

Richard III

Two Example Sections



Original Text

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RICHARD III

(The Condensed Story)

After the death of King Henry VI of England, the reign of the House of Lancaster ends and the House of York reclaims power under King Edward IV. Richard-Duke of Gloucester is the youngest of three brothers – the other two being King Edward IV and George-Duke of Clarence. Richard considers himself to be deformed and unsuited to peacetime. He'd rather wage war than pursue the pleasures of the harmonious times his brother's reign has brought to the country. So, he plots and schemes to take the throne of England for himself.

Many people stand in Richard's way. The king himself is first, then the king's two sons and then the Duke of Clarence. Clarence is older than Richard and he would become king if anything happened to Edward and his sons. Richard spreads rumours that Clarence is plotting to overthrow the king, by means of a prophesy that states that "G" of Edward's heirs will disinherit him. Richard prompts the king to interpret "G" as referring to "George"[Duke of Clarence] and this has the effect of having Clarence imprisoned in the Tower of London.

Richard next needs to consolidate his claim to the throne. He decides to marry Lady Anne Neville, daughter-in-law of the late King Henry VI, in an attempt to gain support from both Yorkists and Lancastrians, even though he killed her husband and her husband's father. Anne resists him at first, but eventually succumbs to his advances, which illustrates Richard's supreme skill in the art of feigned sincerity.

The atmosphere at court is poisonous. The established nobles are at odds with the up-and-coming relatives of King Edward's wife, Elizabeth Woodville. This hostility is fuelled by Richard. He then has Clarence murdered in the Tower and pretends it was at the instigation of Queen Elizabeth and her family. Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI's widow, returns from banishment and tries to warn the squabbling nobles about Richard. The nobles, however, are all Yorkists and unite against Margaret, a Lancastrian, and Richard's plots and intrigues continue.

Edward IV becomes seriously ill and dies. However, his eldest son should now succeed him as King. Richard, as Protector, has both princes sent to the Tower "for their protection", before the eldest can be crowned Edward V by Elizabeth and her relatives. Richard has most of the relatives executed and he's now in a position to put himself forward as the preferred candidate for the throne. Those who disagree are also executed.

Richard declares that Edward IV's sons are illegitimate and, with manufactured support from the people, he feels powerful enough to have his two nephews in the Tower secretly killed, leaving the way finally open for his coronation as Richard III of England. However, the increasingly paranoid Richard loses his allies – the closest, the Duke of Buckingham, revolts and Henry-Earl of Richmond arrives with an army from France and confronts Richard at Bosworth Field. On the night before the battle, Richard is visited by the ghosts of those he murdered and they all tell him to "despair and die". Next day, Richard is deserted by the Earl of Derby during the battle and his army is defeated. Richard is killed by the Earl of Richmond, who succeeds as Henry VII, the first Tudor king of England, ending the reign of the Plantagenets and the Wars of the Roses.

SECTION 1

Act 1, Scene 2, lines 33 to 186

Background

Lady Anne Neville is the daughter of Richard Neville-Earl of Warwick, also known as ‘The Kingmaker’. The Wars of the Roses were notorious for the number of times the leading figures changed sides whenever it suited them and Anne’s father was no exception.

Lady Anne Neville was married at fifteen to seventeen-year-old Edward-Prince of Wales, heir to Henry VI. With the death of Edward at the Battle of Tewkesbury, she was taken prisoner. Richard’s brother, Clarence, was married to Anne’s sister Isabel and he took her in as his ward. Henry VI was imprisoned in the Tower of London during the Wars of the Roses and he was murdered there in 1471. Many people blamed Richard for this murder.

Lady Anne is on her way to bury Henry VI at Chertsey Abbey, when she’s stopped by Richard-Duke of Gloucester. Richard is planning to take the throne of England by any means necessary. He knows a marriage to Lady Anne Neville, widow of Henry VI’s heir, will strengthen his claim and, perhaps, placate the hostile Lancastrians to accept a Yorkist king and a Lancastrian queen.

