
BUCKINGHAM: How chance swart furrows hath effac'd
 the lately-purchas'd laurel from your brows? 120

GLOUCESTER: You mark a queasy conscience stomaching
 which liefer me were swallow down than choke with it. n³⁵

BUCKINGHAM: If Conscience virtue has,
 'tis that she bindeth up the weak to aid the strong.
 The crying puss-cat is, as it were, th'unperfect work of Nature
 making lions. Does your lion weep to seize the lamb?
 Or doth a mighty cry salt tears to fall upon his prey n³⁶
 that in his turn would turn to fall on him?

High Nature naturing – or God –
 hath natur'd His each creature with it fang or claw. 130

Come away, lord; unwish nothing.
 Compassion's Nature's fools' cloth: n³⁷

Never it shall be the stuff of Nature's politics.
 Be acknown of this: Of strength comes victory; n³⁸
 and knowing that, be strong. 135

"Compassion's Nature's fools' cloth." Compassion is the uniform worn by
 Nature's fools. *Dark Sovereign* gives Compassion quite a kicking.

³⁴ 3.3.157. *time's no more by night delay'd*: Beyond the literal sense, the line plays on *to delay time*,
 meaning to put off, to procrastinate

³⁵ 3.4.122. *swallow down*: retract. In short, "My conscience tells me I should retract this morning's events
 rather than choke on them".

³⁶ 3.4.127. *a mighty*: a powerful man

³⁷ 3.4.132. *Nature's fools' cloth*: the uniform (or mark) of Nature's fools

³⁸ 3.4.134. *Be acknown of this*: Be apprised of this. Realize or recognize this. Make yourself understand
 this. The expression is more usual in a negative context.

Richard Gloucester never recovers from staging his *coup d'état* at Northampton. I contend that this is where depression set in, with the more acute anxiety. Two contemporary portraits seem to show an anxious man.

After seizing the person of the boy king, Gloucester and Buckingham escort him to London. Gloucester's consort, Queen Anne, reaches the capital in haste from North Yorkshire.

QUEEN ANNE: What, no greeting?

Spouse mine, art thou moody?

Smooth thy creas'd front: I find thee melancholy, chang'd.

And, distress of weather speaks a storm.

60

GLOUCESTER: Thou wert better stay at Middleham!

ANNE: Here's sour welcome home!

GLOUCESTER: 'Fore God, I would the power lay at York!

ANNE: What is thee? Art sick o' th' sullens

that thou call'st me to an account for England's history?

GLOUCESTER: Southren honour's little lack of dead!

n³⁹ 66

ANNE: The unaccustom'd weight of state makes thee to stoop.

76

Is power, like astringents, of that nature

that it purse thee so?

GLOUCESTER: Woman, I am not thy butt to scold.

ANNE: No blood is shed. All's safely done.

80

The comfort of thy new found office succour thee!

GLOUCESTER: I owe too brief a span,

n⁴⁰

beyond which date a father's son of perfect age

130

shall take his vengeance on my head.

Notice the North-South divide! Gloucester, shortly to become King Richard III, was the only king of England to take the throne with a Northern power base. He couldn't reign in the Southern power establishment in time to avert disaster

³⁹ 4.1.66. *Southren*: Cf. "Contention between the Northren and Southren students at Oxford" (Holland, 1610)

⁴⁰ 4.1.129. *owe*: own, have. The verb *own*, as in *possess* or *have as one's own*, dropped from use after about 1275, not reappearing until Shakespeare, who may have reintroduced it. The verb *owe* was used throughout the Period to mean the same thing, which is more than a little confusing to modern perception.

“I owe too brief a span,” means that young Edward V is twelve. When he turns fifteen Gloucester’s role as Protector will cease. Gloucester will be exposed perhaps to the fury of an independent sovereign (and that sovereign’s mother, Elizabeth Woodville). Gloucester has bought himself two or three years. No more.

