

RICHARD III | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

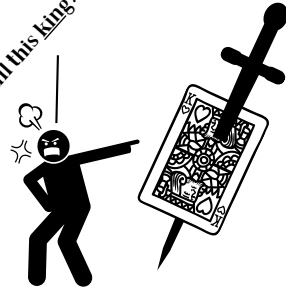
Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Didn't thou not kill this king?



Richard III is full of prophecies and curses. In particular, two women wish curses on other characters. One of them is Margaret, who used to be queen. She shows up and curses several of her former enemies. The other is Lady Anne, and we're going to spend this activity pack looking at her curse.

There's a backstory here. Keep in mind that *Richard III* is the fourth play in a series that Shakespeare wrote very early in his career. The first three plays, creatively titled *King Henry VI, Part 1*; *King Henry VI, Part 2*; and *King Henry VI, Part 3*, are action-packed, old-fashioned war plays. (The Wars of the Roses, to be precise.) Lots of battle scenes, backstabbing, dirty politics, and armies moving over the stage. No one puts them on much anymore, since they're not especially well-written and they're very expensive to produce.

Henry VI, Part 3 ends as Richard of Gloucester (the future King Richard III) kills King Henry VI and his son. Before he dies, Henry VI says these lines to Richard:

KING HENRY VI

Hadst thou been kill'd when first thou didst presume,
Thou hadst not lived to kill a son of mine.
And thus I prophesy, that many a thousand,
Which now mistrust no parcel of my fear,
And many an old man's sigh and many a widow's,
And many an orphan's water-standing eye—
Men for their sons, wives for their husbands,
And orphans for their parents timeless death—
Shall rue the hour that ever thou wast born.

KING HENRY VI (translation)

If you had been killed when you first showed signs of wanting too much, you wouldn't have lived to kill my son. I predict this: Many thousands of people—people who don't begin to understand why I fear you, don't hear the sighs of many old men and widows or the weeping of so many people (men weeping for their sons, wives weeping for their husbands, and orphans weeping for the murder of their parents)—will curse the hour that you were born.

Quite a prophesy! Richard cuts him off and stabs him, though. ("Die, prophet in thy speech," Richard says. Cold.)

Cut to the beginning of *Richard III*. Lady Anne, who was married to Henry VI's son (yes, the one Richard killed), is getting ready for the dead king's funeral. In fact, she's walking with the pallbearers who are carrying the casket...

The Shakespeare

LADY ANNE

Set down, set down your honorable load,
If honor may be shrouded in a hearse,
Whilst I awhile obsequiously lament
The untimely fall of virtuous Lancaster.
Poor key-cold figure of a holy king!
Pale ashes of the house of Lancaster!
Thou bloodless remnant of that royal blood!
Be it lawful that I invoke thy ghost,
To hear the lamentations of Poor Anne,
Wife to thy Edward, to thy slaughtered son,
Stabbed by the selfsame hand that made these wounds!
Lo, in these windows that let forth thy life,
I pour the helpless balm of my poor eyes.
O cursed be the hand that made these fatal holes!
Cursèd be the heart that had the heart to do it!
Cursèd the blood that let this blood from hence!
More direful hap betide that hated wretch,
That makes us wretched by the death of thee,
Than I can wish to adders, spiders, toads,
Or any creeping venom'd thing that lives!
If ever he have child, abortive be it,
Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,
Whose ugly and unnatural aspect
May fright the hopeful mother at the view;
And that be heir to his unhappiness!
If ever he have wife, let her be made
A miserable by the death of him
As I am made by my poor lord and thee!
Come, now towards Chertsey with your holy load,
Taken from Paul's to be interrèd there;
And still, as you are weary of the weight,
Rest you, whiles I lament King Henry's corse.

