

STUDY GUIDE FOR KING RICHARD III

Brief Biography of William Shakespeare

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

The Wars of the Roses were a series of English wars fought between 1455 and 1485 among the House of Lancaster and the House of York, two rival lines of the royal House of Plantagenet who both claimed the right to rule England. The war got its name from the two houses' heraldic symbols: York was symbolized by a white rose and Lancaster by a red rose. Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond and a member of the House of Lancaster, ended the wars by defeating King Richard III (a York). He then married Elizabeth of York, uniting the Yorks and the Lancasters. Henry Tudor founded the Tudor line of Kings and Queens that continued to Elizabeth I, who was Queen when Shakespeare wrote Richard III.

Other Books Related to Richard III

Richard III is related to the tetralogy of history plays including Richard II, Henry IV Part 1, Henry IV, Part 2 and Henry V that is sometimes called the Henriad. Those plays track the reigns of King Richard II, King Henry IV, and Henry V, the father of Henry VI, Queen Margaret's husband and Lady Anne's father-in-law, whom Richard murders right before the play Richard III opens.

Key Facts about Richard III

Full Title: The Tragedy of King Richard the Third

When Written: c. 1592

Where Written: London

When Published: 1597

Literary Period: The Renaissance

Genre: History play

Setting: England

Climax: Richard pretending not to want the crown, then finally deferring to Buckingham and the Lord Mayor's entreaties to take it.

Antagonist: Richard

Extra Credit for Richard III

Not Really a Hunchback. Though Shakespeare chose to portray Richard with a serious hunchback, the historical king had scoliosis, not a hunchback, and would not have appeared as severely deformed as he looks in the play. Sources available at Shakespeare's time described Richard's condition accurately, but the playwright may have chosen to exaggerate Richard's outward deformity in order to emphasize his inner crookedness.

Real Life Omens. The day the historical Lady Anne died was marked by a solar eclipse – a threatening omen that would fit right in among the prophetic dreams and ominous signs of the play Richard III. Some at the time thought the eclipse signaled King Richard III's fall from divine grace.

Richard III Summary

It is approximately 1485 in England and Richard of Gloucester is incensed that his brother King Edward has taken the throne after numerous civil wars fought between their family (the House of York) and the House of Lancaster. Richard feels excluded from everyone's peacetime celebrations because he was born unattractive, has a hunchback, and lacks love. Instead of frolicking, he has contrived a plot to make himself king. He's turned King Edward against their brother George of Clarence (next in line for the throne) by leading Edward to

believe a prophesy that he'll be murdered by a family member with a 'G' in his name. Yet, when Richard meets Clarence on his way to prison, he pretends to be outraged at Clarence's circumstance and promises to go plead Clarence's case to Edward. On the way Richard meets Lady Anne in mourning for her father-in-law Henry VI and her husband Edward of Westminster, the king and heir to the throne before Richard killed them both. Richard is determined to marry her to advance his rise to the throne and, though Anne understandably detests him, he manages to sweet-talk her into accepting his ring. Alone, Richard gloats at his coup.

Meanwhile, Queen Elizabeth is worried because King Edward is sick and she fears Richard, who hates her and her allies, will take power. At the palace, she and Richard bicker until Queen Margaret, the former Queen who was supposed to be banished, steps out and begins cursing everyone for depriving her of her husband Henry VI, son Edward of Westminster, and rightful place on the throne. Everyone bands against her. She curses each person present, saving the worst for Richard. She prophesies that Richard will ruin everyone's lives.

Richard secretly arranges Clarence's murder and, when King Edward decides to free Clarence, Richard pretends to be just as sad as everyone else at the mix-up. King Edward dies soon after and his son Edward Prince of Wales is brought to London to be crowned the new king. Meanwhile, Richard and his sidekick Buckingham plot to crown Richard instead. They capture Queen

Elizabeth's relatives, Earl Rivers, the Marquis of Dorset, and Lord Grey and plan to execute them. That night, Lord Stanley has a dream foreboding Lord Hastings' beheading by Richard, but fails to convince the trusting Hastings to run away. Sir William Catesby tries to win Hastings over to Richard's plot but he refuses and, indeed, Richard soon finds an excuse to have Hastings beheaded. Richard and Buckingham spread the news of Richard's impending coronation with the help of the Lord Mayor, but receive a stunned lack of enthusiasm from the public. To win favor, Richard and Buckingham stage a scene in which Richard acts humble and religious and repeatedly declines the offer of the crown, accepting it only at Buckingham's insistence.