Unrest spreads to the streets of London. Mobs take sides. Lord Hastings bravely shouts down a crowd:

HASTINGS: Countrymen, I treat you – nay, herefor I chide! –
put not the times to bloody judgment till ye do know truth!
Nor turn your private grudges into common hurt
unless th’ unsteady hour come so far out of joint
it never should be brought in frame again.

Heat but engenders ire, the which, consuming up, 20
doth render good with ill, nobility of soul with base,
and so an end. Deny t’ incline to baseness; pluck it out.
In likewise put off arms; come not abroad by warring companies.
And look how far you are the body of the weal,
so far the common weal is you.
If, therefore, that you love your king, your land,
your lives, your loves, your self, begone!
That hearth you have, betake you home!

The Royal Council is restive, too. Many members were Edward IV’s or Elizabeth’s appointees. In the most enigmatic episode of this sad period, Gloucester contrives the execution of his erstwhile ally, Lord Hastings. Hastings serves as an example to “suck the courages out of the Council.” But Gloucester only adds guilt to his own rising level of anxiety. Imagine Edward Munch’s *The Scream* during this passage...

GLOUCESTER: Why so, it’s done. His death is done,
th’ acerbity whereof hath suck’d the courages
out of the Council. But, however the intent
by Hastings’ death achieved is, his shade,
no less eternal than the act,
still and anon doth dwell I’ th’ head.

n⁴¹

⁴¹ 4.5.3. *however*: however much

O, if I could, I should reach clysters in to pluck it out.
 How long ere it abate, quitting the unquiet mind?
 Or doth th'infection of impulsive death persist,
 to grow apace, his cause contagious, cankering the brain? n⁴² 10
 What cost compassion? Death. His ever presence 20
 needly is the goad must set me on. *Makes to go.* n⁴³

There's that phrase, "What cost Compassion?" again. Given the times, even the newly-self-appointed king of England cannot afford to extend compassion. From here to the end of his life, the soon to be King Richard III must suppress his best instincts.

Here we introduce what a Freudian psychiatrist might call Gloucester's Id—that undercurrent of dark thoughts that fights the better aspects of human nature. *Dark Sovereign* puts Richard's Id on stage, as Incubus:

INCUBUS: Richard, we would a word in time.

GLOUCESTER reacts, as if to his own thought,
never perceiving the other as a physical being:

It seems that I am stay'd,
 – and that upon the leisure of an inkling. Which?

INCUBUS: An inkling, pah! Here Incubus, thine Incubus.

Come tarry, tarry Richard. Come.

GLOUCESTER: My foolish brain to entertain dark thinkings thus!
Again he offers to depart.

INCUBUS: Is not Incubus our proper familiar?

GLOUCESTER: How, this sudden inward voice? 30

INCUBUS: Why, I am thee, and thou art me,
 so thee and me be indivisible. Hold, Richard. Stay!

GLOUCESTER: Then speak!
 And if this fiend-like notion should be me, I should cry hold, n⁴⁴
 hold friends with it, and hold his inkling true.

If else, I would be rid of thee.

INCUBUS: We are well rid of Hastings. The princes remain still.
 What saist thou to the deaths of babes?

⁴² 4.5.10. *contagious*: Refers to the contamination of the soul by the sins of the body, a notion going back at least to Boethius (d.525). A reverse logic may account for More's fixation upon Gloucester's "deformity". Cf. Leviticus 21.17-24; Psalm 50 (A.V. 51) verse 5.

⁴³ 4.5.21. *must set me on*: must urge me on

⁴⁴ 4.5.34. *cry hold*: surrender (to it)

GLOUCESTER: To waste a life were sin...

INCUBUS: ...but that it were politic!

GLOUCESTER: These shall be bastards, both.

INCUBUS: Bastards?

GLOUCESTER: Bastards!

