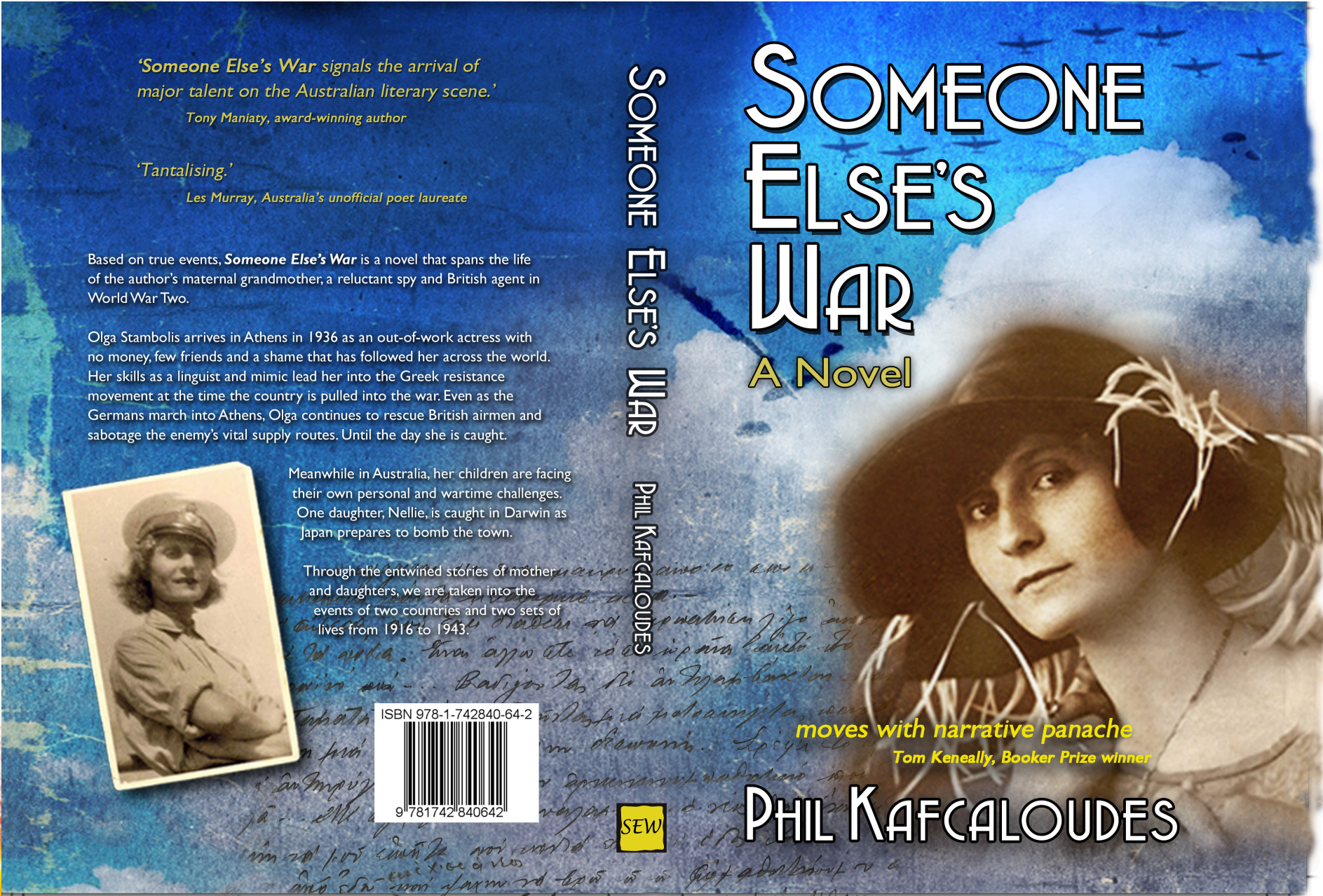


Shakespeare *and the Telling of Lies*



Phil Kafcaloudes (B.A., M.Litt, PhD candidate)

This presentation comes from my experience writing my grandmother's story as a novel..



Why do I refer to
LIES?



Why do I refer to
LIES?