Richard is officially crowned. He imprisons King Edward's sons and orders Buckingham to kill them. When Buckingham hesitates, Richard turns against him and finds another hit man. Fearing that he himself will be the next to be killed by Richard, Buckingham flees and starts to raise an army against Richard. Richard plans to imprison Anne and marry King Edward's daughter to secure his throne. He intercepts Elizabeth in mourning for her sons and, though she loathes him, Richard eventually manages to convince her to coax her daughter into marrying Richard (or so he thinks).

Reports arrive that the Earl of Richmond, a member of the house of Lancaster, approaches England with troops, aiming to usurp Richard's throne. Richard sends Stanley off to raise troops for him, threatening to behead Stanley's son if

he fails to return. Stanley secretly arranges to side with Richmond and notes that Elizabeth is eager to give her daughter's hand to Richmond. A messenger reports that Buckingham's army has scattered and that Buckingham is captured. Before execution, Buckingham repents his sins, feeling his death to be deserved. Richard marches off with troops to fight Richmond.

Richmond proves himself a generous and conscientious leader by treating his army well. The night before the battle between Richard and Richmond, the ghosts of all Richard's victims rise into the night and hurl curses at Richard while giving Richmond their blessing. The next day, Richard is defeated and killed and Richmond takes the crown, resolving to end the Wars of the Roses and establish peace by marrying young Elizabeth, the daughter of King Edward, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster forever.

Summary Analysis

Richard III Act 1, Scene 1

Summary

Richard of Gloucester enters alone and sets the scene, opening with one of Shakespeare's most famous lines: "Now is the winter of our discontent." Though it's technically summer, it is winter from Richard's perspective because he is unhappy. His family, the House of York, has emerged victorious from the

Wars of the Roses and all around him people are celebrating and enjoying peacetime. Richard paints an image of "grim-visag'd war" turned into a lover, chasing women, not enemies. Yet the sour-tempered, hunchback Richard, "not shap'd for sportive tricks, nor made to court and amorous looking glass," feels he cannot take part in the frolicking. Angry, he feels cheated by "dissembling nature" which caused him to be born premature, "deform'd," and unattractive.

Analysis

Richard is one unhappy guy. He's unable to enjoy the pleasures of summer and feels alienated from the happy people celebrating a long-awaited peacetime after the drawn-out Wars of the Roses. Though a big reason Richard may be excluded from other people's celebrations is his sour temper and desire for power, Richard focuses on other reasons: he has a hunchback and was born with unattractive features. These handicaps, he feels, make him powerless to hold his own in romantic courtship or other peacetime pursuits.

Summary

If he "cannot prove a lover," Richard thinks, he is "determined to prove a villain, and hate the idle pleasures of these days." He has already laid "plots, inductions dangerous," "drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams" to set his brothers, Clarence and King Edward, against one another and expects Clarence to be killed because of a prophecy (spread around by Richard) that Edward will be murdered by an heir associated with the letter 'G.

Analysis

Because he feels excluded from romance and peacetime pleasures, Richard decides to ruin those experiences for everyone else. He will empower himself by contriving a plot, he confides to the audience—setting himself up as a kind of "director" of the plot and the audience as his confidante—and has made up lies and supernatural omens to manipulate his brothers into hating each other.

Summary

Clarence enters guarded by the Tower's lieutenant Brackenbury in armed escort to the Tower (the king's prison). He explains to Richard that he is under arrest because his given name is George and Edward has been convinced by a prophecy that he will be murdered by a 'G.' Richard explains that Edward's domineering wife, Queen Elizabeth, must be behind this, as she recently convinced her husband to imprison Lord Hastings, who was just finally released that day. Hastings won his freedom by appealing to the queen. Clarence and Richard agree it's crucial to position themselves in the good graces of the queen and of the king's mistress, Mistress Shore.

