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‘See How the Blood is Settled in His Face’: Shakespeare’s Warwick – Fiction’s First Pathologist

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Andrea Smith

The pronouncement of the forensic pathologist is an essential element of modern detective drama on television. But the Hobsons, De Bryns and Pasquanos (*Lewis, Endeavour* and *Inspector Montalbano* respectively) of the twenty-first century have an antecedent dating back more than four hundred years: Shakespeare’s Earl of Warwick. In the same way that our contemporary pathologists examine a body for clues as to the cause of death, so does Warwick in William Shakespeare’s *2 Henry VI*. This paper will compare a key scene from that play – the discovery of the body of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester – with the examinations of bodies in twenty-first-century television drama. It will show that there are striking similarities, not only between the descriptions of the bodies but also between the characters of the fifteenth-century ‘Kingmaker’ and modern pathologists. And it will argue that Shakespeare’s Warwick is alone in demonstrating such forensic skill in fiction until late on in the development of the detective story.

The character of Warwick is an amalgam of two real people. Michael Hicks, in his biography *Warwick the Kingmaker*, states: ‘Shakespeare merged our Warwick with an earlier earl, his father-in-law and war hero’.¹ Hicks describes the real Warwick as the model of:

The medieval nobility of service and of the all-encompassing chief minister of the future. Pragmatism and ruthlessness went hand in hand with honour. He was a daring subaltern, the boldest and most brilliant of strategists, a consummate logistician, and a pioneer in the tactical use of seapower, combined operations, and field artillery.²

Many of these traits are picked up and used by Shakespeare in his creation of the character. While Hicks states that the soubriquet ‘Kingmaker’ was not applied to Warwick until much later, achieving ‘currency only in the eighteenth century’, the earl was still referred to as ‘the great’, ‘the stout earl of Warwick’ and ‘Warwick make-king’.³ This shows that his importance as a historical figure was already well-established when Shakespeare wrote the play. Therefore, it is unsurprising that, while Warwick is not the title or even a central character in the *Henry VI* plays, he is recognised as intelligent and holding a place of command throughout.

This is particularly apparent in the middle of *2 Henry VI*, after the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. The Duke has apparently been found dead in his bed, or at least that is how it is reported by the Duke of Suffolk.⁴ The implication is that it is death by natural causes, but the audience knows that Suffolk, along with Queen Margaret, Cardinal Beaufort and the Duke of York, have conspired to cause Gloucester’s death; something King Henry is unaware of. When Warwick enters, the king says of

¹ Michael Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 1–2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 240–316, act III, scene 2, line 29. Future references to the play are to this edition and are abbreviated *2 Henry VI*.

Gloucester: 'That he is dead, good Warwick, 'tis too true. / But how he died God knows, not Henry'.⁵ It is not until Warwick examines the Duke's body that murder is confirmed:

See how the blood is settled in his face.
 [...]
 His face is black and full of blood;
 His eyeballs further out than when he lived,
 Staring full ghastly like a strangled man;
 His hair upreared; his nostrils stretched with struggling;
 His hands abroad displayed, as one that grasped
 And tugged for life and was by strength subdued.⁶

Warwick goes on to describe the way Gloucester's hair sticks to the sheets and how his beard is 'rough and rugged'.⁷ He ends by stating: 'It cannot be but he was murdered here. / The least of all these signs were probable'.⁸ What makes this unusual is not the vivid description of the corpse, but the fact that Warwick both describes and analyses what he sees, reaching a conclusion about the manner of death, not just the cause: Gloucester did not die in his sleep.

Claire Saunders, in her article "'Dead in His Bed": Shakespeare's Staging of the Death of the Duke of Gloucester in *2 Henry VI*', describes Warwick as a 'stage "presenter" of this scene', adding that his speech acts 'as a sort of camera close-up'.⁹ This seems to echo perfectly the way modern television drama uses a pathologist to outline the cause of death; holding court in front of the story's detectives, giving a detailed description of the corpse, often describing injuries too distressing to be shown on camera. Saunders goes on to say: 'It may not be Shakespeare's poetic best but it is gruesomely effective and ensures that the Duke of Gloucester, "dead in his bed", will live as a tableau, haunting the audience's imagination long after the bed and corpse have been removed from the stage'.¹⁰ Again, in detective drama, the pronouncements of the pathologist can have huge impact, creating empathy for the dead person and driving forward the investigation.

