

ACT 1

Scene 1

Enter Richard, Duke of Gloucester, alone.

RICHARD

Now is the winter of our discontent
 Made glorious summer by this son of York,
 And all the clouds that loured upon our house
 In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
 Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths, 5
 Our **bruised** arms hung up for monuments,
 Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,
 Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.
 Grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front;
 And now, instead of mounting barbèd steeds 10
 To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
 He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
 To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.
 But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
 Nor made to court an amorous looking glass; 15
 I, that am **rudely stamped** and want love's majesty
 To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
 I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time 20
 Into this breathing world scarce half made up,

bruised

When you see this mark over the letter E, pronounce “ed” as a separate syllable. So: “brooz-ed.”

WHY? Most of this play is written in verse, like a poem—it has a rhythm. Sometimes, to fit the rhythm, a word needs an extra syllable. Spelling and pronunciation rules in Shakespeare's time were more flexible than they are today.

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I relate to Richard.

[This evil man is] not who he is; that's who he became. I really like to think that Richard was just a normal boy—a good kid—and all these people would shun him and say evil things to him. After a while, that world caused a lot of pain and anger and hatred. And then he was taught how to fight and kill, so he got a lot of that out. But still, those whispers never ceased. That eroded him.

16. rudely stamped

When I was little, people would say mean things [about my skin color], and that's why I know how to fight. I started amplifying it, and I would sit and think about how I could hurt you. If I felt not dominant, not number one, if you were stronger than me, I would attack you. That's how Richard is. I see him holding in things that have hurt him and amplifying it out to everyone else. And he doesn't tell anyone.

19. Cheated of feature by dissembling nature

—I can feel the hatred in Richard, and I know the feeling of something being taken away.
 —Coming to prison, you fall into self-pity: “Why aren't you visiting me? Why aren't you writing? Why don't you send me some money?” And it's all about me.

20. Deformed

[His “deformity”] could be a body-image thing—maybe he doesn't look that bad to other people.

And that so lamely and unfashionable
 That [dogs bark at me as I halt by them](#)—
 Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
 Have no delight to pass away the time, 25
 Unless to see my shadow in the sun
 And descant on mine own deformity.
 And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
 To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
[I am determinèd to prove a villain](#) 30
 And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
[Plots have I laid](#), inductions dangerous,
 By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
 To set [my brother Clarence and the King](#)
[In deadly hate, the one against the other;](#) 35
 And if King Edward be as true and just
 As [I am subtle, false, and treacherous](#),
 This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up
 About a prophecy which says that “G”
 Of Edward’s heirs the murderer shall be. 40
 Dive, thoughts, down to my soul. Here Clarence
 comes.

Enter Clarence, guarded, and Brakenbury.

My brother Clarence and the King

George, Duke of Clarence is one of Richard’s brothers. The other is Edward, King of England.

In Shakespeare’s England, noblemen were often referred to by the name of the land they ruled over. For example, Richard is sometimes called “Gloucester” because that is his title.

This can get confusing when characters change titles or die. When Richard becomes king in Act III, he can no longer be called “Gloucester”; he is “England.”



George, Duke of Clarence

23. **dogs bark at me as I halt by them**

—Richard has been the pariah his entire life, and now this is the only what for him to be respected, to have people do what he wants. That’s what drove him to this point. I mean, dogs bark at him when he walks by! He wants to get away from that feeling by any means.

—[It’s] a classic case of playing the victim. People just victimize themselves.

30. **I am determinèd to prove a villain**

—He’s like, ‘Well, fine. If I can’t have these things that you guys all have, and dance and love and talk and have fun, then I will take what I know how to take the way I know how to take it—the way you’ve taught me—and I will be this person, because what else do I have?’

—He’s evil and he’s mean, and he’s hurt, I think.

32. **Plots have I laid**

He’s fixin’ to fuck their day up. He’s gonna give it to them. In the most conniving and nasty way. What a horrible feeling that is to be in that state of mind! I have felt that way...and it is...not a good place to be. It’s just sad.

34. **In deadly hate, the one against the other**

—He says, “I’m going to turn their happiness into sorrow.”

—He loves chaos, even in the opening soliloquy.

—He starts this major trouble for fun, like the [Norse] god Loki does. He’s just bored, and now he’s stirring up the shit-pot. And he tells you why he wants to do this, and how he’s jealous of the others, and he shows you that he really has little care for his family.