The red rose of Lancaster



The white rose of York



The Translation

LADY ANNE

Set down the honorable body you carry, men—if there is ever any honor in being dead. I want to mourn the cruel death of this good man. Look at the noble king's poor, cold body—the ashen remains of the Lancaster family. His royal blood has drained right out of him. I hope I can talk to your ghost, Henry, without breaking church laws. I want you to hear my sorrow. My husband was murdered by the same man who stabbed you. My tears now fall into the holes where your life leaked out. I curse the man who made these holes. I curse the man's heart who had the heart to stab you. And I curse the man's blood who shed your blood. I want the man who made me suffer by killing you to face a more terrible end than I could wish on snakes, spiders, toads, and all the poisonous, venomous things things alive. If he ever has a child, let it be born prematurely, and let it look like a monster—so ugly and unnatural that the sight of it frightens its own mother. And if he ever has a wife, let her be more miserable when he dies than I am now. Guards, let's continue on to Chertsey monastery, carrying this holy burden you picked up at St. Paul's monastery. When it gets too heavy, rest, and I'll lament over King Henry's corpse some more.

How do you envision this part of the scene?

The only thing that needs to be there is King Henry VI's casket. The only other people who need to be there are the ones carrying it. But: There's no limit to the scale of this scene.

Is Anne giving this angry speech to a hundred people in a funeral procession? Or to a couple of pallbearers? Or somewhere in between?

Is she speaking to them or to the audience?

Are they listening, or are they over it?

Is the casket fancy, or are they burying the former king in a plain wooden box? Or what?

How far into the trip are they?

Is this the first time he's stopped them to give a speech?

Anne knows that Richard killed her husband and father-in-law, but she doesn't curse him directly. Instead, she curses his future wife.

Why, do you think?

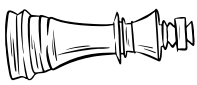
What's the difference between cursing *Richard* and cursing his (nonexistent) *wife*?



Didn't thou not kill this king?

Right after this speech, Richard enters, and Anne confronts him. But she does not repeat the curse—she just gets mad at him. Very mad...

Why do you think she doesn't curse him to his face?



How is that different from cursing him while he's away from the scene?



NERD ALERT!



Right in the middle of her speech, Anne says these three lines:

O cursèd be the hand that made these fatal holes!

Cursèd be the heart that had the heart to do it!

Cursèd the blood that let this blood from hence!

Not bad, eh?

What's the difference between "O cursèd" and "Cursèd"? (Remember: "èd" adds a syllable to the word: *curs-ed*)

But wait a minute!

Some editions of the play write the first line this way:

Cursèd be the hand that made these fatal holes!

Wait another minute!

Some other editions have it this third way:

O cursèd be the hand that made these fatal holes!

How is that one different from the others? (Notice that it has a more regular rhythm, and that it's 12 syllables long!)





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So, Anne curses Richard (or, actually, his future wife). But by the end of that scene, she agrees to marry him! It's famously difficult to make that scene believable. Why would Anne marry this guy whom she was just cursing and insulting? Even Richard seems surprised. He says:

*What, I that killed her husband and his father,
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
... And yet to win her?*

Why on earth would she agree to marry him?

Here's some analysis Shakespeare in Prison ensemble members said when we worked on this play:

what if she was
pleading revenge? what
if that was her
motivation?

SHE WENT IN ANGRY,
BUT BY THE END SHE'S
PLEADING WITH HIM
TO CONVINCE HER. IT
WAS A GAME.

SHE'S BLOODY BRILLIANT.
SHE MARRIED INTO POWER;
THIS DIRTBAG STOLE IT BY
KILLING HER HUSBAND. THE
ONLY WAY TO GET THE
POWER BACK IS TO MARRY.

when you're
desperate for love,
you'll do all sorts of
things. she wanted
to be saved.

she's too easily won
in her vulnerability.
she sold out!

she's grieving. she's in a hard spot.
you have to take those factors into
consideration.

she's painted into
a corner; keep
your friends close
and your enemies
closer.

In any case...

Anne marries Richard. Time goes on. Richard lies, cheats, and steals (and murders!) his way to the throne.

In this next scene, Lady Anne is joined by Elizabeth, the former Queen, and the Duchess of York, who is Richard's mother. Anne has just been told that Richard will become king, and she needs to join him for the ceremony, where she'll be made queen.