Like so many aspects of Shakespeare's writing, it is impossible to determine from where he got his information to create such a vivid picture. In his book *The Shakespeare Symphony*, Harold Bayley suggests that Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights 'must have wandered systematically from the alehouses to the Hall of the Barber-surgeons where alone could they have acquired the medical knowledge which they unquestionably possessed'.¹¹ F. David Hoeniger draws similar conclusions, stating 'one can assume that Shakespeare learned orally part of what he knew about physiology [...] The impressively detailed clinical descriptions found in some of his plays may be testimony of Shakespeare's personal gifts of observation'.¹² It is also suggested by Hoeniger that 'one should not rule out the possibility that Shakespeare occasionally dipped into works in Latin, including Renaissance translations of the Greek

⁵ *2 Henry VI*, act III, scene 2, lines 130–131.

⁶ *Ibid.*, act III, scene 2, lines 160–174.

⁷ *Ibid.*, act III, scene 2, lines 175–176.

⁸ *Ibid.*, act III, scene 2, lines 177–178.

⁹ Claire Saunders, "'Dead in His Bed": Shakespeare's Staging of the Death of the Duke of Gloucester in *2 Henry VI*', *The Review of English Studies*, 36.141 (1985), 19–34 (p. 29) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/res/XXXVI.141.19>>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Harold Bayley, *The Shakespeare Symphony* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1906), p. 127.

¹² F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 32.

medical classics by Hippocrates and Galen.¹³ In addition, he states that the playwright would have known the poet and physician Thomas Lodge.¹⁴ Lodge did not gain his medical degree until 1598, but is likely to have had a ‘good grounding in medical theory’ for some years prior to that, so may have been able to help Shakespeare with this play.¹⁵

Hoeniger points out that Shakespeare could also have picked up information from the work of fellow writers:

For at least some of them [Shakespeare’s clinical descriptions] are closely paralleled in other literature of his time, an indication that such knowledge was more widely familiar than one might have at first thought. The books in which Shakespeare found information were not confined to those on medical or paramedical subjects. Some of the poems, plays, and other literature he read included passages of medical bearing.¹⁶

However, what makes Warwick’s description of Gloucester so unusual is that it is post-mortem; elsewhere in both his work and that of his contemporaries, allusions to medicine and illness are not uncommon, but a description of a corpse is. This is especially unexpected as the body is that of a man who at first glance may have died in his sleep, but the audience knows has been murdered.

Killings in Early Modern drama are not usually disguised to look like death from natural causes. Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* is broadly contemporaneous with *2 Henry VI*, being dated to the late 1580s; Shakespeare’s work is thought to be from 1591.¹⁷ In Kyd’s play, Hieronimo discovers the body of his son, and describes the ‘murderous spectacle’:¹⁸

What savage monster, not of human kind,
Hath here been glutted with thy harmless blood,
And left thy bloody corpse dishonoured here!¹⁹

And later, to the king, Hieronimo says:

Where, hanging on a tree, I found my son,
Through-girt with wounds, and slaughtered as you see.²⁰

There is never any doubt this was an act of murder; no attempt is made to cover up the crime, in fact quite the reverse.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁷ David Bevington, ‘*The Spanish Tragedy*’ (introduction), in *English Renaissance Drama*, ed. by David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus and Eric Rasmussen (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 3–7 (p. 3); Jean E. Howard, ‘*The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*’ (introduction), in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 229–237 (p. 230).

¹⁸ Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy, or Hieronimo is Mad Again*, ed. by David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus and Eric Rasmussen, in *English Renaissance Drama* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 8–73, act II, scenes 5, line 9.

¹⁹ Kyd, *Spanish Tragedy*, act II, scene 5, lines 19–21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, act IV, scene 4, lines 111–112.

