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Textanalyse und Interpretation zu

William Shakespeare

RICHARD III

Patrick Charles

Analyse | Interpretation in englischer Sprache



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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

2.1 Biography

2. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE & WORK

2.1 Biography

Much of Shakespeare's life is documented, in particular after he began to have success as a playwright. Not everything is relevant to the study of an individual play: here are some of the most important landmarks in Shakespeare's life. More specific information about his plays and his career can be found in the chapter on Other Works (see page 16), and the chapter on Contemporary Background (p. 11) gives a broader context for his life and his plays.



William
Shakespeare
(1564–1616)

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YEAR	PLACE	EVENT	AGE
1564	Stratford-upon-Avon, England	Probably born on April 23, baptized on April 26 in Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwickshire in England. He was the third of eight children.	
1582	Stratford-upon-Avon	Marries Anne Hathaway. They have three children.	18
1583	Stratford-upon-Avon	Baptism of the daughter Susanna	19
1585	Stratford-upon-Avon	Baptism of the twins Hamnet and Judith	21
1585–1592		The "lost years". Nothing is known about this period of Shakespeare's life. By the time he reappears in the historical records in 1592, he is living in London and has already written plays which have been performed on stage. He also regularly performs as an actor.	21–28

2.2 Contemporary Background

2.2 Contemporary Background

Shakespeare was born during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The age of her reign, the Elizabethan Age, is famous for the blossoming of the theatre – with playwrights William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe at its centre.

SUMMARY

Politics and society

Shakespeare was born during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (reigned 1558–1603). Elizabeth was the last of the monarchs of the **House of Tudor**. Elizabeth is one of the most famous rulers in British and English history: the time of her rule is widely referred to as “**the Elizabethan Age**” (the only other period in British and English history which is equally strongly characterised by the ruler is the rule of Queen Victoria, 1837–1901, called “the Victorian Age”).

Elizabeth is a complex figure, but in general, her rule is seen in a positive light, **as she brought an important stability to the country**, which had long been caught in bloody conflicts between the major noble houses and dynasties, and which had also been torn apart by religious conflicts between Catholics (who acknowledged the Pope in Rome as their spiritual leader) and the newer Protestant forms of Christianity. Elizabeth was not a Catholic, and she followed her father, King Henry VIII, in forcing a more **liberal Protestant-influenced Anglican Church** catering specifically to British and English believers.

Queen Elizabeth I

Elizabeth's sister **Mary, Queen of Scots**, was a famously pious Catholic, which had led to a long history of complex and deadly intrigues and struggles between the sisters. The Protestant churches were determined to break away from the often corrupt rule of Rome,

Queen Mary

2.2 Contemporary Background



of Le Havre, the Elizabethan Age saw a number of small-scale English military adventures on French soil, all of which ended either pointlessly or disastrously.

During this period in history, it was very much on the seas and oceans of the world that England was able to establish itself as a **military power**. This naval power translated into increased political influence among the constantly squabbling states of Europe.

The "Armada-Portrait": Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603), painted by George Gower. © picture alliance/ Photo12/Ann Ronan Picture Library

2.3 Notes on Other Important Works

2.3 Notes on Other Important Works

SUMMARY

Shakespeare wrote 39 plays (probably – there is some debate about whether this number is accurate). He also wrote poems, most importantly 154 sonnets.

The plays were collected in 1623 in the “*First Folio*”. The categorisation of the plays in tragedies, comedies and history plays begins with this collection. The *First Folio* remains the most important source for the texts of the plays.

The plays

Shakespeare’s plays are traditionally categorised in three separate groups: **the tragedies, the comedies and the history plays**. This organisation is useful in addition to a basic chronological approach of his entire bibliography.

Note: the dates of the plays’ writing, publication and first performance are often approximate. The dates given here are the general consensus according to Shakespeare scholars.

The tragedies

What is a tragedy?

