

A man for all seasons critical



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Richard Rich; Bolt's young and ambitious bachelor of England, self-centred and ambitious, yet not sinister or evil. Despise is too strong a word to use for Rich, because as an audience, although we dislike Rich and would not like to be involved with him as a person, we can see his situation from afar and sympathise with him.

We pity the character that is trapped in his own desire for promotion opposed to his care for other characters, namely Sir Thomas More. Rich is described by Bolt as the character "longing to be rescued from himself", which immediately suggests to us that his unpleasant and self-absorbed nature is viewed as a weakness even to himself, making us pity his lack of ability to change himself rather than hate the character he is. Bolt first introduces Richard Rich to us right at the beginning of the play, showing he is a significant character. Rich's opening line – "but every man has his price" is relevant to his character and immediately makes the audience aware of his materialistic priorities. Bolt wants us to be aware of Rich's beliefs that everyone is corruptible – "there's always something," and so influence us to believe Rich too is corruptible. Our first impressions of Rich are that he is an ominous character, and this is reinforced by his willingness to threaten – "Impose suffering and offer him – escape".

Bolt does not influence us to be fond of Rich as his lack of true friendship with other characters prevents us from seeing him as a likeable character – "A friend of Sir Thomas More and still no office? We are taught lack of relationships is due to his cynical views of them being worthless unless profitable for him. Bolt furthermore presents him as quite a snobbish character who very much believes in status – "A teacher!" Despite this

objectionable introduction to Rich's character, Bolt continues to make us pity Rich rather than despise him. Bolt uses Rich's ambitious nature to win the audience's sympathy – " D'you know how much I have to show for seven months work? " We pity Rich as we feel that his insensitive nature will come to no harm due to his lack of status, and he is also aware of this. Bolt emphasises Rich's desperation for acknowledgement by his superiors by making Rich an open character who is prepared to discuss his feelings truthfully- I want a gown like yours. " Bolt uses Rich's own words to help the audience feel sympathetic towards him. He writes Rich's lines to make him sound desperate for a recognisable career – " if I was who would know it? " We can see how Rich tries to please everyone with his comments – " .

.. slightly, your grace. " He does not hold strong opinions himself as he alters them to suit his surrounding characters. Bolt also makes Rich beg for help – " if only you knew how much I'd rather yours than his! " which additionally increases our pity for him. Rich is easily influenced by pressure from his peers, such as Cromwell – " He isn't really my friend," which makes the audience feel sorry for Rich that he cannot stand up for himself.

However, the audience can see from Rich's words that he wants to gain some self-respect from his superiors that stops him from giving the impression he is pathetic – " I can't tell you anything". We also feel sorry for Rich after seeing his bribery skills; or lack of. His attempt to bribe the steward for information is dismal to the audience as they can see that he begins by giving the money before being told anything, and receiving little information in return – "(gives coin) What did you tell him? " Despite Rich's inconsistent opinions, he still comes across as an upfront character – " I

sense that I am not welcome here. " His feeble attempts to sell himself are embarrassing for him, which makes us empathize more - " I would never repeat or report a thing like that. His honesty during his conversation with Cromwell is admirable, and also shows that he is not a treacherous character, nevertheless he still possesses disagreeable qualities - " it would depend what I was offered", but nothing that would make us despise him. Bolt also presents Rich as a naive character which prevents us from hating him - " who's convenience? " Also his surprise at having " lost his innocence" would make us believe he is young and immature, so he is not old enough to be taken seriously enough to be despised.

Furthermore, Rich continues to defend More, which shows he does have a conscience on certain issues - " Don't forget he's an innocent, Master Cromwell. " His horrified reaction to Cromwell's burning of his wrist suggests that Rich's flippant attitude towards using pain as a bribe would never be practised, as he is not violent enough - " You enjoyed it! " The majority of our sympathy for Rich is due to his dismissal by other characters. He is looked down upon and ridiculed by many, making it easier for us to understand his desperation to become important. More is one of the few characters who treats Rich well - " say friendship," and genuinely advises him suitably - " Be a teacher," as he identifies with Rich.

Bolt writes as though More's impressions of people are correct, so in this case we are influenced by More's defensiveness of Rich. When other characters arrive Rich is pushed into the background and tries to join in conversations, only to be looked down upon by his peers - " Nasty book, from what I hear. " The steward especially looks down at Rich - " That one'll

come to nothing”, as he dislikes Rich’s attempts to treat him as an inferior when Rich is of little status himself. Rich’s efforts to bribe the steward also create pity for him as the audience are aware of the steward’s mocking – “ Master Cromwell went that way, sir. ” Our pity for Rich increases when Roper, Alice and Margaret gang up on him – “ he’s dangerous,” because we can see that they based their opinions on him by rumour and repute – “ you have heard of me? ” We feel sorry for Rich because we know that a dishonest reputation precedes him and so he will find it difficult to gain a promotion.

In addition, Cromwell takes great advantage of Rich’s insignificance and mocks him openly – “ You’re the Duke’s secretary are you not? ” by keeping Rich in his place. Cromwell hires Rich eventually, but ensures that he maintains his authority over him – “(leaves Rich standing). ” Cromwell’s treatment of Rich wins our sympathy as we can see that Cromwell only hires him as a spy – “ Where did he get it? ” and does not care for Rich at all. Bolt shows that Rich is despondent working for Cromwell, but his ambitious nature takes over – “(unhappily),” which makes us pity his position.

It is only the end of Act I that Rich realises how little Cromwell cares for him and how he is being used – “ then he never put he hand in a candle... did he? ” Bolt uses stage direction to influence the audience’s impression of many characters, especially Rich – “(contemptuous)”. His use of stage direction allows him to express the characters emotions to each other and what they are thinking – “(regarding Cromwell with horror)”, “(But he seems gloomy)”. This helps us to pity Rich as we can see that his giving out of information is done hastily and that he is not happy betraying More.

This restores our faith that he is trapped by his own selfishness for ambition rather than downright wickedness. Bolt describes Rich as “ an academic hounded by self-doubt,” which sums up why we dislike Rich, yet choose to pity him rather than despise him. He is portrayed as pushy and worldly, yet his conscience and desperation allow us to view him as harmless, so we feel sorry for him instead. He comes across as a young man trying to get noticed in the ruthless world, yet he doesn't seem cut out for hard-hearted work as his moral values prevent him from being as callous as he likes to depict.