The Shakespeare

LADY ANNE

I would to God that the inclusive verge
Of golden metal that must round my brow
Were red-hot steel, to sear me to the brain!
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 humour, wish thyself no harm.

LADY ANNE

No? Why? When he that is my husband now
Came to me, as I followed Henry's corpse,
When scarce the blood was well washed from his hands
Which issued from my other angel husband
And that dead 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 wed'st, let sorrow haunt thy bed:
And be thy wife—if any be so mad—
As miserable by the life of thee
As thou hast made me by my dear lord's death!
Lo, ere I can repeat this curse again,
Even in so short a space, my woman's heart
Grossly grew captive to his honey words
And proved the subject of my own soul's curse,
Which ever since hath kept my eyes from rest:
For never yet one hour in his bed
Have I enjoyed the golden dew of sleep,
But have been waked by his timorous dreams.
Besides, he hates me for my father Warwick;
And will, no doubt, shortly be rid of me.

The Translation

LADY ANNE

I wish to God that the golden crown that I'll have to wear were red-hot steel and burned me straight through to the brain! I wish I could be anointed queen with deadly venom, not oil, and that I would die before anyone even had a chance to say, "God save the Queen!"

QUEEN ELIZABETH

Go, you poor woman, I don't wish I was in your position. Humor me by not wishing harm on yourself.

LADY ANNE

No? Why? The man I'm married to now came to me when he'd barely washed the blood off his hands from killing my first husband, that angel, as well as my husband's sainted father, whose corpse I was following to burial. I'm telling you, when I looked at Richard's face, this is what I wished: "I want you to be cursed for making me a widow so young. And when you get married, let sorrow haunt your bed. And I hope your wife—if any woman is crazy enough to marry you—is more miserable about the fact that you're alive as you have made me by killing my husband!" And then what? Before I even had time to repeat the curse, my woman's heart was taken captive by his sweet, slick words. I became the victim of my own curse. Since I married him, I have not had one hour's sleep in his bed. Every night I'm awakened by his terrified dreams. It doesn't matter if I sleep, though. He hates me because of who my father is. He will, no doubt, get rid of me soon.

Does this scene offer clues about why Anne would marry Richard?⁷ She offers one explanation, but do you believe her?⁷ Does she believe herself?⁷



THERE ARE SOME AMAZING IMAGES IN THESE SPEECHES. TRY DRAWING OR VISUALIZING OR RESPONDING TO ONE OF THEM.

Then try the speech again. Did the line (or the speech) change for you?

Anne is talking about Richard for almost every line of these speeches. But she only says his name once. why?



watch the "crown"

It is often said that one goal of writing is to

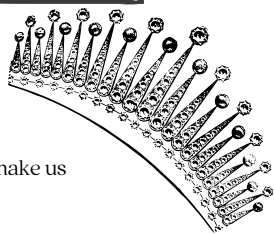
MAKE THE FAMILIAR STRANGE

in other words, to take the things we know and make us see them as if for the first time.

When Lady Anne says

the inclusive verge / Of golden metal that must round my brow

Shakespeare specifically avoided having her use the word "crown." How is that different than just writing "the crown I must wear"? And how is it, as an actor, to say that line the way she does? What might be Lady Anne's motivation for avoiding that word? Why not just say "crown"?



Lady Anne is about to become the queen. She's talking to Elizabeth, who is technically still a queen, but she lost power when her husband died a while earlier. How does that fact influence the scene?

CURSES!

Anne says she's "proved the subject of my own soul's curse." Perhaps. What do you think? Was she a victim of her own curse, or does she just have really bad luck (or judgment)?

Also, notice that her description of the curse is different from reality. In the earlier scene, she says the curse before Richard enters the stage. But in this monologue, she says she cursed Richard to his face, addressing him directly.

What do you think that means?

Does she misremember the event? What would that mean?

Or is she changing her story when speaking to Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess? Why would she do that?