Tragedy is a dramatic structure which was as far as we know first developed by **the ancient Greeks**, and was later expanded upon and further explored by the Romans, in particular **Seneca** (4 BC–AD 65). Seneca’s tragedies became a major, dominant influence on the re-birth of tragedy in Italy, France, Spain and Britain during the **Renaissance** of the 15th and 16th centuries (for more on this era and its relevance to Shakespeare, see the chapters in this study

2.3 Notes on Other Important Works

Shakespeare's tragedies:

TITLE	YEAR WRITTEN	PERFORMED
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	1601–1608	1606–1608
<i>Coriolanus</i>	1605–1608	1682
<i>Hamlet</i>	1601	1602
<i>Julius Caesar</i>	1599	1599
<i>King Lear</i>	1603–1606	1606
<i>Macbeth</i>	1603–1606	1611
<i>Othello</i>	1602–1604	1604
<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	1595–1596	1596
<i>Timon of Athens</i>	1607	1678
<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	1593	1594
<i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	1602	1609

The comedies

What is a comedy?

A comedy is a work of art or entertainment which is intended to be **humorous or to provoke laughter**. As with tragedy, the roots of comedy lie in Ancient Greece.

Specific to Shakespeare's works and the Elizabethan era in which he lived and wrote, a comedy is a play with a **light tone and a happy ending** which almost always involved a marriage between as-yet unmarried characters. The comedies are less dark in tone and subject matter than the tragedies, as one would expect, and they sometimes contain elements of the fantastic, which are very rare in the history plays.

3. ANALYSES AND INTERPRETATIONS

3.1 Origins and Sources

Shakespeare writes *Richard III* around 1592/93. It is published in 1597 and first performed on stage in 1598. *Richard III* is grouped among the histories in the *First Folio*.

SUMMARY

Historical sources

Shakespeare made good use of historical chronicles and other sources in writing his history plays. His *Richard III* is believed to have been developed from Thomas More's *History of King Richard III*, which he had read in chronicles compiled by **Edward Hall** (1542) and **Raphael Holinshead** (1577, revised in 1587)⁴. These two chroniclers – Hall and Holinshead – were evidently his favourite sources for historical matters, as he used them time and again for his history plays.

But we must always remember that Shakespeare's "history" plays were a living, relevant reminder or **memory of his contemporary political and social environment**. The *Wars of the Roses* were real history for Shakespeare's world, and that meant that there was a real political aspect to how these historical dramas could be told (for more on the contemporary and relevant historical background, see the chapter in this study guide on Contemporary Background, p. 11).

Wars of the Roses

This contemporary relevance of historical events meant that Shakespeare was sometimes more relaxed when it came to the ac-

⁴ See introduction to *Richard III* in: Wells; Taylor: *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. p. 183.

3.2 Summaries

3.2 Summaries

King Edward's brother, Richard, begins to aspire to the throne and plans to kill anyone he has to in order to become king. First, he eliminates his brother Clarence to hasten Edward's death – then he kills a variety of other people to get to the throne.

Finally, at Bosworth Field, Richard battles with Richmond. The night before, Richard has a terrible dream in which the ghosts of all the people he has murdered appear and predict Richard's death, and the next day, Richard is killed by Richmond. The war of the Lancaster and York houses is over.

SUMMARY

Act I

Act I Scene 1

In London, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, enters the stage alone. He explains how successful the house of York has been, emerging victorious from the recent conflicts in the country. The time of war and conflict has passed, he says, and people are now happy and celebrating. But Richard says that he is not designed for times of peace: being ugly and deformed and having a twisted and immoral sense of ambition, he sees no opportunities for himself and is determined to become a villain. He has begun laying plots against his brother Clarence and against King Edward.

Clarence enters the stage, under guard. He tells Richard that the king has ordered him to be imprisoned in the Tower of London. He tells Richard that the king is being influenced by rumours and prophecies. Richard says it is the king's wife, Lady Grey, who is behind the plot against Clarence. Richard tells Clarence before he

Clarence is
arrested

3.2 Summaries

leaves under guard that he will intervene with the king to try to have his brother released.

Alone again, Richard bids farewell to Clarence, saying that he will soon be executed.

The Lord Chamberlain, Lord Hastings, now enters. He has been released from prison. He tells Richard that the king is weak and is dying and then exits.