Arden of Faversham dates from around 1588–92.²¹ It centres on a plot to murder the title character (Thomas Arden), and when it is finally carried out, there is an attempt to conceal the killing, but it is wholly unsuccessful. Arden is struck by Black Will, Mosby, Shakebag and finally his own wife, Alice. The body is moved to the counting house, but evidently the beating has left a bloody mess. Alice commands her maid Susan to ‘fetch water and wash away this blood’.²² But Susan tells her ‘the blood cleaveth to the ground and will not out’.²³ Mosby suggests strewing rushes, but almost immediately Fowle, Bradshaw, Greene and Franklin arrive, and while they seem unaware of the blood on the floor, a search for Arden is made and his body is quickly found, ‘smeared in blood and filthy gore’.²⁴ Though the corpse has been hidden, there has been no effort to mask his injuries.

One play which does differ from this pattern is the anonymous work, *Woodstock*. The play centres on the reign of Richard II and is thought to date from around the same time as *2 Henry VI*, or just after.²⁵ Towards the end of the play, the title character is murdered:

1st M. Bring in the feather-bed ... and roll him up in that till he be smothered and stifled ... and life and soul pressed out together. [...] Pull off the bed now—smooth down his hair and beard. Close his eyes ... and set his neck right: why, so. All fine and cleanly: who can say that this man was murdered now?²⁶

The two murderers are then promptly killed for their efforts and the man who commissioned them to carry out the crime, Lapoole, tells the audience: ‘Now who but we / Can make report of Woodstock’s tragedy? / Only he died a natural death at Calais: / So we must give it out’.²⁷ The end of the play is missing, so it cannot be certain, but it does not appear the ruse is ever discovered.

This murder still differs from Gloucester’s, even though there are similarities. Both men are killed in their beds. Both are asphyxiated, either by strangulation or smothering. But the murderers in *Woodstock* think to disguise their crime more effectively than those in *2 Henry VI*. And after the discovery of the body, Lapoole’s word is simply taken as true; although the fact the murder has been commissioned by the king may play a part in that.²⁸ Without a Warwick figure to examine the body, the crime is left undiscovered. It is also evident that the writer of *Woodstock* believed that a little, neat arranging of the body would make the murder undetectable; Shakespeare appears to have known differently.

While murder is commonplace and descriptions, and depictions, of battered and bleeding bodies frequently appear in Early Modern drama, making deductions from such descriptions is rare for many centuries. It does not seem to be until the advent of modern detective fiction that evidence from the body of the victim is used, and even that does not happen immediately.

²¹ David Bevington, ‘*Arden of Faversham*’ (introduction), in *English Renaissance Drama*, ed. by David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus and Eric Rasmussen (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 421–426 (p. 421).

²² Anonymous, *Arden of Faversham*, ed. by David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus and Eric Rasmussen, in *English Renaissance Drama* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 427–481, scene 14, line 255.

²³ *Ibid.*, scene 14, line 256.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, scene 14, line 330.

²⁵ A. P. Rossiter, ‘Preface’, in *Woodstock*, ed. by A. P. Rossiter (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), 1–76 (p. 72).

²⁶ Anonymous, *Thomas of Woodstock*, ed. by A. P. Rossiter, in *Woodstock: A Moral History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), 79–169, act V, scene 1, lines 234–245.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, act V, scene 1, lines 278–281.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, act VI, scene 1, lines 266–268.

Peter Thomas states that ‘Edgar Allan Poe is commonly regarded as the father of detective fiction.’²⁹ David Van Leer adds that in Poe’s ‘groundbreaking’ story ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, and its sequels, Poe wrote the first stories ‘to achieve popularity primarily for their ingenious solutions of puzzles.’³⁰ But Poe’s stories are centred on the detection of the person responsible; there is no doubt that a murder has been committed:

On a chair lay a razor, besmeared with blood. On the hearth were two or three long and thick tresses of gray human hair, also dabbled with blood, and seeming to have been pulled out by the roots [...] a search was made of the chimney, and (horrible to relate!) the corpse of the daughter, head downward, was dragged therefrom.³¹

Jeffrey Meyers states that Poe’s detective, Dupin, ‘solves problems by means of a pure disembodied intellect that combines scientific logic with artistic imagination’.³² Dupin analyses the facts of the case to get to the truth. However, he is presented with an obvious crime scene; there is no need for a pathologist to establish whether or not this was murder.