Let's go back a couple
of millenia



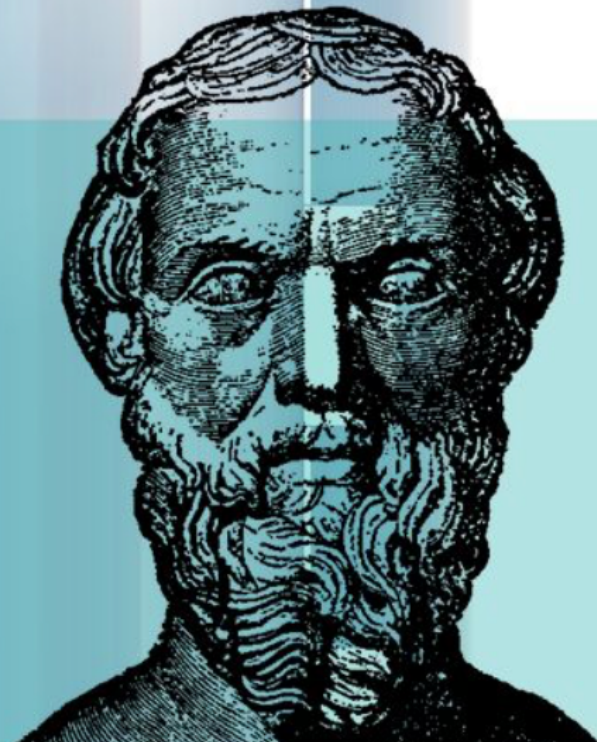
Herodotus.. The first historian (the author of *Histories*)

HERODOTUS

THE

FATHER OF

HISTORY



Cicero
“On The Republic”

But...

HERODOTUS

THE

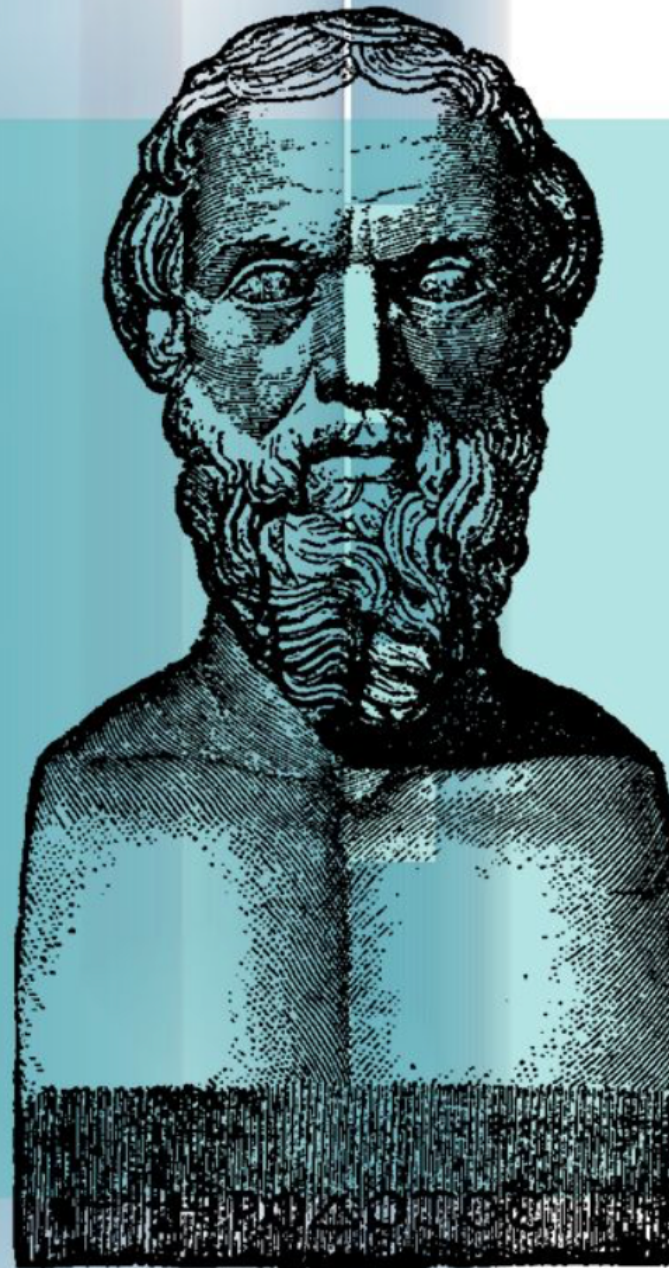
FATHER OF

HISTORY

OR

THE FATHER

OF LIES



Cicero

“On The Republic”

Plutarch

“On the Malice of Herodotus”

It could be argued that his plays helped decide the public view as to the nature of his characters.