Richard decides to go to the king to stir up hatred against Clarence, in order to have him executed more swiftly. In his plan, the king will soon die, leaving him, Richard, to seize power and make a politically advantageous marriage (to Lady Anne).

Act I Scene 2

Lady Anne enters, accompanying the corpse of King Henry VI. She asks the pall bearers to set down the body so that she can mourn him. She curses the man who killed the king. When she is done, she asks the pall bearers to continue to their destination.

Then Richard enters and orders them to set the coffin back down. Anne is furious at him, cursing and insulting him. She accuses him of being a monster and of having murdered her intended husband. Richard claims he did not, telling her that it was Edward who killed him.

Richard argues against her by constantly complimenting her and mentioning her beauty. He seems to be courting her, and tells her that he loves her. She is horrified and basically says she would rather die than ever be close to him.

But Richard continues talking and claiming to love her and to feel repentant for all he has done. Anne's hatred and defiance weakens and she eventually agrees to marry him. She leaves, and Richard says that he has only been pretending to love her. He has begun making plans for his future.

Lady Anne and
the dead King
Henry VI

3.3 Structure

3.3 Structure

SUMMARY

Shakespeare's *Richard III* is a classic tragedy with a five-act structure.

Shakespeare and his contemporaries generally organised their plays in five acts. It was only from the 18th century onwards that the three-act structure became more popular and more widely used.

In the 19th century, the German writer **Gustav Freytag** (1816–1895) developed an important analysis of the five-act structure in dramas. According to Freytag, the five acts have the following functions:

→ **Exposition (or Introduction)**

The setting is introduced: the place, the time and the characters. The exposition can also contain elements of the “backstory” – what has happened to our characters before the opening of the play?

→ **Rising action**

This is what sets the plot – the engine of the story – in motion. The rising action refers to those events which set the characters on their dramatic courses, whether of collision or cooperation.

→ **Climax**

This is not the end of the story: it is the point at which the protagonist's course or journey becomes changed by the engine of the plot (peripeteia). From this point on, the protagonist is revealed in all their strength or weakness as they face their fate and the consequences of the rising action from Act II.

3.3 Structure

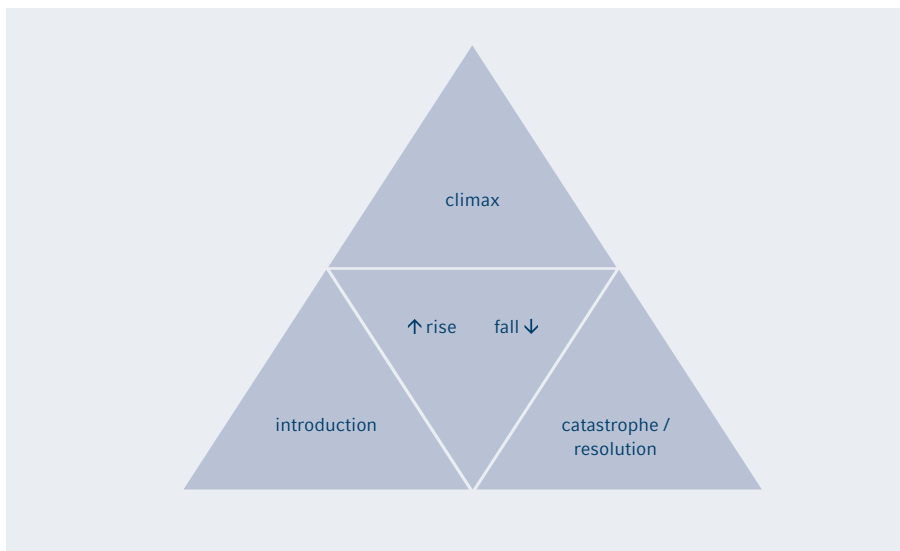
→ **Falling action**

The protagonist faces the hostility of the opposing forces – opposed characters and dangerous events.

→ **Catastrophe or resolution / revelation**

The protagonist faces the logical, unavoidable conclusion of his or her dramatic arc.

