

Shakespeare in Prison

A Guide to Reading This Book

The Left-hand Page

Here, you'll find the text of Shakespeare's *Richard III*.
The play is divided into five Acts, and each act is divided into several scenes.


Act #
Scene #

RICHARD

When someone speaks, their name appears in bold, capital letters above.

When someone enters or exits, there is a stage direction in italics.

When members of the Shakespeare in Prison ensemble have something to say about word or phrase, you'll see a symbol* here.

If you look for that symbol on the right-hand page,  you can read what the women of Shakespeare in Prison said. 5

Richard III is in verse, and the lines are numbered.

You can find any line in this play by referring to the Act, scene, and line number. The beginning of the play is Act 1, scene 1, line 1. The opening speech ends on Act 1, scene 1, line 41. Or, for short, 1.1.41. 10

To Anne. Sometimes, a stage direction is added in the middle of a speech.

Don't read those words aloud; they're just to help prevent confusion.

Beneath this line, you'll find notes on **bold, underlined words and phrases** from the text above. Sometimes the notes help with pronunciation or language.

Sometimes, they give a helpful tip for actors. And, since this play is based on a true story, some are historical notes about the play, explaining the people and the politics. For example...

poisonous bunch-backed toad!

The discovery of Richard III's skeleton in 2012 revealed that he did, indeed have scoliosis. His right shoulder would have been a bit higher than his left, but it wouldn't have been very noticeable.

The Right-hand Page

Here, you'll find the words of Shakespeare in Prison ensemble members, taken from discussions about *Richard III*. In these notes, you will see currently and formerly incarcerated women wrestling with the characters, themes, and language of Shakespeare's play.


The comments have been edited for clarity and length, but the words are theirs.



General Notes

In these boxes, you'll find analysis that isn't tied to a specific line. These will include observations about the characters and situations, reflections on the play's themes, and debates about the play's overall meaning.

* 16. line-specific analysis

In these boxes, you'll find the specific analysis that corresponds with the symbols on the left-hand page.

—To indicate which woman is speaking, we have assigned each one a symbol, which will appear at the end of her comment. 

—Each woman who worked on *Richard III* twice (once while incarcerated and once again in the free world, as a contributor to this text) has two versions of her symbol: one to represent her while she was in prison,  and another one, similar but more fully shaded, to represent her three years later, after her return home. 

Performance Notes

In these boxes, you'll find notes from the women that provide insight into the theatrical choices they made when performing in *Richard III* while they were in prison.

Act I Scene I

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,
 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
 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;
 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
 Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
 And that so lamely and unfashionable
 That dogs bark at me as I halt by them§—

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.

è

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 would cause 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. †

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

—Richard has been the pariah his entire life, and now this is the only way 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. †

Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
 Have no delight to pass away the time,
 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†
 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;§
 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.
 Dive, thoughts, down to my soul. Here Clarence comes.**

Enter Clarence, guarded, and Brakenbury.

Brother, good day. What means this armèd guard
 That waits upon your grace?
 CLARENCE His Majesty,
 Tend'ring my person's safety, hath appointed
 This conduct to convey me to the Tower.

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."



* 28. I cannot prove a lover

I do feel sorry for him. He can't perform in bed—he's not a lover. You can't help but giggle a bit, and still feel sorry for him. 🤔

† 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. 🤔

§ 35. To set...the one against the other

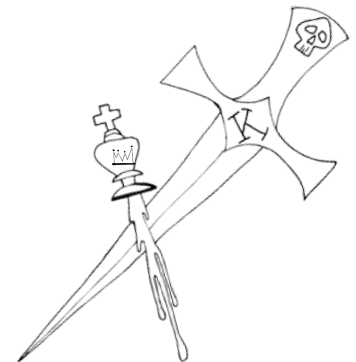
—He says, "I'm going to turn their happiness into sorrow." 🤔
 —He loves chaos, even in the opening soliloquy. 🤔
 —He starts this major trouble for fun, like the [Norse] god Loki does. He's just bored, and now he's stirring up the shit-pot. And he tells you *why* he wants to do this, and how he's jealous of the others, and he shows you that he really has little care for his family. 🤔

** 41. Here Clarence comes.

Poor, unsuspecting Clarence. He really has no idea what's about to happen. 🤔

He's thought it out like a chess game.