I will discuss this in relation to:



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I will discuss this in relation to:

RICHARD III



It could be argued that his plays helped decide the public view as to the nature of his characters.

I will discuss this in relation to:

RICHARD III

KING JOHN



NOTE: Shakespeare's role in writing a play:

- To entertain
- To get bums on seats
- To get money for his backers
- To make the punters want to come back
- To tell a ripping story

He NEVER claimed to be an HISTORIAN



Shakespeare's characterisation..

“Many commonly held ideas about Richard III emanate from William Shakespeare's play.”

- Richard III Society



Shakespeare painted of Richard III as...

The evil guy with a deformity

- “a bottled spider”
- “foul bunch-backed toad”
- “and turns the sun to shade” (*spoken by his mum*)



But was Shakespeare right?

“it is **not history**, it does not represent **fact**”.

The negative perception of Richard III relates to:

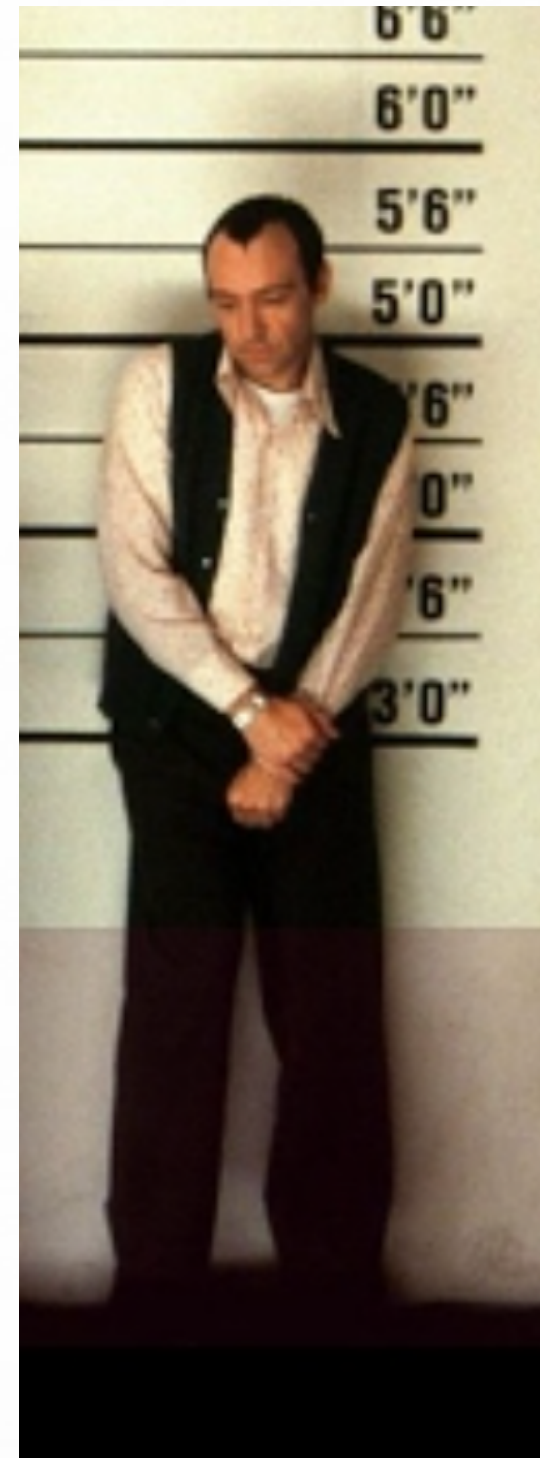
- he was a nasty hunchback who plotted and schemed his way to the throne;
- he killed Henry VI's son Edward;
- he killed Henry VI (a sweet, innocent saint);
- he got his brother, the duke of Clarence, executed;
- he killed the Princes in the Tower (sweet, innocent children);
- he killed his wife Anne because he wanted to marry his niece Elizabeth;
- he was a bad king.”

- Richard III Society



Shakespeare's Richard has stuck:

Keyser Soze in The Usual Suspects



Shakespeare's Richard has stuck:

An evil Dr Who character



But Richard III did some good stuff:

- Formed the Court of Requests (so poor people could be heard)
- Gave freedom to the press
- the historian John Rous praised him as a "good lord" who punished "oppressors of the commons", adding that he had "a great heart".
- In 1483 the Italian observer Mancini reported that Richard enjoyed a good reputation and that both "his private life and public activities powerfully attracted the esteem of strangers".