This structure for the classic (Aristotelian) drama is called **Freytag's pyramid**, because when the dramatic structure is expressed in visual terms, it looks like this:



This structure **describes a dramatic arc** that is generally followed by most forms of storytelling – a story grows and rises towards a

3.4 Characters

3.4 Characters

The characters of *Richard III* are broadly grouped in their belonging to, or being allied with, one of the two great dynasties of the country: Lancaster or York.

SUMMARY

Possibly the single biggest obstacle to getting to grips with *Richard III*, after **the difficulty of the language**, is the cast of characters. There are lots of them: they are often called by different names (Richard, Gloucester, Duke of Gloucester, et cetera); and many of them have the same name (there are at least three Edwards in the play, for example⁶). To make things even more complicated, **the characters are grouped in different factions** which also change allegiance and identity during the play. Luckily, some of the named characters do not require our full attention, as they mostly serve as messengers or sources of information, and are not fully rounded characters with any real impact on the plot or Richard's career. Ratcliff and Lovell are two examples of this kind of "functional" character, from whom we learn things as if from a bulletin.

Large number of names in the play

And there is yet another interesting complication: this is a play in which **the main character tells lies all the time**. Richard almost never tells the truth, except in the asides to the audience in the earlier scenes. He constantly deceives those around him, whether they are allies or enemies, and twists the truth to cast suspicion on other characters for his own evil deeds.

⁶ King Edward IV, his son Edward (young Prince of Wales) and Edward of Westminster (Lady Anne's intended husband).

3.4 Characters

Language

As with so many aspects of this play, and indeed any Shakespearean drama, **the best advice is to not expect that you will understand everything the first time you read it.** The language is difficult and confusing; the action is often described or conducted indirectly; and there are far too many characters for anyone to be able to understand everything in one sitting. You will have to get used to re-reading passages to get at the content. **Studying Shakespeare is hard work, but it's worthwhile:** the black comedy of *Richard III* and the evil, cynical plotting of the main character are fascinating and entertaining enough to be a reward for the effort it will take you to understand this complex and lengthy play.

Main characters – House of York**Richard, later King Richard III**Protagonist of
the play

First appears: Act I, Scene 1. Richard is the **Duke of Gloucester**. He has two brothers, King Edward IV and George, Duke of Clarence. **Their mother is the Duchess of York.** Richard is the youngest of the three brothers.

Richard is the protagonist of the play – **he is the central character**, and the structure of the drama follows his actions and their consequences. But he is not a hero: he is a cynical and deceitful man who intentionally **performs evil acts to increase his own power**. Richard even introduces himself at the beginning of the play as a villain (I.1.30). He feels excluded from the joys and pleasures of peace time by his **physical deformities** and ambitious, restless nature. He plots to play his brothers off against one another for his own benefit.

Evil intentions

As he describes himself, he is deformed, hideous enough to make dogs bark (I.1.23). His physical ugliness is the expression of the vicious and unnatural nature of his soul and personality. Everything about Richard, he tells us himself in his opening speech, is somehow

3.5 Notes on themes

3.5 Notes on themes

Because so many of the themes in Shakespeare's history play *Richard III* are so densely interconnected, we look at them in three groups:

- Morality
- Ambition & power
- Fate & free will.

SUMMARY

The history plays: genre and themes

In writing his history plays, using figures and events drawn **from chronicles of English history**, Shakespeare could rely on his audiences being fully familiar with the subject matter. Five hundred years later, we have to research who did what, where and when and why – but the dynastic struggles of the ***Wars of the Roses*** and **the conflicts between major noble families** were as well-known to contemporary audiences as, for example, the broad facts of the First and Second World Wars and the (historically) brief history of the GDR are to all of us today.

