

The significance of courting anne in richard iii



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In *Richard III*, a morality play by William Shakespeare, the “undefeatable” characteristic of the vice excites the audience by allowing the main character to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks and get away with them. The action of Richard wooing Anne launches the plot into a chain of extraordinarily doubtful events, while skyrocketing Richard’s confidence, which shapes his character and emotions. Both of these things drive the play forward and capture the audience. In the scenes preceding the given passage, Richard revealed his quest for the crown, and declared he would stop at nothing to obtain it. He already imprisoned his brother, and declared his wish to maliciously legitimize his connection to the throne by courting the widowed princess. At a time before the scope of the play, Richard arranged the murders of both Anne’s husband, Edward, and Edward’s father Henry VI. Understandably, Anne feels resentment toward Richard for killing these men. As she enters the scene with the coffin of Henry VI, she curses Richard for their murders, and prays that any child he ever has will be sick, and that any women he ever marries will be as unhappy as she is—this is ironic considering the turn of events that immediately follows. After Anne curses Richard, he begs for her forgiveness, and upon her refusal, he denies killing the men in the first place. He then presents his sword to her, telling her that if she will not forgive him, he does not want to live at all. As she is about to stab him, he expresses that he killed Edward and Henry out of his love for her—“’twas thy beauty that provoked [him].” (I. ii. 180). Anne’s tone completely relaxes, and she miraculously agrees to marry Richard, as he places the ring on her finger. In Richard’s soliloquy following the proposal, he exclaims his amazement that he was able to woo Lady Anne despite the circumstances. He wonders who else would be able to do such a thing, and

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ridicules the fact that he was able to do this while the corpse of the body he murdered was right in front of her. He boasts that he was able to accomplish this with nothing on his side “ but the plain devil and dissembling looks” (I. ii. 244). Richard questions if Anne already forgot about her wonderful husband, and pats himself on the back for being able to compete with Edward’s regality. He begins to think he has been wrong about himself all along; there must be something great about him for Anne to feel this way. This dramatic change in Richard’s self-image is critical to his confidence, which drives his character for the rest of the play. Richard’s charming of Anne begins the sequence of inconceivable events, which brings the plot forward by captivating the audience with disbelief. Richard justifies Hastings’ murder to the Lord Mayor by convincing him that Hastings was plotting to kill him all along, and then the Mayor praises Richard’s execution of Hastings to the public. Richard maliciously murdered Hastings, and somehow still ended up with everyone on his side. Later, Richard is able to essentially make the Lord Mayor beg him to be king, so the public thinks that Richard did not force himself upon the throne (even though this is exactly what he is doing). Toward the end of the play, he announces his plans to marry his niece and kill Anne, his wife who he wooed just scenes earlier. Both of these things cause the audience dissonance between their intrigue and morality, and keep the plot moving unexpectedly. The passage in question denotes a key change in Richard’s confidence, which shapes his character for the rest of the play, and arguably causes his downfall. From his dramatic self-pitying opening soliloquy, the audience becomes very emotionally invested in Richard’s inferiority complex. Because he puts himself down so much at the beginning, this turn of events takes a positive toll on his confidence, and

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causes a drastic change in Richard's feelings toward himself during the rest of the play. However, after he completes his conquest of Anne, he becomes overconfident regarding his abilities to gain power and control. Richard's thought that Anne sees him comparable to the great Prince Edward boosts his ego—he realizes that he might have some redeemable qualities after all. " I do mistake my person all this while!/ Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,/ Myself to be a marv'lous proper man." (I. ii. 259-261) This turn in Richard's self-assurance enables him to do all the crazy things he does to obtain the throne, but leads to his downfall later in the play. His view of how others see him becomes arrogantly skewed. He thinks he has taken control of his allies by giving them viable reasons to stay loyal to him (such as promising Buckingham the position of earl of Hereford should he become King), but he misunderstands how loyal they actually are to him, and does not realize they obey him out of fear. Blunt the Nobleman says, " He hath no friends but who are friends for fear./ Which in his dearest need will fly from him." (V. ii. 20-21). Richard is completely assured that he will win the final battle because Richmond only has one-third as many men as he does, but clearly this ends up not being the case. The scene where Richard courts Anne is vital to the play's grasp on the audience, both through the plot and main character. This scene hooks the audience by launching the plot full of unimaginable events, as well as shaping Richard's confidence, causing his abuse of power and leading to his downfall. Shakespeare strategically wrote this scene to create intrigue and emotional investment in the viewer, which helped it become a classic.