Why was he portrayed as so evil?

“Part of the explanation lies in the Tudor **propaganda machine**; Richard III is the last Yorkist king so he has to be bad, especially in light of the fact Henry Tudor is not particularly good himself and dies an unpopular king: Richard III must be made to look worse than Henry VII.”

(Sophie De Brul, Northwestern University, Illinois)



Why was he portrayed as so evil?

AND.. the evil portrayal of RIII came from the Archbishop of Canterbury (**John Morton**) who:

“.. had personal reasons to hate Richard. Edward IV took a large bribe from Louis XI (*on the advice of*) John Morton. Richard was very angry about this and refused a large cash offer. In June 1483, Richard went to the Tower of London to break up a murder conspiracy between three men (*including*) John Morton. The man they planned to murder was.. Richard III.”

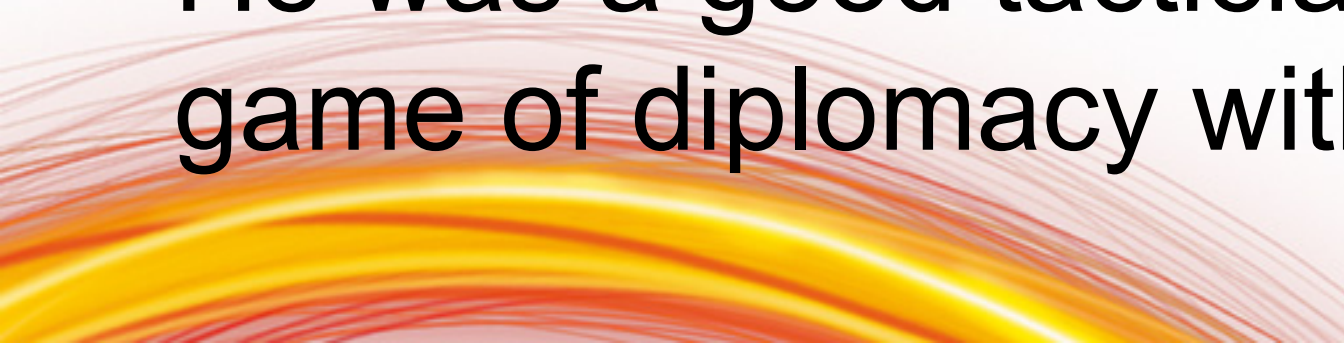
- L. Smith, University of Newcastle.

Then to King John

Shakespeare draws John as a character **his audience would have accepted** — with recognisably human failings as a ruler.

(Pressley, JM, Shakespeare Resource Centre)
<http://www.bardweb.net/content/ac/kingjohn.html>

Shakespeare's King John was benign..

- He was his brother's choice as King (NOT a usurper).
 - He stands up to the Pope.
 - He regrets an order to kill a relative, and rejoices when it wasn't carried out.
 - He was a good tactician, and plays a smart game of diplomacy with France.
- 

BUT after Shakespeare had died..

In the 17th and 18th centuries there was some **revisionism** about King John..

Particularly with the writing of the *Robin Hood* story... which needed a villain.

King John became that villain.