During the twentieth century, the popularity of crime writing grew, and with it, methods of murder and detection changed. Agatha Christie is well-known for the use of poisons in her murder stories, and some of these victims are initially mistaken for cases of death by natural causes, such as in the 1939 novel *Murder Is Easy*.³³ Detection required a pathologist. But this was more about testing samples in a laboratory than observing the state of a victim. Wendi Arant Kaspar states that it is not until later that the forensic pathologist becomes a character in their own right: ‘Although forensic science has played a role in mystery fiction for more than a century and a half, it is only since the late twentieth century that it has moved to centre stage in the creation of primary characters who are professional forensic scientists’.³⁴ This has been particularly prevalent on television.

According to Jim Turner, a senior lecturer in forensic psychology, ‘forensics on TV means you’ve solved the case.’³⁵ While Sue Turnbull suggests that the forensic scientist is presented ‘as the empathetic champion of the voiceless victim’.³⁶ Certainly the latter would be a good description of Warwick who, in accusing Suffolk of the crime, says he will ‘do some service to Duke Humphrey’s ghost’.³⁷ In the twenty-first century, a number of television pathologists also fit Turnbull’s description.

These characters are usually on the edge of the action. In dramas where the protagonist is a police officer, pathologists play a supporting role, much as Warwick does in *2 Henry VI*. There are examples where pathologists are central characters, such as the 1970s American television series, *Quincy*

²⁹ Peter Thomas, ‘Poe’s Dupin and the Power of Detection’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by Kevin J. Hayes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 133–147 (p. 133).

³⁰ David Van Leer, ‘Detecting Truth: The World of the Dupin Tales’, in *New Essays of Poe’s Major Tales*, ed. by Kenneth Silverman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 65–92 (p. 65).

³¹ Poe, Edgar Allan, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, *Graham’s Magazine*, 18 (April 1841), 166–79 (repr. in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Stories* (London: Vintage, 2010), 473–505), p. 481.

³² Jeffrey Meyers, *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy* (New York, NY: Cooper Square Press, 2000), p. 123.

³³ Kathryn Harkup, *A is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 20.

³⁴ Wendi Arant Kaspar, ‘Forensic Mysteries’, in *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Literature* (Salem Press, 2019), para. 24 <<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=125599134&site=eds-live&scope=site>> [accessed 12 December 2019].

³⁵ Jim Turner, ‘Have you been fooled by forensics on TV?’, *BBC Ideas*, 26 July 2019 <<https://www.bbc.com/ideas/videos/have-you-been-fooled-by-forensics-on-tv/p07hy9pf>> [accessed 30 July 2019] 01:15.

³⁶ Sue Turnbull, *The TV Crime Drama*, TV Genres Series (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 131.

³⁷ *2 Henry VI*, act III, scene 2, line 231.

M. E., or the twenty-first century British drama *Silent Witness*. However, in the three programmes mentioned at the start of this paper (*Lewis*, *Endeavour* and *Inspector Montalbano*), the pathologists, Hobson, De Bryn and Pasquano, inhabit separate worlds to the rest of the characters; their domain is the hospital or laboratory. Another parallel can be drawn here with Warwick; he is not a central figure in either Henry's court or the group of conspirators wishing Gloucester dead. Warwick might not have his own, independent space, however he is still portrayed in this scene as someone separate from all the main characters.

At times peripheral, television pathologists assist the detectives and facilitate the action. Their pronouncements separate murder from natural death or accident, and their evidence can point to a perpetrator. Dr Max De Bryn in *Endeavour* has a particular knack for getting to the truth behind deaths that appear to be other than they are. In the episode 'Cartouche', a former policeman is found dead in his bedsit. When asked if there is anything suspicious, De Bryn initially replies 'nothing obvious'.³⁸ But later in the episode, his evidence changes the course of the story:

DR DE BRYN: I have the toxicology on Mr Beavis's blood. Nux Vomica. Ingested an hour or two before his decease.

