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Auszug aus:

William Shakespeare: Richard III.

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1. AT A GLANCE

This study guide to William Shakespeare's play *Richard III* is designed to provide an easy-to-use overview of the structure, context, themes and characters of the play. Here is a quick rundown of the most important points.

Citations: When quoting from the play or referring to specific passages, the following reference is used: Act II Scene 4 lines 55–57 is written II.4.55–57. So III.1.67–74 refers to Act III, Scene 1, lines 67 to 74.

Part 2 takes a brief look at **Shakespeare and his career**.

- ⇒ p. 9 → **Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon** in the county of Warwickshire (England) in 1564. Around 1585 he began to act, produce plays and write for the stage.
- ⇒ p. 11 → ***Richard III*** (ca. 1593) is one of the longest plays Shakespeare ever wrote. Its **relevance to the political climate of his era** – Tudor monarchy – made it popular with contemporary audiences.
- ⇒ p. 16 → Most of **his work was written in the years 1589–1613**. Shakespeare achieved success and critical acclaim during his lifetime, and he was one of the most prominent writers of his era. His plays are usually categorised as **comedies, tragedies or history plays**.

Part 3 provides analyses and interpretations of the play.

***Richard III* – Origins and Sources:**

- ⇒ p. 23 Shakespeare took his material from chronicles of English history. He adapted it to suit his artistic goals. But Shakespeare was primarily a

poet and not a historian, so here – as in his other history plays – he happily bent and manipulated the historical facts to suit his poetic and artistic purpose. *Richard III* was probably written in 1593.

Summaries:

Richard III is about Richard Duke of Gloucester, a physically and morally deformed man who is determined to become King of England, by any means necessary. He sets out with a few allies to spread rumours about anyone who opposes him or stands between him and the throne. He has already begun to murder his opponents before the play begins. For Richard, loyalty is a one-way street, and he repeatedly sacrifices and eliminates supposed allies and followers when it suits him. Once he has seized the throne, however, Richard begins to fall apart, becoming steadily more paranoid as he faces an increasingly powerful and righteous rebellion. He is eventually slain on the battlefield by Richmond, bringing an end to the traumatic civil wars known as the *Wars of the Roses*. ⇨ p. 27

Structure:

Richard III is a **five-act play**. The dramatic structure follows a classic pattern of Introduction – Rising action – Climax – Falling action – Catastrophe and resolution. ⇨ p. 40

Characters:

The play is about the warring dynasties of noble houses in England during the 15th century. The cast of characters is long and can be very confusing. Here are the most important characters:

- **Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later King Richard III.** The protagonist and absolutely dominant figure in the play. ⇨ p. 44
- His brothers **King Edward IV and George, Duke of Clarence.** ⇨ p. 47
- The **Duchess of York**, their mother ⇨ p. 48

- ⇒ p. 48 → **Queen Elizabeth**, wife/widow of King Edward IV
- ⇒ p. 50 → Old **Queen Margaret**, widow of King Henry VI: She curses Richard and his followers.
- ⇒ p. 51 → **Lady Anne**, daughter-in-law of Queen Margaret, later Richard's wife
- ⇒ p. 52 → **Earl of Richmond**, Henry Tudor: Richmond kills Richard in battle.
- ⇒ p. 56 → **The Duke of Buckingham**: A loyal and extremely useful ally to Richard during his climb to power.

Themes:

- ⇒ p. 61 The major themes we will look at in this study guide are morality, immorality and the moral law of the Tudor universe: ambition, power and the abuse of power; and fate, free will and fatalism.

Style and Language:

- ⇒ p. 81 The language of the play, Shakespeare's poetic Elizabethan English, can be hard to understand and follow. The stylistic tools we will look at here are rhetoric and black humour.

Interpretation

- ⇒ p. 88 *Richard III* has remained a popular play with audiences. It has also proved to have lasting and consistent relevance to any society in any era. The core subject matter of an illegitimate and morally unfit leader, like Richard, speaks to all audiences. Wherever there are large groups of people, there are those who seek power, and amongst those there will probably be at least a few budding Richards. The political and moral content of the play will continue to keep audiences fascinated.



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