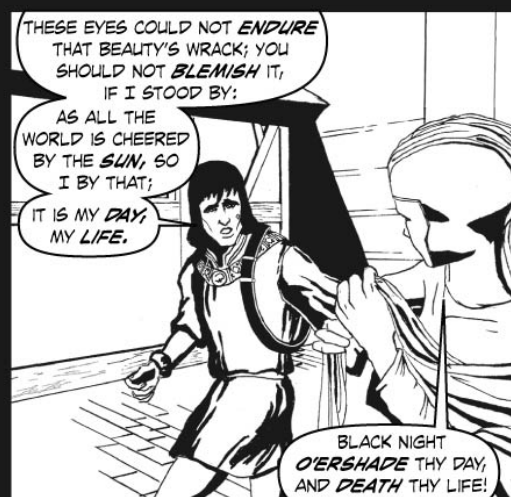
How does Richard persuade a woman who hates him to marry him? He killed her young husband at the Battle of Tewkesbury and murdered her father-in-law in the Tower of London. Act1-Scene2 is an illustration of Richard’s supreme skill in the art of insincerity. He has already confided to the audience :-

“I’ll marry Warwick’s youngest daughter.
What though I kill’d her husband and his father?
The readiest way to make the wench amends
Is to become her husband and her father:
The which will I; not all so much for love,
As for another secret close intent,
By marrying her which I must reach unto.”















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AFTERMATH

Richard's efforts succeed and he marries Lady Anne in 1472. They live together for thirteen years – it's to be eleven years before Richard becomes king and Anne becomes queen consort in 1483. They have one son, who dies at the age of ten. The marriage doesn't succeed in placating the Lancastrians and the Wars of the Roses continues until Richard's death at the battle of Bosworth Field. Anne's health declines during her years of marriage – Shakespeare attributes this to Richard :-

“For never yet one hour in his bed
Have I enjoy'd the golden dew of sleep,
But have been waked by his timorous dreams.
Besides, he hates me for my father Warwick;
And will, no doubt, shortly be rid of me.”

Anne dies in 1485, at twenty-nine. She probably dies of tuberculosis, although there are rumours of poisoning. She's left in an unmarked grave until 1960, when a bronze tablet is erected on a wall near her burial-place.

SECTION 2

Act 4, Scene 4, lines 199 to 342

Background

Elizabeth Woodville (Queen Elizabeth) is the widow of Edward IV, Richard's brother and king before Richard. Her two young sons, The Prince of Wales and The Duke of York have been murdered in the Tower of London, paving the way for Richard to become king. Elizabeth blames Richard for this and also for the execution of her brother, Earl Rivers. Elizabeth herself and her daughters have just emerged from sanctuary and are returning to court.

Here again, we have Richard trying to persuade a woman who hates him to allow him to marry her daughter, his own niece, and again, we see his skills in the art of insincerity.

The final chapter in the Wars of the Roses is about to be written, at the Battle of Bosworth. Neither Richard nor Queen Elizabeth know what the outcome will be, although Richard is confident of winning and is planning for the future. Lady Anne Neville is dead and Richard wants to marry young Elizabeth of York to cement future relations with the powerful Woodville family, who have very strong allies and who can help him keep order in the country if he wins.

Unknown to Richard, Queen Elizabeth is secretly negotiating with agents of Henry Tudor-Duke of Richmond, to marry her daughter Elizabeth of York to him, should he succeed in defeating Richard. Queen Elizabeth can't be sure who'll win, so she doesn't rule out a marriage to Richard – that way, her family will be restored to power, wealth and prestige, no matter what happens.

Richard's insincerity is obvious when he says, after Queen Elizabeth has departed in the carriage with The Duchess of York :-

“Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman!”













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AFTERMATH

In the end, Richard is defeated and killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Henry-Duke of Richmond becomes Henry VII, the first Tudor king, thus ending the reign of the Plantagenets. Henry marries Elizabeth of York and their son, Henry VIII, continues the Tudor line of monarchs.