THURSDAY: Strychnine. [...] So how'd he come by it? [...]

DR DE BRYN: His shirt had one or two spots on it. Once the lab identified poison, I took a swab and tested it. Came up positive. The poison was in orange squash.³⁹

This points to the victim's visit to the local cinema and focuses the rest of the investigation and episode there.

Similarly, in the episode 'Canticle', Dr De Bryn reveals that what appears to be a murder by strangulation is in fact either a murder by other means or an accident. Again, his initial assessment suggests one thing:

Adult male. Early to mid-twenties. Died some time between eight and midnight. Strangled, with a ligature. About the thickness of my finger. Sash cord, perhaps? He's as I found him but post-mortem lividity says he died on his front.

Rolls the victim over, revealing a cross-shaped white mark on a purplish patch on the man's body.

Note the marks on the side of his torso.⁴⁰

Post-mortem lividity is the settling of blood under the influence of gravity after death.⁴¹ It would also explain the cause of Gloucester's face being 'black and full of blood'; he has died face down, and then been rolled onto his back later. In *Endeavour*, it gives a vital clue to the movement of the body. After the full post-mortem examination, De Bryn revises his opinion on the cause of death:

Oh, he was strangled, yes. Several times. Only that's not what killed him. It wasn't asphyxia. His heart gave out. The strangulation occurred perimortem: on or about the moment of death. He was already dying.⁴²

³⁸ *Endeavour: Complete Series Five*, dir. Brady Hood and others (Mammoth Screen, 2017) [on DVD] 0:05:10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 0:20:42.

⁴⁰ *Endeavour: Complete Series Four*, dir. Ashley Pearce and others (Mammoth Screen, 2017) [on DVD] 0:08:34.

⁴¹ A. Cala, C. L. Lawrence and J. Duflo, 'When is Post Mortem Lividity Fixed?', *Pathology*, 27.1 (1995), p. A8 <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0031-3025\(16\)35368-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0031-3025(16)35368-5)>

⁴² *Endeavour: Complete Series Four*, 0:20:00.

In modern television detective drama, these pathologists exhibit expertise, knowledge and skills that none of the other leading characters possess. Consequently, they take control of the story, dominating the scenes in which they feature and temporarily being more important than the central character. Their actions also empower the protagonist to lead the rest of the narrative. Without this specialised information, the plot would stall.

In Shakespeare's play, Warwick's analysis of Gloucester's body and subsequent accusation of those he believes to have been involved in the murder becomes the final straw, or perhaps the final excuse, for the commons to rise up and rebel. Salisbury says:

Dread lord, the commons send you word by me
Unless Lord Suffolk straight be done to death,
Or banished fair England's territories,
They will by violence tear him from your palace
And torture him with grievous ling'ring death.
They say, by him the good Duke Humphrey died;
They say, in him they fear your highness' death.⁴³

From here on, the play is dominated by the Jack Cade rebellion and the rise of York. While these events would have happened anyway, as York has outlined in the scene before, Shakespeare makes the death of Gloucester a pivotal moment in the plot, accelerating the action.

In *2 Henry VI*, Warwick fulfils a role akin to that of a twenty-first century television pathologist. He studies the body of Gloucester and, using his experience and powers of observation, establishes that the death is not natural. In a similar way to television pathologists, Warwick operates in a separate space to the drama's protagonists, he has expert knowledge beyond that of the other characters, and he is able to apply his knowledge to inform the protagonists and push the story forward. The description of Gloucester's body is unlike any other in literature at the time, or for centuries to come, and his combination of observation and analysis is more like the depiction of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century pathologists than that of the soldiers, court officials and detectives who play similar roles in earlier works. While the play is far from a 'whodunnit' or detective drama, Warwick's role in this key scene argues strongly for him being fiction's first pathologist.

⁴³ *2 Henry VI*, act III, scene 2, lines 245–251.

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