Analysis

Richard's plot is already being put into action. Richard's manipulative way with words – casting blame on others, pretending to be sympathetic, making up fake reasons for situations he himself has caused – is all in evidence here.

Clarence is convinced by Richard and doesn't suspect Richard is actually the reason he's under arrest. More specifically, here Richard is tricking his rival (Clarence) into complacency while also setting up the Queen (another rival) to be blamed for Clarence's death.

Summary

Brackenbury interrupts, saying that King Edward has forbidden anyone to speak privately with Clarence. Richard replies that there's nothing private about their talk and welcomes Brackenbury into it – "we speak no treason," he says, he and Clarence are just complimenting King Richard, Queen Elizabeth, and their relatives. Brackenbury apologizes. Richard promises Clarence he will do everything possible to free him. But as soon as Clarence and Brackenbury exit, Richard confides that he will send "simple, plain" Clarence to his death.

Analysis

Richard is lying to Brackenbury – he has just been bad-mouthing Queen Elizabeth to Clarence and calling her manipulative. Of course, it is Richard himself who's doing the manipulating here. Yet even after hearing his brother lie outright, Clarence seems to trust Richard's promises to help. As soon as Clarence is out of earshot, Richard tells the audience just how hollow those promises are.

Summary

Hastings enters and Richard congratulates him on his freedom. Hastings is dismayed to hear that Clarence is imprisoned. He tells Richard that the king is in bed "sickly, weak, and melancholy" and Richard pretends to be upset. Hastings exits and Richard notes to himself that Hastings should die, too, after Clarence. He recounts his plan to stoke King Edward's hatred of Clarence, wait for Edward to die of sickness, and then marry Lady Anne, whose father (King Henry VI) and husband (Edward of Westminster) Richard himself killed. He'll marry her not out of love but "for another secret close intent." Richard then chides himself for thinking so far into the future while Clarence and Edward are still alive, and exits.

Analysis

Again, Richard proves what a good liar he is by pretending to be sympathetic to Hastings' face, then changing his tune as soon as Hastings leaves. Richard's plot thickens. It now involves three deaths and a marriage. Like a good director, Richard keeps both the big and the small picture in view: he has a grand vision (which he is keeping secret from everyone but the audience for now) but is also mindful of the order in which a plot's individual events occur and reminds himself to approach his plot step-by-step

Richard III Act 1, Scene 2

Lady Anne enters in mourning alongside the funerary procession bearing King

Henry VI's coffin. Anne, distraught, furiously curses Richard for killing Henry VI, her father-in-law, and Edward of Westminster, her husband. She hopes that any of Richard's future children will be aborted and any future wife of his will be "made more miserable" by his death than she is now.

Analysis

Lady Anne is understandably devastated by the double loss of husband and father-in-law. But even in her grief-stricken state, she's able to articulate her anger and misery into an eloquent and moving attack on Richard.

Summary

Richard enters and calls a halt to the procession, incensing Anne. She berates Richard, calling him "foul devil" and asking God and earth to kill him. Richard praises Anne's beauty, tries to reason with her gently, and claims that he didn't kill her husband, his brother King Edward did. Anne continues to curse and spite him, calling him a liar. Richard changes tacks. He claims that, in fact, it was Anne's beauty that caused Henry and Edward's deaths because he, hopelessly in love with her, killed her husband in order to marry her. Anne spits at him but Richard insists he is in love with her and Anne eventually comes around, hesitantly taking his ring. He pleases Anne by promising he will properly inter Henry VI's noble body himself. Anne exits. Richard sends the funerary procession off without him.

Analysis

Anne is as articulate as Richard but she lacks his manipulative tactics. Anne speaks eloquently and honestly, but Richard is willing to twist his eloquence to suit whatever "truth" is most convenient – thus, he blames a murder he committed on Edward to make himself look better and, when this doesn't work, he admits he committed the murder, but pretends the act was motivated by love for Anne. Richard gets the upper hand over Anne by dishonest means.