And you can tell by how he says it. He has plotted. He says "plot." He thought this thoroughly through. He's thought about what he's going to do if certain things happen. He's dead-set on this. It's premeditated all the way through, like a chess game. 🤔



Enter Stanley.

STANLEY

Let me but meet you ladies one hour hence, 30
 And I'll salute your Grace of York as mother
 And reverend looker-on of two fair queens.
To Anne. Come, madam, you must straight to Westminster,
 There to be crownèd Richard's royal queen. 35

QUEEN ELIZABETH Ah, cut my lace asunder

That my pent heart may have some scope to beat,
 Or else I swoon with this dead-killing news!

ANNE

Despiteful tidings! O, unpleasing news!

DORSET, *to Queen Elizabeth*

Be of good cheer, mother. How fares your Grace? 40

QUEEN ELIZABETH

O Dorset, speak not to me. Get thee gone.
 Death and destruction dogs thee at thy heels.*
 Thy mother's name is ominous to children.
 If thou wilt outstrip death, go, cross the seas,
 And live with Richmond, from the reach of hell. 45
 Go, hie thee, hie thee from this slaughterhouse,
 Lest thou increase the number of the dead
 And make me die the thrall of Margaret's curse,
 Nor mother, wife, nor England's counted Queen.

STANLEY

Full of wise care is this your counsel, madam. 50
To Dorset. Take all the swift advantage of the hours.
 You shall have letters from me to my son
 In your behalf, to meet you on the way.
 Be not ta'en tardy by unwise delay.

DUCHESS

O ill-dispersing wind of misery!† 55

Ah, cut my lace asunder

Queen Elizabeth is talking about the lace that binds her corset. She's saying that her heart is beating so hard that if her corset isn't loosened, she won't be able to breathe, and she'll faint. This is important to keep in mind when staging the scene.

[This scene] brings the women together in a way that hasn't been done yet. ♣

Yeah...[The women are] trying to throw themselves in the way because they know [Richard and his allies] can't hurt [the kids] when they're there. And that's really the only time before the end, before the war scene, that you really see somebody trying to throw themselves in the way. Because most of this is just people protecting themselves...Nobody really gives a shit about anybody else. They're always concerned about their own neck and how their own wealth is going to go—kind of like right here—and then people start thinking of other than themselves. †

✿ 42. Death and destruction dogs thee at thy heels

[Elizabeth and Anne] fear for their lives. Everyone around them is dying. They pick the safest option. *I'd be trying to save my own ass!* 🌐

✿ 55. O ill-dispersing wind of misery!

The Duchess is like, "Oh, woe is me! I have it the worst!" [It] reminds me of my mom: it's [always about] who has it worst. And I'm like: I'm in prison—I have it worst! 🍷



Still from "Shakespeare in Prison." Credit: Chuk Nowak.

O my accursèd womb, the bed of death!
A cockatrice hast thou hatched to the world,
Whose unavaoided eye is murderous.*

STANLEY, to Anne

Come, madam, come. I in all haste was sent.

ANNE

And I with all unwillingness will go.
O, would to God that the inclusive verge
Of golden metal that must round my brow
Were red-hot steel to sear me to the brains!
Anointed let me be with deadly venom,
And die ere men can say "God save the Queen."

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Go, go, poor soul, I envy not thy glory.
To feed my humor, wish thyself no harm.

ANNE

No? Why? When he that is my husband now
Came to me as I followed Henry's corse,
When scarce the blood was well washed from his hands
Which issued from my other angel husband
And that dear saint which then I weeping followed—
O, when, I say, I looked on Richard's face,
This was my wish: be thou, quoth I, accursed
For making me, so young, so old a widow;
And, when thou wedd'st, let sorrow haunt thy bed;
And be thy wife, if any be so mad,
More miserable by the life of thee
Than thou hast made me by my dear lord's death.
Lo, ere I can repeat this curse again,
Within so small a time my woman's heart
Grossly grew captive to his honey words†
And proved the subject of mine own soul's curse,
Which hitherto hath held my eyes from rest,
For never yet one hour in his bed
Did I enjoy the golden dew of sleep,
But with his timorous dreams was still awaked.
Besides, he hates me for my father Warwick,

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O, would to God that the
inclusive verge of golden
metal that must round my
brow were red-hot steel to sear
me to the brains!