Familiar topics

Shakespeare's writing was strongly influenced early in his career by **Christopher Marlowe**, the dominant author in Elizabethan drama at the time. Marlowe had a gift for writing powerful rhetoric and a gift for applying irony to his subjects. Shakespeare took Marlowe's approach and broadened it. **History plays** as a genre were very popular in the last couple of decades of the 1500s, and as a genre, there were recognisable themes and structures:

Influenced by
Marlowe

“The main themes behind Shakespeare's histories are the main themes of Tudor political thought – kingship, the sinfulness of

3.5 Notes on themes

TEXT	REFERENCE	NOTES
[...] I am subtle, false, and treacherous.	I.1.37	Right from the opening of the play, Richard shows us his true colours. He is deliberately taking the immoral course to power.
[...] this deep disgrace in brotherhood / Touches me deeper than you can imagine.	I.1.111–112	Richard often employs hypocrisy to deceive people around him. Here, he is pretending grief for the imprisonment of his brother Clarence – which is the result of his own plots.
[...] With lies well steel'd with weighty arguments;	I.1.147	In the early scenes of the play, Richard often tells us in asides like this example what his strategy will be and how he plans to make his next move.
I'll have her; but I'll not keep her long.	I.2.231	Richard delights in having overwhelmed Lady Anne, who hates him with a passion, with his own seductive rhetoric, but as soon as he is alone on stage he reminds us that Anne is nothing more than a stepping stone for him on his path to power: he has absolutely no interest in the woman beyond her temporary usefulness.
They do me wrong, and I will not endure it [...]. Because I cannot flatter and speak fair, [...] I must be held a rancorous enemy.	I.3.42–50	This is a good example of Richard's moral slipperiness, and Shakespeare's irony. Claiming to be victimised because of his ugliness, Richard has taken his own motivation (to seize power because he is not pretty and suited for courtly harmony, as laid out in the play's opening speech) and turned it inside out in order to attack his opponents.

3.6 Style and language

3.6 Style and language

It is important to look at two particular aspects of the language Shakespeare uses in *Richard III*:

- At Richard's **powers of persuasion** and the techniques of deception and seduction.
- And at **the rich black humour** of the play, which gives the story of evil, ambition and murder a refreshing, modern, ironic layer.

Other interesting aspects include **boar imagery** and the extremity of **the curses** and insults used in the play.

SUMMARY

Rhetoric

The play opens with Richard arguing why he has chosen to follow the path of evil and deception to pursue his ambitions. He is alone on stage, which in a play means that the character is alone and what they are saying is an inner monologue, the sound of a mind talking to itself. **And we see here the core of his personality:** he is a cynical, clever, unscrupulous man who has no illusions about himself and nothing but contempt for the people around him. We as an audience can eavesdrop on Richard's plotting and goals – unlike characters on stage with him later, we are shown the real thing.

During the play, and in the first half in particular, we see Richard using his **rhetorical skills to overwhelm others**. It should be remembered that Richard's rhetoric is consistently boosted by hypocrisy and untruthfulness. One of the most important examples is his lengthy interaction with Anne (I.2), which begins with her wishing him dead and ends with them apparently about to get married. Even Richard is a bit taken aback by how easy it was (see

Richard's inner monologue (Act I)

Richard's rhetoric

3.7 Interpretations

3.7 Interpretations

SUMMARY

Richard III remains both popular and relevant: it is entertaining, and it manages to explore the themes of ambition, abuse of power and the justice of fate in ways which continue to speak to us hundreds of years later in very different political and social circumstances.

Power and manipulation

Elizabethan era

Politically, the play is set in (and was written during) **an age of feudal, royal power**, in which the country is ruled by a monarch with absolute power. The general assumption was that the King or Queen of England rules by the grace of God: that royalty was divinely appointed, and that God was on the side of the righteous.

This idealistic concept is harshly contradicted by the events of *Richard III* (and British history in general): as we can see in this play, taking the crown of England has little or nothing to do with the righteousness of God and the divine suitability of the monarch, and everything to do with **power** and manipulation. It is not difficult to draw parallels with our own age, where democracy – the free expression of the political will of the citizens – is an ideal equivalent to the divine righteousness of a monarch blessed by God, and the **abuse of power** and manipulation of the machines of power in Richard's era is comparable to what we have today: the manipulation and corruption of information and the truth, and the weaponization of fear and bigotry. Any society, at any time, can see in *Richard III* reflections of contemporary abuse of power.