Summary

Alone on stage, Richard gleefully marvels at his success with Anne. "Was ever woman in this humour woo'd? Was ever woman in this humour won? I'll have her; but I will not keep her long" he gloats. "I do mistake my person all this while," he reflects [for] "she finds, although I cannot, myself to be a marvelous proper man." He plans to buy new clothes. "I am crept in favour with myself," he muses, then sets off to see Henry VI into his grave before returning to "my love."

Analysis

Richard's boasting once Anne is gone shows just how disingenuous his claims about being lovesick was – it's all just a power game to him. Yet, Richard is also here lying to himself – Anne may have relented and taken the ring but she certainly did not express admiration for Richard or call him anything close to a 'marvelous proper man.'

Richard III Act 1, Scene 3

Summary

Queen Elizabeth, Elizabeth's brother Earl Rivers, and Lord Grey worriedly discuss King Edward's health at the Palace. Rivers and Grey try to comfort Elizabeth but she fears that, should Edward die, Richard—"a man that loves not me, nor none of you"—will seize power because her sons, the heirs to Edward's throne, are still too young to rule.

Analysis

Queen Elizabeth's fears concern the rules of succession to the throne – though her sons are first in line after King Edward, Richard (who's technically behind her sons and his brother Clarence) might be able to wield his own power by manipulating her sons who are still too young to rule alone.

Summary

The Duke of Buckingham and Lord Stanley enter, having just visited King

Edward. They report that the king wants to make peace between Richard and Queen Elizabeth's brothers. Richard enters complaining that Elizabeth and her friends have slandered him to the king. He is, he claims, a plain, peace-loving, honest man, slandered by "silken, sly, insinuating Jacks." Elizabeth denies slandering him and claims that Richard is just jealous of her and her friends. Richard, pretending to be disgusted, accuses her of imprisoning Clarence. Elizabeth vehemently denies the accusation. They argue.

Analysis

It's evident that Richard and Queen Elizabeth don't get along. Richard tries to get the members of the royal court to side with him against her by claiming to be an honest man attacked by Queen Elizabeth and her friends' slander. Richard is, of course, lying. In fact, he's been the one slandering Queen Elizabeth to Clarence and, now, to everyone in court by blaming her for Clarence's arrest.

Summary

Queen Margaret, the wife of King Henry VI and mother of Edward of Westminster, enters unnoticed. She berates everyone under her breath, accusing Elizabeth of stealing the throne that belongs to her, and accusing Richard of killing her husband (Henry VI) and son (Edward of Westminster). Meanwhile, Richard accuses Elizabeth and her friends of originally siding with the House of Lancaster, then switching over to side with the House of York

later. Rivers protests that he and Elizabeth weren't traitors, they were just loyal to whomever was England's king at the time, like good citizens.

Analysis

Margaret's bitterness is tied up with the struggles for the throne that played out in the Wars of the Roses. During the wars, Richard (a York) killed her husband and son (Lancasters) to consolidate power for the House of York. As a Lancaster, she resents seeing a York (Edward) wear the crown. But Richard's argument with Rivers shows how complicated house allegiances are: it's unclear whether one's ultimate loyalty should be to one's house or to the current king.

Summary

Queen Margaret's accusations grow louder and Richard notices her. He asks why she is in England since she was banished on pain of death. Margaret says she prefers death to banishment. They owe her, she claims, a husband, a son, a kingdom, and happiness. Richard reminds her that she has been forever cursed by his father for killing his baby brother Rutland and that her misery is God's will. Everyone teams up to criticize Margaret, calling her crazy.

Analysis

Aside from suffering the pain of lost loved ones, Margaret is the victim of some powerful words: she's been officially banished and the penalty for disobeying

the terms of that order is death. Furthermore, Richard's father cursed her with a curse that Richard suggests God himself stands behind.

Summary

Queen Margaret starts hurling curses. She curses Elizabeth to "outlive [her] glory," her children, her husband, and her throne, as Margaret has. She curses Rivers, Dorset, and Hastings to die before they reach the age her son was when he was killed. She curses Richard to be "be-gnaw[ed] by "the worm of conscience," to mistake his friends for traitors and vice versa, and to be unable to sleep without nightmares. She calls him an "elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog," calls Elizabeth a fool for taking Richard's side against Margaret, and says the queen will one day wish Margaret were there to help her curse him. She warns everybody against Richard saying that they will look back on this day "and say, poor Margaret was a prophetess!" She exits. Richard claims to forgive Margaret and everyone is impressed by his gentleness.

