

### Excerpt I from *Richard III*

Richard III is one of Shakespeare's "histories"—plays dramatizing the lives of historical figures. Richard III, who lived in the last half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, was one of the brothers of the King of England, Edward IV. Although the historical accuracy of the events in the play has been questioned, Shakespeare depicts Richard as a ruthless murderer who plots to usurp the throne from Edward IV's sons. In this soliloquy, which comprises the opening lines of the play, Richard's feelings and plans are revealed to the audience. The "son of York" Richard refers to is Edward, who has just brought peace to England after a period of warfare.

#### Richard, Duke of Gloucester:

Now is the winter of our discontent Made glorious summer by this son of York; And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.	<b>loured:</b> frowned (lowered)
5 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;	<b>alarums:</b> calls to arms (in preparation for battle) <b>measures:</b> dances (or perhaps music for dancing)
10 And now, instead of mounting barbèd steeds To fright the souls of fearful <b>adversaries</b> , He <b>capers</b> nimbly in a lady's chamber To the <b>lascivious</b> pleasing of a lute.	<b>barbèd:</b> armored <b>lute:</b> a stringed instrument
15 But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks, Nor made to court an <b>amorous</b> looking-glass; I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty To strut before a <b>wanton</b> ambling nymph; I, that am <b>curtailed</b> of this fair proportion, Cheated of feature by <b>dissembling</b> nature,	<b>sportive:</b> playful (in a romantic or sexual sense)
20 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; Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace, 25 Have no delight to pass away the time, Unless to spy 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,	<b>descant:</b> comment, remark
30 I am determined to prove a villain And hate the idle pleasures of these days. Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous, By drunken prophecies, <b>libels</b> , and dreams, To set my brother Clarence and the King	<b>inductions:</b> beginning steps
35 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 mewed up About a prophecy which says that "G" 40 Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be. Dive, thoughts, down to my soul. Here Clarence comes.	<b>mewed:</b> confined, caged <b>"G":</b> George, Duke of Clarence

### Syntactic/Grammatical Analysis Questions

What are the subject and full verb of the independent clause on lines 1 and 2? What are the subject and full verb of the independent clause on lines 3 and 4? Rearrange these clauses according to standard contemporary syntax.

What characteristic do most of the verbs in lines 14-21 share, and what is the rhetorical effect of this grammatical choice?

What syntactic role does the word “plots” play in line 32, and what is the rhetorical effect of its placement at the beginning of the line? Rearrange this clause according to standard contemporary syntax. What is syntactically significant about the phrase “inductions dangerous,” and what is the rhetorical effect of this choice?

What is the subject of the independent clause on lines 38-39? What are the subject and predicate nominative of the dependent clause on lines 39-40, and what is the rhetorical effect of this syntactic arrangement? Rearrange these clauses according to standard contemporary syntax.

### Comprehension Questions

Based on the context in which they appear, what do the following words mean?

bruised (line 6)  
arms (line 6)  
shaped (line 14)  
court (line 15)  
rudely (line 16)  
stamped (line 16)  
want (line 16)  
fair (line 18)  
proportion (line 18)  
feature (line 19)  
made up (line 21)  
delight (line 25)  
Unless (line 26)  
prove (lines 28 and 30)  
set (line 34)  
subtle (line 37)

Identify the pun that occurs on line 2. What is its effect?

Identify the metaphors used in the first four lines. Given the context of the rest of the soliloquy, what is ironic about this description of the situation? What other literary device occurs in that first sentence?

What rhetorical structure dominates the description in lines 1-13?

What are lines 12-13 intended to suggest about the man being described?

In what sense does Richard “want love’s majesty” (line 16), and how has this fact apparently influenced his attitude?

In what sense has Richard been “cheated” (line 19)? What literary device is this an example of, and what is its rhetorical effect?

What is the tone of lines 24-27?

What intention does Richard express in this soliloquy, and what reasons (both explicit and implicit) does he give for his decision?

What does Richard mean when he tells his thoughts to “dive down to [his] soul”?

### Question for Discussion and Writing

1. What is the tone of the first two sentences (lines 1-8), and how does it contrast with the tone of the next two sentences (lines 9-27)? What are some of the details of the diction and structure of these sentences that convey this contrast in tone?

2. Consider the following quotations carefully, then read the prompt below.

“To prefer evil to good is not in human nature.”  
—Plato

“Man may choose to do good or evil, and to bring on himself fortune or misfortune.”  
—Chinese proverb

(Source: *The Columbia World of Quotations*)

**Assignment:** Do you think that those who do evil choose to do so, or is evil the result of psychological influences that we have no control over? Decide which of these two positions you agree with, and write an essay in which you use specific examples from your own experiences, your observations, or your studies to support your opinion.

### AP-Style Essay Prompt

In a well-organized essay, analyze the rhetorical strategies Richard employs in explaining his decision and revealing his feelings and character. Discuss your interpretation of the soliloquy’s intended effect on the audience’s perception of Richard.