

Richard iii, explore the way shakespeare shapes

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Spoken by Richard (Duke of Gloucester at this point in the play) only 30 lines into Shakespeare's depiction of the tragedy of Richard III, I believe that this quotation is one of the many prime examples of how Richard's words deeply affect us as his audience. Because Shakespeare gives us - unlike any of the characters - the privilege to study Richard throughout the play, we are consequently able to witness his plans and characteristics -- some evident from the moment we are introduced to him; some for only certain characters to see; and some for the audience alone to observe.

Nevertheless, our everchanging relationship with Richard allows us to see him in every possible light: his conflicting, complex character is how Shakespeare shapes the audience's response. Richard III opens with Richard's first soliloquy - his first encounter with the audience. The fact that Shakespeare chose to begin the play with Richard speaking directly to the audience, and no-one else, proves how significant it is that the audience are the first to be able to react to Richard's actions and words.

Our first impressions of Richard do not specifically develop during the first few lines of his speech; however, since he sets the scene for the play, we are led to believe that the character will indeed have a central role. The further the soliloquy progresses, the stronger this view becomes. This is primarily due to the pace of Richard's speech. For instance, line 9: 'Grim-visaged war hath smoothed his wrinkled front' This line conveys that Richard is presumably speaking reasonably quickly, as there is a use of iambic pentameter alongside a hyphenated word (which is also demonstrated during the BBC video of Richard III).

He seems impatient and almost bitter when announcing that the War of Roses has come to an end. Already, we as the audience are evoked with feelings of anticipation and wonder - we are encouraged by the energy of his speech to find out what he will say next. As the soliloquy continues, Richard seems to speak to the audience with a sardonic tone to his words. An example of this is shown on line 12, when the war is personified ('He').

Because the war is metaphorically created as joyful and dancing ('in a lady's chamber') - which we know are opposite adjectives of what it is usually connected with - it is easy for the audience to notice that Richard is in fact not at all content with his family, the Yorkists. Other language techniques that Shakespeare uses as the soliloquy continues are useful for shaping Richard's character and our feelings towards him, too.

For example, the repetition of the word 'Our' (lines 6, 7 and 8) emphasises Richard's cynical approach to his speech, as we sense that he feels segregated from his family yet he ironically includes himself when describing them. The inkling that Richard feels separated from the Yorkists is additionally represented in Shakespeare's use of antithesis. Richard speaks of these in his speech - e. g. 'stern alarms' and 'merry meetings' (line 7); 'dreadful' and 'delightful' (line 8); 'soothed' and 'wrinkled' (line 9).

Both of these devices were perhaps embodied into Richard's monologue to encourage the audience to feel that Richard is not like the Yorkists, and as a result makes the readers feel uneasy as we are unsure whether to perceive positively or negatively. Richard then proceeds to tell the audience about his deformity (14-18): 'But I that am not made 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... Here, Shakespeare manages to persuade us into almost feeling a little sympathetic towards Richard.

Phrases such as 'rudely stamped' expose his self-oathing feeling, and the harsh sound of the words indicate that his physical disabilities really trouble him. He also shows a lucid disdain for love, in particular line 18, which Shakespeare could have wanted Richard to include in the soliloquy because it is a feeling that many in the audience can relate to and thus feel that they can connect with him.

It is at this point that we can understand why Richard feels rejected by the Yorkists, and we feel increasingly privileged that he is choosing to express his feelings to us. Only a few lines later (line 26), Richard is observing his own shadow: an outline of his mishapened figure which we deduce is the major reason for his distress. It seems as if Shakespeare is preparing us for the remainder of the play to some extent, as we sense that Richard's distress may cause him to seek revenge, therefore act iniquitously.

His monologue ends by revealing to us that he will stop at nothing to secure the throne for himself, including lying, hypocrisy and murder - all elements of the play we are now certain that we will encounter. Although Richard has now admitted to the audience that he is '... subtle, false and treacherous' (line 37), the adjectives ironically make us gain what we can only see as respect for Richard, as at least he is speaking honestly to us.

The extremely dynamic and fast paced speech has left us confused about Richard III, yet we are now all the more certain that as he is able to change the way he behaves so rapidly, he will be able to manipulate others to succeed the throne. By the end of only Act 1, Scene 2, Richard has already ingratiated himself with Anne Neville within one conversation: not only by deftly gaining her affection as he manipulates her into thinking that the reason he killed her husband, Edward, as because he loved her (which only we know is far from the truth), but by his use of actions, too.

This is represented when he explicitly holds his own sword up to his chest and threatens to kill himself if that is what Lady Anne wishes. We as the audience know that Richard will not kill himself, and as we are the only people who have witnessed his "true" character, we feel as if he is almost illustrating his acting ability - while in fact undermining the other characters in the play - simply to impress and prove to us how powerful he is already.

Despite the fact that we have now established the fact that Richard is indeed living up to the features of a 'villain', he is undoubtedly entertaining to watch. A specific demonstration of this in the seduction of Anne is presented on lines 165-8: 'Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry; But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me. Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabb'd young Edward; But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on. ' Shakespeare's language here summons mixed emotions for the audience.

Firstly, we should consider that Richard is indeed pushing his power to its limits as he encompasses subtle hints that he is lying to Anne face to face to create tension -- e. g. on the first line he tells Anne not to pause, yet a semi-

colon implies that he himself pauses: this implicates that he has an intention to act with no harm; but in fact he is acting this way to cause great harm. In addition, the audience are reminded of Richard's scheming and duplicitous behaviour due to the repetition of the words 'nay' and 'but'.