Analysis

Margaret's curses are articulated in powerful, biting language, but it remains to be seen whether they'll actually end up affecting the characters' reality. Margaret's insult to Richard twists his heraldic symbol – the boar – from something noble into something grotesque and crude (and more fitting for Richard's true character). At this point, Richard thinks little of the power of Margaret's curses, and uses his response to those curses in order to cast a

good impression of himself, pretending that he is so merciful and kind that he can forgive even an outburst as nasty as Margaret's.

Summary

Sir William Catesby enters with a message from King Edward, who calls Elizabeth, Rivers and the other lords to his bedside. All exit but Richard, who recounts with satisfaction the success of his plot: he has tricked Clarence, Stanley, Hastings, and Buckingham into thinking Elizabeth and her friends are to blame for Clarence's imprisonment. Furthermore, he has convinced them of his own moral rectitude by quoting the Bible and pretending to show Christian forgiveness towards her and her company.

Analysis

Richard describes further developments of his plot to the audience: through lying and verbally manipulating those around him, he has shifted blame that should rest on his shoulders onto Queen Elizabeth's. He has also polished his own public image by quoting the Bible and parroting Christian values that he does not actually believe in.

Summary

Two murderers enter to report to Richard. Richard sends them off to kill Clarence, but warns them to do it quickly because Clarence is articulate and he doesn't want them swayed by his pleas. The first murderer assures Richard

that "talkers are no good doers" and that they won't engage in discussion. Richard approves.

Analysis

As a savvy manipulator of language, Richard is well aware of the power of words and wants to make sure Clarence's own eloquence doesn't get in the way of his plot.

Richard III Act 1 scene 4

Summary

In the Tower, Clarence tremblingly recounts a nightmare he's just had to Brackenbury. Clarence dreamt that he and Richard were reminiscing about the Wars of the Roses while walking along the hatches of a ship crossing the Channel to France. Richard stumbled and hit Clarence, who fell overboard and slowly drowned, seeing the wretched wealth of shipwrecks and skeletons on the seafloor. Dead, he crossed the River Styx and met his father-in-law (a Lancaster supporter) and Edward Prince of Wales, who reprimanded him for treachery. Fiends surrounded him and their howling woke him from the nightmare. Clarence laments that his sins were committed for King Edward, yet Edward has imprisoned him. He begs God to spare his wife and children from any punishments he might face for those sins. He sleeps. Brackenbury reflects on the ephemerality of glory.

Analysis

Clarence may not be able to see through Richard's lies in waking life, but his dreaming self seems to know the truth. Indeed, Richard is trying to knock Clarence out of the picture, just as he does in the dream. Clarence's dreamed conversations in the land of the dead illustrate his guilt and frustration surrounding the English throne. He feels bad for betraying his father-in-law by supporting the House of York, but also feels frustrated that his loyalty towards the House of York and his brother Edward is not being duly rewarded. Brackenbury's thoughts, meanwhile, focus on how any quest—or even success—in gaining power will never last. It is a meditation on time and, in a sense, the entire sequence of the Wars of the Roses.

Summary

The two murderers enter and present Brackenbury a paper saying they are to take over his guard. Brackenbury goes off to report the switch to King Edward. The murderers bicker about how to go about killing Clarence. The second murderer worries he'll be damned for killing Clarence and no longer wants to murder. The first murderer reminds him of the payment they'll receive for killing and the second murderer is swayed, dismissing conscience as something that "beggars any man that keeps it."

Analysis

Though the first murderer seems to have no trouble being the straightforward

"doer" he promised Richard he'd be, the second murderer is much more of a talker. He thinks ahead to the consequences of his actions and debates with his conscience. Still, he thinks life would be easier if he didn't have a conscience.

