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Power in Richard III

The quest for power has been the reason behind many of history's greatest evils. While many strive to obtain it, the cost of having it is commonly overlooked. In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the nobility fight in order to gain or maintain status, but they are never able to truly achieve it as they are never satisfied with what they have. This corrupted persona is made evident in Richard, Elizabeth and Margaret. Through these three characters, Shakespeare reveals how futile power can be as the play clearly suggests that power never truly satisfies, only brings harm, and is ultimately lost.

Throughout the play, Richard uses manipulation and deception in his attempt to achieve power. However, his efforts are futile because he is always yearning for more. In the beginning, Richard's only goal is to grasp and maintain power. However, as the play progresses, his thirst for power spirals into an obsession for security. After Richard is crowned, his paranoia becomes apparent when he tells Buckingham, "O bitter consequence / That Edward still should live "true noble prince"!...I wish the bastards dead" (4.2.17-20). He orders the execution of the princes, even though they pose no real threat to him; the crown alone is simply not enough. Richard continues on his path of villainy to ensure the security of his power. He loses many who are close to him in his journey to become King, but once he achieves this, his end goal changes which emphasizes his endless greed for power. Through the character of Richard, Shakespeare

displays how the thirst for power is never truly satisfied, revealing the meaninglessness of seeking power.

At the start of the play, Elizabeth's influence through her title of Queen is evident. She uses the power that she undeservedly gains in marriage to promote her relatives to higher positions of authority. Richard mentions that "every jack became a gentleman"(1.3.73), indicating the previously low status of her family. Moreover, she surrounds herself with a loyal court, which provides security and protection, along with her title. However, it is this that has put her family's safety at risk. Elizabeth's actions are ironic because the power she grants her kinsmen should have ensured their protection, but instead puts them in danger as it poses a threat to Richard. She acknowledges the danger of her crown when she says that the "Insulting tyranny [is beginning] to jut / Upon the innocent and aweless throne" (2.4.56-57). Elizabeth realizes that the imprisonment of Rivers, Grey and Vaughan will lead to the "ruin of [her] house" as Richard is targeting everyone who may challenge his power (2.4.54). Her title should have granted her safety, but instead forces her into sanctuary. Shakespeare uses this irony to reveal the fact that power only leads to fatal consequences.

This is also true in Margaret's character. She was once in Queen Elizabeth's position, but the loss of her throne cost her everything. While listening to Elizabeth talk with her kinsmen, Margaret exemplifies Elizabeth's impending fate when she reveals: "For I am she, and altogether joyless" (1.3.160). The fall from the throne that Margaret experiences and prophesizes displays the fragility of power. Although the Queen holds one of the highest titles in society, her status and power are easily taken. After Edward wins the fight for the power of her crown, Margaret's husband is killed and she is sent into exile. Margaret suffers the loss of not only her husband, but

her position in society as well. She expresses the sorrow this causes her when Richard inquires of her banishment by responding, "I was, but I do find more pain in banishment / Than death can yield me here by my abode" (1.3.173-174). The consequences that Margaret experiences as a result of her title reveal the inevitability of its loss. Power cannot be kept forever, and Margaret's character confirms the steep price of having it.

In *Richard III*, the emptiness in obtaining power is very evident. Richard fights for it throughout the entire play, but never becomes content with what he gains because his desires are constantly changing. It is impossible to reach an end goal that is continually moving. Elizabeth and Margaret, who were once queens, suffer many losses as a result of their title. Through Richard, Elizabeth, and Margaret, the consequences of power are clear as they lead to corruption, death, and grief. If these are the costs of power, is it really worth it?

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *Richard III*. Simon & Schuster, 2014. Print.