Not only could this convey Richard's two-faced character and convince the audience that he is play-acting, but it also gives the impression that his words have an effect of falseness - as if the words had already been planned. The audience are therefore aware that Richard finds it astoundingly simple to switch from truthful to untruthful, and continue to be fascinated by his character: we are the ones pinned with guilt for allowing him to carry on with his wickedness, yet we are mesmerised by his intelligence and want to see him carry on at the same time.

A definite venomous act which proves to us that Richard is indeed a villain is his next move: the imprisonment and ultimately the death of his own brother, Clarence. From his soliloquy, he has admitted to us that he would eliminate anyone who stood in his way when attempting to secure his position on the throne; and so now he makes it his priority to ensure that he will carry this act through with no repentance -- he tells his two executioners 'Do not hear him plead..' (line 347) - i. e. feel no remorse, either - which I believe was said possibly to allow even the audience to gain a little respect for Richard's power.

On the other hand, we may interpret Richard's attitude as egotistical as it appears he is taking advantage of his current authority and using it simply to feel more powerful; we know however that it seems unnecessary as it is not

going to help him achieve the throne. It is important to take note of how we react to Richard's pharisaic behaviour in relation to Clarence's murder.

Richard's small yet significant speech during lines 324-38 expresses this. When Richard refers to the majority of the characters as 'gulls' (line 328), meaning someone who is easily tricked, the audience perceive him as being extremely confident. With Richard's ego boosted as a result of Anne's seduction, Shakespeare shapes the speech to prepare us for Richard's actions and to emphasise the fact that Richard is openly displaying his allegiance to evil. A principal example of this is his paradoxical quote (lines 335-6): Tell them that God bids us do good for evil.

And thus I clothe my naked villanity' Ironically, the murder is indeed carried out by two executioners sent by Richard -- the audience react to this as we simply expected Richard to carry out the murder. Yet once again, Richard cannot hold all of the guilt, and we shortly see Richard use this to his advantage as there is no way of the other characters proving that Richard was a part of it. Conveyed in Act 2, Scene 1, we are easily able to notice the dramatic irony that takes place, as Richard is the one to firstly announce the news of Clarence's death, then secondly offer his condolence.

Shakespeare employs subtle language devices in his words such as line 53, 'Amongst this princely heap if any here', where 'princely heap' could be interpreted by the audience as a humorous remark that implies Richard's perpetual thought about becoming king, as well as 'heap' showing that he does not really care about the other characters. This reminds us of our

relationship with Richard. In addition, religious references are recognised in his words - for instance, 'blessed' (line 52) and 'God' (line 71).

I believe that Shakespeare's decision to do this is to create a reaction of surprise amongst the audience when they realise that Richard can get away with murder, and feel so confident that he can challenge even the views of religion: what is morally right. When Richard's final monologue in Act 5 takes place, we as his audience throughout the play are inclined to juxtapose it with his first. After being crowned King Richard, he has not paid so much attention to the audience; but at this point in the play, it is ironically the actions of the other characters in the play that make Richard vocalise one more soliloquy.

His sheer decline in authority does make the audience somewhat sympathetic towards him, but I do not believe that it is to such an extent as in his first soliloquy. I think this is because Richard could not be held responsible for his physical deformity; whereas his words that state 'if I die, no soul will pity me' (Act 5, Sc. 3, line 202) are a result of his character: he has chosen to reject love and pity, and isolated himself from others.

We can only feel that Richard is also being hypocritical as he has treated others so appallingly, yet when others (those who are ghosts of whom he has murdered that haunt him in a nightmare) begin to frighten him he seems incredibly self- pitying. As Richard is now observing his mind as opposed to his physical appearance - in contrast to that of his introductory soliloquy - the audience witness that for the first time in the play he genuinely seems

afraid, perhaps of himself more than the ghosts (lines 161-2): 'What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by.'

Richard loves Richard; that is, I and I' The above quote illustrates Richard's uncertainty of his future as King due to the use of rhetorical questions. On top of this, Shakespeare enables the audience to feel that Richard could even be on the verge of insanity, as he speaks of himself in 3 person as though he seems quite distant from his thoughts. It is the shock element of Richard's words that give the audience such a diverse range of emotions: we did not expect for such a strong character to become so weak, especially after he was finally King.

Later uses of hyphens and rhyming couplets (such as the one in the above quote) amplify Richard's confusion which leads to his downfall. Foresight for his downfall could have been added by Shakespeare to suggest to us that, despite his unforgiving deeds, this was Richard's chance to be able to "back out" from the battle against Richmond; nevertheless, Richard once again wants to see his plans all the way through -- but the unchanged idea put forward that he will always be a villain does not have the same impact as it once did, as Richard does not seem as much of a dominant character anymore.

In conclusion, we as the audience know that Shakespeare chose to present Richard as a character that will always be known as engaging with evil. Even Richard himself knows how wicked his deeds are, but we are nonetheless interested to watch him commit them anyway. Our response to his character

involves a diverse and complex range of emotions: from sympathy to mercilessness; unease to surprise; rejection to admiration.

These have all been created by Shakespeare in three separate ways which all contribute to the effectiveness of his character: Richard's words, - particularly in soliloquies - his actions, and his interactions with other characters. It is clear that we immediately have an established relationship with Richard, and he unquestionably becomes a highly entertaining character to study. In my opinion, one thought that we are left with as the play closes is perhaps the reason that the most evil character is also the most attractive is the reason why Richard III is a tragedy.