Summary

Clarence wakes and asks the two murderers if they are here to kill him. When they say yes, he tries to reason with them, telling them he's innocent and that they'll be damned for killing him by Christ, the King of kings whose will overrides King Edward's. When the murderers call him a traitor, Clarence protests that he switched sides in the Wars of the Roses entirely for his brother's sake and thus Edward can't order him murdered for that. When Clarence tells the murderers that Richard will reward them for sparing his life, they reveal that Richard himself has ordered the death, which Clarence can't believe. "Relent, and save your souls," he cries. The first murderer stabs Clarence dead. The second murderer, distraught, wishes they had spared Clarence and tells the first murderer to take the full payment for the deed since he himself repents. He exits. The first murderer calls the second a coward and exits to hide the body.

Analysis

As Richard feared, Clarence proves himself a persuasive speaker. His argument, though, appeals to the murderers' consciences and thus only the

second murderer (who was already wrestling with questions about the potential consequences of murder before Clarence woke up) is ultimately persuaded. The first murderer kills Clarence as planned and is not tormented by the doubt and self-questioning plaguing his partner. He considers such struggles of conscience cowardly. Even though the murderers tell Clarence it's Richard who has masterminded his death, Clarence can't shake his faith in Richard's promises. He believes Richard's deceptions even to the end.

Summary

Back at the Palace, King Edward announces to Queen Elizabeth, Dorset, Rivers, Hastings, Buckingham, Grey, and others that, though he is near death, he feels much more at peace knowing that he has orchestrated peace between his friends on earth. He calls on Rivers and Hastings to shake hands and swear love, which they do. He calls on the others to echo them, which they do too. Edward notes that they now only need Richard to swear to keep peace.

Analysis

Edward is using his kingly power to the general benefit of his people by trying to heal damaged relationships between his subjects. He may not be physically healthy, but he is serving the health of the state and proving himself a king who deserves to sit on the throne because of both his blood and his character.

Summary

Richard enters and, at King Edward's prompt, duly swears to keep friendly

peace and claims he has no enemies in all of England. Queen Elizabeth asks the King to forgive Clarence and, when Richard interjects that Clarence is dead, everyone is shocked. Edward protests that the original death order was reversed, but Richard says he was killed by the first order. Stanley enters asking Edward to do him a favor and pardon his servant, who has just killed a man. Edward agrees but, deeply distraught, laments that no one spoke up earlier to plead Clarence's pardon. He remembers all Clarence has done for him and chastises those around him for failing to remind Edward of Clarence's goodness when he was angry. Edward fears God's vengeance. He exits along with Elizabeth, Hastings, Rivers, Dorset, and Grey.

Analysis

For Richard, words can be thrown around regardless of their truth and he will say (or swear) anything as long as it serves his plot. His promise to Edward is utterly hollow but it helps bolster the image he's trying to spread of himself as a peace-loving, gentle guy. Richard uses time to his advantage by pretending that Clarence's death was just the too-hasty fulfillment of Edward's own order. Edward wishes those around him had taken the time to articulate Clarence's innocence to him – their words might have saved his life.

Summary

Richard notes to Buckingham how pale "the guilty kindred" of Queen Elizabeth looked upon hearing Clarence was killed. "O, they did urge it still unto the king!"

he cries, "God will revenge it." They exit.

Analysis

Richard is a shrewd director, making sure to manipulate every character in his favor – here he directs Buckingham's opinion of Queen Elizabeth.

Richard III Act 2 scene 2

Summary

In another room in the Palace, the Duchess of York (mother of King Edward, Richard, and Clarence) weeps beside Margaret Plantagenet and Edward Plantagenet (Clarence's children). When they ask her to explain, she says their father is dead but that it is "lost sorrow to wail one that's lost" and that her tears are for King Edward, sick but alive. Edward and Margaret Plantagenet blame King Edward for their father's death, based on what Richard has lovingly told them. The Duchess laments "that deceit should steal such gentle shape" and tells them Richard killed Clarence.

Analysis

Though Clarence's young children take Richard at his loving word, the Duchess knows better – she sees through Richard's façade of kindness to his cruel, dishonest interior. The Duchess' claim that it's no use mourning the dead shows how hardened she's become from witnessing so much violence and

tragedy in her life, a topic she'll expound on later in the play.