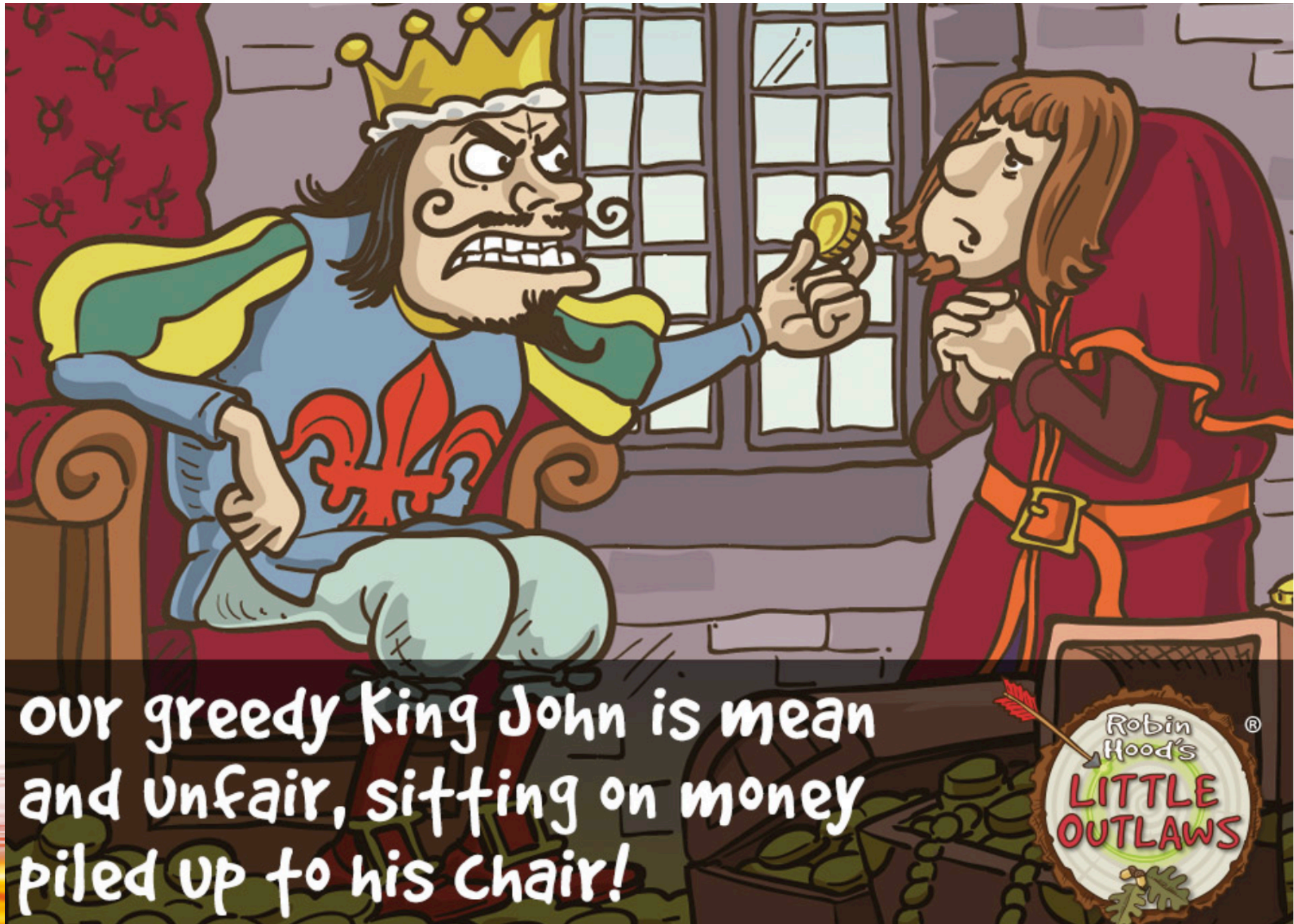
Then to King John

Claude Rains played him as an amoral coward in the 1938 film *The Adventures of Robin Hood*:



Then to King John

Generations of kids have been told he was a no-good:



our greedy King John is mean
and unfair, sitting on money
piled up to his chair!

Then to King John

Even Disney turned on him:



“King John may be less propaganda than Richard III, for instance, but it is nevertheless still **fiction based** upon history.”

(Pressley, JM, Shakespeare Resource Centre)

SUMMARY: In Shakespeare's King John

Shakespeare painted a nuanced character, but subsequent writers have amended this character to **suit an entertainment.**

We have taken this **amended** character as **real** when it **probably wasn't.**



SUMMARY: In Shakespeare's Richard III

Shakespeare painted a vicious murderer, a selfish psychopath. This has gone down in history as TRUTH.

Again, we have taken his character as **real when it probably wasn't.**



And the danger is..

“The playwright uniquely blends images of **exaggerated physicality** with specific animals and crimes to create a character whose criminality is scripted onto his body. Shakespeare's characterisation of Richard contributed to (*the notion*) of **innate inborn criminal.**”

-(Olson, G. (2005). "Richard III's Animalistic Criminal Body.")



Especially as the role of Shakespeare and his ilk:

“.. the novelist’s business is to represent the real thoughts of mankind.”

- Charles Kingsley, *Two Years Ago*, Macmillan & Co, 1857, p. 109

It was deception by:

“People are realising that a lot of what they thought they knew about Richard III was pretty much **propaganda and **myth building**.”**

(Phillippa Langley, Richard III Society, 2013)

- https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/remains-of-king-richard-iii-identified/2013/02/04/d79e87b2-6ebb-11e2-ac36-3d8d9dcaa2e2_story.html



A final thought...

Et reddet emptori historiae cave



A final thought..

Et reddet emptori historiae cave

“Let the buyer of history beware”

