

THESIS ABSTRACT

This MA thesis examines the portrayal of King Richard III (1452-1485) in texts preceding William Shakespeare's canonical play on this subject. By analyzing a wide range of sources written between the 1480s and the 1590s, it traces how the reputation of Richard III as an epitome of a tyrant, a usurper and a royal murderer was created and consolidated. At the same time, special attention is paid to innovations and deviations from this interpretation that contributed to the diversification of the King's image. The first chapter covers some of the most significant historiographic works of the Tudor era: *The Second Continuation of The Crowland Chronicle*, chronicles by Polydore Vergil, Edward Hall, and Raphael Holinshed, Thomas More's historical narrative, as well as a less-known manuscript by Dominic Mancini who described the early months of the reign of Richard III. The second chapter examines the transformation of the historical topic into poetry. The image of Richard III is analyzed in as diverse sources as, on the one hand, a popular ballad and, on the other hand, a prominent poetically-didactic work *A Mirror for Magistrates*. The representation of Richard III on the English stage is discussed in the third chapter in connection with Thomas Legge's university drama *Richardus Tertius* and the anonymous play *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third*. It is not only their facticity, but also their literary quality, and a specificity of their representation of Richard III that is examined in these texts. Furthermore, the texts are discussed in terms of their treatment of particularly controversial points, such as the King's alleged deformity or the description of the Battle of Bosworth and its aftermath.