Summary

Queen Elizabeth enters distraught with Rivers and Dorset, and reports that King Edward is dead. The Duchess is devastated. Margaret Plantagenet and Edward Plantagenet at first question how they can partake of her grief after she neglected to cry for Clarence but the women and children soon start to mourn together, echoing each other's laments.

Queen Elizabeth's and the Duchess' laments here prove extremely moving. As they elicit empathy even from Clarence's reluctant children, so the women's words touch audience members, inspiring pity and sympathy (and jarring the audience from its status up until now of being complicit and almost cheering on Richard the anti-hero's efforts).

Summary

Dorset and Rivers interrupt the women to urge Queen Elizabeth to have her son, young Edward Prince of Wales, crowned immediately. Richard, Buckingham, Stanley, Hastings, and Sir Ratcliffe enter and discuss how young Edward should travel to the Palace from his home in Ludlow. Richard asks the Duchess and Elizabeth to go help negotiate the transport and everyone exits except Buckingham and Richard.

Analysis

Dorset and Rivers, like every other male character in the play, are more concerned with politics and practicalities than with emotion. Still, they're right to urge haste: crowning the young prince quickly will secure his power and shorten the period in which the throne is kingless – a dangerous condition for the state, especially when power-hungry Richard's around.

Summary

Buckingham refers to some prior private conference between the two of them, telling Richard they must be present in the party chaperoning young Edward Prince of Wales trip so that they can be sure to keep the prince distant from the queen's friends. Richard praises Buckingham's loyalty.

Analysis

As usual, Richard's plot aims to grab power by sneaky means. Here, he will feign allegiance to the young prince while actually trying to subvert him. Richard's words of praise encourage Buckingham to keep working for Richard.

Richard III Act 2 scene 3

Summary

On a London street, three citizens discuss King Edward's death. Two are

optimistic about young Edward Prince of Wales future reign, pointing to the example of King Henry VI crowned at nine months old. Yet the third protests that baby Henry had "virtuous uncles" to protect his grace whereas young Edward's maternal and fraternal uncles are factious and include the dangerous Richard and haughty relatives of Elizabeth. "...were they to be rul'd, and not to rule," the citizen speculates, "This sickly land might solace as before." They exit.

Analysis

The first of the play's scenes featuring common people's opinions on courtly power struggles. The citizens' conversation shows that the general population knows what a dangerous, evil character Richard is, and that they consider him a poisonous influence on the health of the state. Calling the land "sickly" refers to the oft-used metaphor of political state as human body. The citizens here seem to believe that neither Elizabeth's inner circle nor Richard is fit to rule, and that only if all of them were ruled by someone else would the state be "healthy."

Richard III Act 2, Scene 4

Summary

In a room at the Palace, the Archbishop of York, Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess, and the young Duke of York (young Edward Prince of Wales' younger brother) discuss the impending arrival of the prince. The young Duke of York hopes he

has not grown faster than his older brother because Richard, his uncle, told him nice flowers grow slow and weeds grow fast. The Duchess says that that can't be true as Richard himself grew slowly. She dismisses the young Duke of York when he makes a joke about Richard.

Analysis

The conversation the Duke of York recounts shows Richard using words to lower the boy's esteem, another of Richard's manipulative tactics. Again, the Duchess is able to see the truth behind Richard lies, perhaps because she is a woman and perhaps because she is a special woman—his mother. Richard's words imply that a person's worth and goodness are directly related to their external appearance – which to him is likely a good joke, as he is claiming this even as he is tricking everyone to think he is good when he has such a deformed body (and is in fact crooked morally as well).

Summary

A messenger enters and announces that Rivers, Grey, and Sir Thomas Vaughan have been imprisoned by Richard and Buckingham. He doesn't know for what offense. Elizabeth laments "the ruin of my house" and the Duchess cries out that she'd rather die than continue to see more battling over the throne, of which she's already seen so much in her lifetime. Elizabeth seeks sanctuary (protection in a church) with the Duke of York, and the Archbishop of York offers to conduct them. All exit.

Analysis

Queen Elizabeth is upset because, by imprisoning her brother, her son, and her ally, Richard is disempowering her family. She hurries to protect herself and her son by seeking sanctuary, a practice of the time by which people could seek protection from all secular powers in a church.

TO BE CONTINUED....