The play has remained popular and has been regularly performed on stage in the centuries since it was written. In the 20th century

3.7 Interpretations



Al Pacino and Winona Ryder in *Looking for Richard* (1996).
© picture alliance/
United Archives/
kpa Publicity

there were also **several film adaptations**, more or less faithful to the text of Shakespeare's play, notably a 1955 film starring Laurence Olivier, and an adaptation in 1995. The 1995 version starred Ian McKellen (familiar to 21st century audiences as Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* and Magneto in the *X-Men* films) and was interestingly updated to be set in a fictional fascist England in the 1930s.

Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard*

And besides all of the more or less conventional adaptations of the play for film or television (or radio), the legendary American actor

4. RECEPTION

As is the case with many of Shakespeare's plays, *Richard III* has remained a popular and critically admired work from its first performance.

SUMMARY

The themes of ambition and the abuse of power, the extraordinary central character, and the rich, funny language have all contributed to the enduring success of the play. Audiences all around the world and throughout history **can identify with the story** of a greedy, evil man who murders and lies his way to power only to be confronted with the consequences of his evil actions. It's a story with universal appeal, and not only for contemporary audiences, for whom the English dynastic wars were still memory rather than history. In the early 21st century we in the modern world can still see parallels with the vulnerability of our own democratic processes and **the abuse of power by immoral or unscrupulous figures**.

Following Shakespeare's death (1616), performances of his plays began to suffer. **Many of the plays were cut** to make them faster and less demanding. In the last years of the 17th century, **women were allowed for the first time to play roles on stage**, and this led to some plays being re-written or adapted to enlarge female roles or invent new ones. It has been noted that during the 18th century and into the 19th, "[t]hose who really appreciated Shakespeare usually stayed away from the theatre".¹³

The fall and rise
in respect for
Shakespeare's art

¹³ All quotations and references here from: Muir, Kenneth: *Changing Interpretations of Shakespeare*. In: Ford (ed.): *The Age of Shakespeare*. p. 282–301.

5. MATERIALS

The Globe Theatre in London

The Elizabethan Age saw the first great flowering of the theatre in England. The theatre drew audiences from all social classes, and during the reign of Elizabeth I the theatres themselves became profitable enterprises and acting, for the first time, was a viable career.

Stage performances were very different from the theatre as we know it today. Lacking any kind of technical support, electricity or complex scenery, stage performances in Shakespeare's time took place during broad daylight (there being no way to artificially light a stage at night) and with extremely limited props and scenery. The actors carried the performance completely, with no support from special effects or elaborate backgrounds and props.

No women were
allowed on stage

Another major difference between then and now was the fact that all roles on stage in the Elizabethan theatre had to be played by boys or men: no girls or women were allowed on stage. It was considered immoral or even blasphemous for women to participate in acting and theatrical events. So in the case of *Richard III*, we can assume that Lady Anne would have been played by a probably good-looking younger man or teenage boy, and old Queen Margaret by an older man.

Theatre was run by groups of writers-actors-producers; Shakespeare was a member of one of the so-called playing companies, called the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men). It was the Lord Chamberlain's Men who built the original Globe Theatre in Southwark in London in 1599. Shakespeare was therefore writing his plays specifically for performance at the Globe. The original Globe was destroyed by fire in 1613, rebuilt in 1614 and then closed

6. SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

Here are some sample essay questions and responses. The number of stars indicates the level of difficulty of the task.

Task 1 **

Is Richard the hero or the villain of the play, and what other terms could be used to describe him?

Model answer:

A hero is, broadly, someone who overcomes obstacles on the way to doing good. This “good” will probably be something which benefits other people by removing problems or conquering enemies/bad situations.

A villain is someone who acts either only in their own interests (selfish) or who intentionally tries to bring harm and suffering down on other people (evil).

Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* is obviously not a hero. In his own words, he is a villain (see I.1.30). His goals are absolutely selfish. He has no intention of taking the throne in order to bring peace and harmony – these are states of being he utterly rejects in his speech at the beginning of the play.

He does conform to the general role of a villain. He is selfish and ambitious to the point of murder. Many of his acts are beyond any kind of moral justification, such as killing the young princes. Richard is evil: he is motivated by the selfish desire to have power and to

Abuse of power