INCUBUS: Were he sired of rape by devils, 50
yet a bastard may destroy a man of Christian birth.
Let them be dead! To claim them bastards
shall invoke a grievous load of law,
and to lay weight upon the Parliament how they'll adhere. n⁴⁵

GLOUCESTER: I am not in the vein for murder. 60

Nevertheless, Incubus scores a point. He persuades Richard Gloucester to involve the Church, in order to get the younger of the princes, ten year old Richard, out of sanctuary. Queen Elizabeth is holed up with her son in the abbot's apartment at Westminster Abbey. The lords persuade the aged Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury to extract the boy:

Q.ELIZABETH: God save you, lords.
Canterbury, what news i' th' world? 110

CANTERBURY: Peace be to your highness' house.

Q.ELIZABETH: May it be long part and parcel
of King Edward's peace. How be it, your severe aspect
looks like to sound a jarring note of discord.

CANTERBURY: The lords resolve the duke of York were the better
for being to his brother, at the Tower.

Q.ELIZABETH: Between high-minded voice
and express'd thought indeed's disharmony.
Richard is sick, wherefore I marvel
that the lord protector is desirous he should keep him.
If death impeach his natural years,
nor Gloucester's blood-dipp'd might, 130
nor all the wastes of unused time his memory will allay.
Nothing doubt: A mother's nature is best nurture.
And sith that I, like other of my house, may not come hence
for jeopardy, the duke rests here by me.

HOWARD: Why, madam,
do you know why those should stand in jeopardy?

⁴⁵ 4.5.54. *lay weight...adhere*: force...to take sides

Q.ELIZABETH: Nay, and nor I wis why my brother, nor my son, n⁴⁶
nor other of my house should be in prison neither!

CANTERBURY *restrains* **HOWARD:** Let my entreaty satisfy.
Asphestus shall be burn'd with fire 140
before your highness come in jeopardy.

Q.ELIZABETH: Whereby may I have trust in you?
The dukes mete brimstone upon other heads
to have their spite at me.

CANTERBURY: Good lady, think you that you be
so very far beyond our care?

Q.ELIZABETH: Yea, verily, if God's proper agent 180
will cast out an innocent to succour the ungodly.
Ye may not take my horse from me, nor yet a penny
from my purse whiles I bide here. But you will steal my son!

Now to the eve before the battle of Bosworth. Shakespeare introduces a procession of spirits, Richard's supposed victims, in his *Richard III*. *Dark Sovereign* introduces only Spirit, who has neither time nor gender.

King Richard does not see Spirit at first. The king is lying on a cot in his tent. Firelight shines through, and the sound of hammers on steel as armourers beat weapons into shape. The staging here is Dante-esque. King Richard wakes, grabs his sword, "sweet iron" in this passage...

I invite you to detect my version of "to be or not to be":

KING RICHARD *wakes, grabs up his sword:*
Who's there? Stand to it, ho! How a tumult speaks,
as sour-voic'd as Tower ravens, and as black.
The very night doth chill for cold, for fright.
Ha, th'expectant air prológues th'induction
to tomorrow's end. O, to be beforehand with the eye,
to eye what lives, which fortunes won or cast,
and O, to claim the epilogue at the last.

⁴⁶ 4.6.137. *I wis*: is a malaprop here, used not infrequently towards the end of its range for *I know* or *I wot* (from *wist*, vb.).

Sweet iron, stern tool to strew the tainted field
with gobbets of the sudden dead, thou look'st too purely,
art too cold, to be address'd to anger's heat
and vengeful spleen. 10

Besides, the grounded moiling in my head is noisomer
than all the din of armourers assailing steel. No coal so hot,
no edge so keen as pangs the head doth forbear, who,
casting the worst, strains so to thwart the tide of conscience, n⁴⁷
as it soon must slip away. How long to think? n⁴⁸
to cling to failing resolution, trow? Whether will my essence
be best pleas'd to bear out crack'd? Or loose and go?

At this point, King Richard detects Spirit, dressed as a gardener.