37. **I am subtle, false, and treacherous**

He made himself that way! He was a great warrior and ugly, but he wasn’t “subtle, false, and treacherous.” He’s like, “Well, fine! If this is what they call me, this is what I’ll be!”

Edward thy son, that now is **Prince of Wales**,
 For Edward our son, that was Prince of Wales, 210
 Die in his youth by like untimely violence.

Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,
 Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self.
 Long mayst thou live to **wail thy children's death**
 And see another, as I see thee now, 215

Decked in thy rights, as thou art stalled in mine.
 Long die thy happy days before thy death,
 And, after many lengthened hours of grief,
 Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen.—
 Rivers and Dorset, you were standers-by, 220
 And so wast thou, Lord Hastings, when my son
 Was stabbed with bloody daggers. God I pray Him
 That none of you may live his natural age,
 But by some unlooked accident cut off.

RICHARD

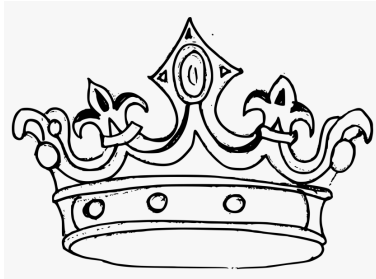
Have done thy charm, thou hateful, withered hag. 225

QUEEN MARGARET

And leave out thee? Stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me.
 If heaven have any grievous plague in store
 Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
 O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe 230
 And then hurl down their indignation
 On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace.
 The worm of conscience still begnaw thy soul.

Prince of Wales

The Prince of Wales is a title traditionally given to the heir to the throne of England.



212. **Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen**

Elizabeth is in [Margaret's former] position. Clearly she's mostly angry at Richard because he's the cause of it, but she sees this woman in [the role] where she should be. [She thinks] she deserves that spot and she doesn't have it.

214. **wail thy children's death**

If you have children in a monarchy, they're a threat.

217. **Decked in thy rights, as thou art stalled in mine**

You have to form alliances with the right people. And you have to know who those right people are. Because back then, it was your life that you would pay with.

They lived in constant fear and terror of what could happen to them. Could they be removed? What would happen if they were removed? How would they live? Who would take care of them? If you are aligned with the wrong people, off goes your head. And they could be the "right" people, but when somebody dies all the sudden they're the wrong people. You were aligned with them and now you're screwed.

PERFORMANCE NOTE

QUEEN MARGARET

I feel like her character was pretty straightforward. Shit happened to her and she's just really angry and bitter about it. When I was in [prison] I related to her a lot: The anger at being where I was, at the position where I ended up, and everything that I had done. There was a connection there. [During performances] I loved scaring the shit out of the people in the back row. Because they didn't even realize I was back there until I started talking. [Three years later,] I still understand where she's coming from, but I'm a different person now. I'm not that angry bitch.

Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st,
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends. 235

No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
Unless it be while some tormenting dream
Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils.
Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog,
Thou that wast sealed in thy nativity 240

The slave of nature and the son of hell,
Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb,
Thou loathèd issue of thy father's loins,
Thou rag of honor, thou detested—

RICHARD

Margaret. 245

QUEEN MARGARET

-----Richard!

RICHARD

Ha?

QUEEN MARGARET

I call thee not.

RICHARD

I cry thee mercy, then, for I did think
That thou hadst called me all these bitter names. 250

QUEEN MARGARET

Why, so I did, but looked for no reply.
O, let me make the period to my curse!

RICHARD

'Tis done by me and ends in "Margaret."

Richard

When lines are indented like this one and the next two, that is because they are part of a single line of verse.

When Shakespeare writes dialogue like this, it is an indication to actors that they should not pause before replying—they are literally finishing each other's lines.



—Wait, **what did [Margaret] come here to do?**

—She was spying on them.

—She's banished, so she has no reason to be there, besides just seeing what's going on. It's the Shakespeare version of Facebook-stalking your ex.

—She said it's worse to be banished than to die for coming back. So she probably was sick of being banished.

—She just wants to be heard. That's what it is: she wants to be heard in any capacity.

—She's really pissed. [These people] killed her husband. They stripped her of her title and banished her. All those people had some sort of part in that. A lot of it underhand. [She's] coming in to tell them that they're all fucking jerks and that they're going to get what they fucking deserve. And she came to curse them. She wasn't going to stay banished, and she's pointing everyone out for their dirty deeds.

253. **'Tis done by me and ends in "Margaret"**

[Margaret] being cursed by [Richard] means nothing to her because she's already had the worst things happen to her. There's nothing else that could be done to her.