

***William Shakespeare's Richard III* retold by Tony Bradman**

Richard III is the latest in the "Shakespeare Today" series aimed at making Shakespeare's texts in more accessible and contemporary.

Author Tony Bradman is obviously trying to connect with his young target audience of 10 to 14 year olds. The contemporary style red-tinged photograph of a brooding man with blood dripping onto a crown and sword should appeal to this audience. Even the blurb reads like a contemporary teen thriller.

The everyday language of the narrative is reasonably successful at attempting to explain the very complex plot. As in the original play, the book begins with a list of characters, which I found myself needing to refer to by the second half of the book as Richard's plot becomes more complicated. Bradman employs a clever use of summarising narrative to forward the action and includes Richard's internal monologues to explain his plotting. Chapter titles act as a summary of each act of the original play. A number of famous lines from the play are included and explained for a modern audience. At just over 90 pages of well-spaced and clear text, this book forms a good summary of Shakespeare's play.

My only criticism is that at times there is too much 'telling' rather than 'showing' in the narrative, but I put that down to the difficult nature of the text and the length of the original play (which runs to five acts) as well as the need to explain quite complex twists and turns of plot.

This book would be a useful addition to any school library and would be useful in introducing students to the play. The language is very accessible for late primary/ early secondary students due to its clear narration and use of dialogue. It could also be useful for teachers unfamiliar with the text as a means into the play.

Recommended for secondary students, teachers and other students of Shakespeare seeking an introduction to the Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

Robyn Veugen, NSW

Tony Bradman's novelisation of William Shakespeare's *Richard III* is an ambitious attempt to condense one of 'The Bard's' more complex plays into an accessible read for upper Primary and lower Secondary students.

There are quite a few lines from the play (including the "Now is the winter of our discontent" opening) and a list of the characters for reference to the original work. The book runs to only ninety-one pages of fairly large type, and is divided into five acts. The acts are given titles that serve as summaries of the action, and an illustration to tie in with the medieval setting. The language is very accessible and easy to understand. Bradman successfully summarises and explains the setting and character motivations through Richard's internal monologue and paraphrasing the play's conversations.

I really felt this novelisation was a bit too short. *Richard III* has a complex plot and many characters that could have been given more time to develop. Whilst it is an adaptation aimed at a younger audience, there seemed many moments when the action progressed in an almost perfunctory manner and was too quickly explained. The reader has all the plot revealed in very clear terms, and is not given much chance to get to know any of the characters well except for Richard. Perhaps I am applying too much of an adult's eye to the text, but it is relevant to the intended audience.

For the competent reader in early Secondary school, this is a very easy read, and could easily run for twice the length with a more complex telling. For upper Primary it seems well-pitched (enough beheadings to lure the reluctant reader). As an accessible summation for a struggling upper Secondary student it would also serve quite well. I would imagine that its appeal would be largely to boys, considering that it contains much skullduggery and a cast of mostly male characters.

I'm sure there will be many young readers who will enjoy this novelisation of Shakespeare's classic play. My only caveat would be that teachers should make sure they are recommending it as a novel in its own right, and to students of an appropriate reading level (not just because 'it is Shakespeare'). It would be especially valuable in libraries of schools where Shakespeare

is not a major part of the curriculum, and these novelisations are the only exposure they might get to his works.

Jason Beer, Secondary English, Mountain District Christian School, Vic