✿ 58. O my accursèd womb, the bed of death!... Whose unavaoided eye is murderous.

As a mother you want to believe the best of your child until you're backed into a corner and it becomes evident that they are not the person you thought you were raising. Because that's part of you, whether or not that's our fault. I know for me it wasn't my parents' fault I made the choices that I made. But they generally had my back, even in my addiction. I don't think they knew a lot of it, but also, that's what you do when you're a parent. Until it comes to a point where it's very clear that that's not the best course of action. He had bloodshed on his hands, it's not like she could deny that. ☹️

✦ 82. Grossly grew captive to his honey words

—If I remember correctly, it did not take much for her to go from cursing him in [Act 1, scene 2] to "Oh, maybe I want to be with you." It didn't seem to take a lot of convincing on Richard's part. 🏰
—To go from having a lifestyle—being clean, having food—to thinking about living in excrement... I'd marry someone pretty horrible to get out of that. 🤢
—It's like going from the suburbs to the middle of Compton. She just took the [safer] option. Now she feels guilty, but at least she didn't go to jail. She had to do something so she didn't end up in the slums. ☹️
— Or she could have been, like, "I'll marry him, and then I'll kill him." That's what I would have been like. [I'd] get real close to him and then off that fucker for doing everything he did to my family. That's just me, though. 🤢
—We've discussed that before! She's saying *right here*: "my woman's heart grossly grew captive to his honey words." This would have been a good time for her to say, "I did this for self-preservation," [or] "I did this because I was in a really terrible state of grief." But she admits right here that she was taken. That she was a fool. 🏰

And will, no doubt, shortly be rid of me.

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Poor heart, adieu. I pity thy complaining.*

90

ANNE

No more than with my soul I mourn for yours.

DORSET

Farewell, thou woeful welcomer of glory.

ANNE

Adieu, poor soul that tak'st thy leave of it.

DUCHESS, *to Dorset*

Go thou to Richmond, and good fortune guide thee.

To Anne. Go thou to Richard, and good angels tend thee.

95

To Queen Elizabeth. Go thou to sanctuary, and good thoughts possess thee.†

I to my grave, where peace and rest lie with me.

Eighty-odd years of sorrow have I seen,

And each hour's joy wracked with a week of teen.‡

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Stay, yet look back with me unto the Tower.§—

100

Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes

Whom envy hath immured within your walls—

Rough cradle for such little pretty ones.

Rude ragged nurse, old sullen playfellow

For tender princes, use my babies well.**

105

So foolish sorrows bids your stones farewell.

They exit.



Rough cradle for such little pretty ones.

The princes were never seen again after they were taken to the Tower. The most common theory is that Richard III had them killed, and that's clearly what Shakespeare thought, but it will likely never be proven.

* 90. **Poor heart, adieu. I pity thy complaining.**

Anne is every woman. At one time, we are all innocent. We've lost innocence and are conscious of that loss. ♣

† 96. **Go thou to Richmond...and good thoughts possess thee.**

[Have you tried to save] somebody you love from certain death or something bad that's going to happen to them... and you *can't*? I have. Not from death, per se, but OD-ing. You want to save people, but you can't. It just sucks, but [that's] kind of where they're at. You want to say a whole world of things, but... there's nothing you can really do. I get a connection there between my own life and [this scene]. [They're] just powerless to change what other people do. ♣

‡ 99. **And each hour's joy wracked with a week of teen.**

We all have this moment when we think about the things that have happened and we just drown in misery and it's like the positive things just never happened. ♣

§ 100. **look back with me unto the Tower**

[This speech] makes me feel like when I was in prison—how I felt. It carries such weight just because of the place that we were at: locked up. ♣

** 105. **use my babies well.**

I want to be like Queen Elizabeth. I've got to get over my past; I think that's what *she* had to do. I also lost my children—to a guardianship. I never see them, but I dream about them constantly. ♣

I think the best monologue in this scene is the last one. By Queen Elizabeth.

It just makes me feel like when I was in prison, how I felt. Locked up and, I don't know. It just describes how I felt. I think it carries such weight just because of the place that we were at...It's just enough. It's not more, it's not less, it's just the right amount of salt. ♣