Sees SPIRIT: What monstrous prodigy is that?
That carries a form constraineth matter too. n⁴⁹
But does it live? Or doth this mannishness well forth 20
of nether brain, as now unplumb'd?

Challenges: Be you of faerie, fiend or flesh?
Will you not speak? You think I see you not.
If I stand here I see you. Speak!

SPIRIT: I am the darkness in thee, lord.

I am [*pause*] thy soul of light.

K.RICHARD, aside: For want of sun nor flame it cannot be a shade:

This speaks a living wight. *Speaks:* Be uncover'd in presence! 30

SPIRIT: Thou look'st to find my face. I tell thee,
'tis none otherwise than every mother's son's, and thine.
Corrupted. Purified.

K.RICHARD: A' would beseem familiarly to the king, quotha!

As who should guise him to a gardener. n⁵⁰

SPIRIT: All kings return to earth.

K.RICHARD: Say at last. I'd know. Be you *vif* or *mort*? n⁵¹

⁴⁷ 5.9.14. *casting the worst*: forecasting, expecting the worst

⁴⁸ 5.9.15. *How long to think?* Plays on the expression *to think long*, suggesting impatience with an expectation delayed. A modern audience aware of Descartes' axiom "I think, therefore I am" will sense that King Richard is contemplating the end of "thinking", and what that entails.

⁴⁹ 5.9.19. *form constraineth matter*: Every thing requires a form, hence a form defines a "thing". The original notion is Aristotelian. It was later worked to death by the Scholastic school of philosophy.

⁵⁰ 5.9.35. *As who should*: As if one would... (Ironic).

⁵¹ 5.9.37. *vif or mort*: alive or dead. Literally: among the living or the dead. In late medieval art, the living were depicted talking with skeletons, three of each, giving rise to the phrase *les trois vifs et morts*.

SPIRIT: How thou perceivest me soe'er, I am.

K.RICHARD: How are you that disputes with me this?

SPIRIT: I am to teach sans voice of word. 40

Fain too am I to satisfy thee with thy doom.

K.RICHARD: What is my doom?

SPIRIT: Whatever it may be.

K.RICHARD: Give me the morrow. How I crave the day.

SPIRIT: There lacketh power to dispose.

Notwithstand past acts redound to present time,
tomorrow scorns today; and shall,
till every atomy and moment of eternity
is shed abroad and gather'd in.

Bet were thee that thy several wills 50
made common suit against the careful hour. n⁵²

Thou canst not gull the still point.

K.RICHARD: Cáre it was did urge infected passion to rash acts...

SPIRIT: In recompense, care taketh not but fear.

K.RICHARD: ...until at length insensate fear slew doubt
with blameless blood.

SPIRIT: Doubting is the price men pay for wisdom; 60
reality the price they pay for dreams.

K.RICHARD: He is no dreamer that, despite of bloody cost,
attach'd the throne in price with saféty. n⁵³

SPIRIT: Thou sayest;
and saying, sitt'st in judgment upon thyself.
Wherein I do commend thee to the resolutions of thy wills.
Whether hadst thou rather win this only day?
Or gain eternity? The question's plain.
Comes in the morrow-light. I go.

Spirit goes, battle begins. In a final slap at King Richard, Tudor propagandist William Shakespeare gives us, "A horse, a horse. My kingdom for a horse!" Here's how *Dark Sovereign* counters that line. A voice shouts from the melee...

⁵² 5.9.51. *careful*: a time full of cares, anxious. (I suggest it be voiced as two words, care/ful.)

⁵³ 5.9.63. *in price with saféty*: as a means of attaining safety. The phrase suggests an obligatory, or contractual, means to an end, as in "This is what I had to do to..." *Saféty* retains a hint of its French pronunciation, with three syllables.

VOICE: A horse! A horse! Some bring the king a horse!

to which **KING RICHARD** replies...

K.RICHARD: I will not budge a foot.
I'll rather die the king of England.

And he does.

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