Richard Iii Essay, Research Paper

English – Shakespeare Richard III1. “The tragedy of Richard III lies in the progressive isolation ofits protagonist”. Discuss. From the very opening of the play when Richard III enters “solus”,the protagonist’s isolation is made clear. Richard’s isolation progressesas he separates himself from the other characters and breaks the naturalbonds between Man and nature through his efforts to gain power. The first scene of the play begins with a soliloquy, whichemphasizes Richard’s physical isolation as he appears alone as he speaks tothe audience. This idea of physical isolation is heightened by hisreferences to his deformity, such as “rudely stamp’d…Cheated of featureby Dissembling Nature, deformed, unfinished. This deformity would be anoutward indication to the audience of the disharmony from Nature andviciousness of his spirit. As he hates “the idle pleasures of these days”and speaks of his plots to set one brother against another, Richard seemssocially apart from the figures around him, and perhaps regarded as anoutsider or ostracized because of his deformity. His separation from isfamily is emphasized when he says “Dive, thought’s down to my soul” when hesees his brother approaching. He is unable to share his thought with hisown family as he is plotting against them. Thus, we are given hints of hisphysical, social and spiritual isolation which is developed throughout theplay. But despite these hints, he still refers to himself as part of theHouse of York, shown in the repeated use of “Our”. The concept of Richard’s physical isolation is reinforced in hisdealings with Anne in Act I scene ii. She calls him “thou lump of fouldeformity” and “fouler toad” during their exchange. Despite these insults,she still makes time to talk to Richard, and by the end of their exchange,she has taken his ring and been “woo’d” by him. After Richard hassuccessfully gained the throne, he isolates himself when he asks the crowdto “stand all apart” in Act IV scene ii. And later, when Richard dreams,he is completely alone. Physical isolation in Richard’s deformity winssympathy from the audience as we pity his condition. But Richard uses hisdeformity as a tool against the other characters, to portray them asvictimizing Richard. Thus the sense of tragedy is lessened by his ownactions, even though his isolation may become greater as the playprogresses. Richard’s psychological isolation is conveyed through his lack ofconscience in his murderous acts. Nowhere does he feel remorse for hismurders, until Act V scene iii when he exclaims “Have mercy Jesu!” and “Ocoward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!”. In this turning point,Richard’s division from his own self is made clear from “I and I”, and “Isthere a murderer here? No. Yes, I am!” He has conflicting views of himselfand realizes that “no creature” loves him, not even himself. We also neverthe “real” mind of Richard, for he is always playing a role, of a lovingbrother to Clarence, a lover to Anne or a victim to the others. We feelsympathy for Richard as he awakes in a vulnerable position and for thefirst time acknowledges the evil that he has done. But as he only revealshis feelings of guilt in the last act of the play, we do not see him ininternal turmoil and thus the sense of psychological tragedy cannot bebuilt upon. Socially, Richard is isolated from both the upper and lower classes

of society. In Act I scene iii, Richard sarcastically calls Elizabeth”sister”, and she contemptuously calls him “Brother of Gloucester” makinga mockery of familial bonds. Margaret calls him “cacodemon” and “devil”,and any unity that the characters have on stage is temporary andsuperficial. In act III, the citizens are said to be “mum” and “deadlypale”, which gives a sense of quiet opposition to Richard’s activities. Richard is thus separated from all around him. Temporarily, we see Richardand Buckingham share a kind of bond, as Richard calls him “My other self”,”My Oracle” and “My prophet”. But they part when Buckingham hesitates tokill the young princes when Richard says “I wish the bastards dead”. Thisis the only time the audience sees Richard act with any other man, but werealize that it is for purely political purposes and that the union existsonly while Buckingham remains useful to him. Our sympathy for Richard islimited as we see that he has no true friendships, and does not genuinelycare for his family or friends. Thus even in his increasing isolation thesense of tragedy upon his death is not really saddening to the audience asthere is no real sense of waste at his loss. Richard isolates himself from God, as he claims to be above God’slaw and only uses religion as a tool to appear holy before he is King. Butironically, although he breaks the bonds between man and Nature, he is atool of Divine Justice as he kill those who were sinners, for exampleClarence who recalls his horrible dream and realizes his guilt early in theplay. As the murders accumulate so does his separation from God, and theneed for his death increases. But being closer to his death brings himcloser and closer to being with God. Thus although Richard may not realizeit, he is never too far from God. But Richard does not increasingly isolate himself from theaudience. From our omniscient position, we share in Richard’s wit,sarcasm, and the dramatic irony brought about when other characters are notfully aware of the implication of his words. Richard also shares hisfeelings with us, although he is not always truthful. But the fact thathe enjoys his villainy to such a great extent, and feels no remorse for hismurders reduces him to a figure of Vice, and is not really seen to be atragic figure of great proportions. In his killing, we see the guilt of Clarence, King Edward, Rivers,Hastings Buckingham and Lady Anne exposed before their deaths, along withall those who die. Thus their deaths are necessary and the audienceremembers that. Also, the deaths appear off-stage, which lessens theimpact of their deaths. The most poignant part of the play occurs in seeing the youngprinces talk happily and innocently to their uncle and “Lord Protector”. York says “I shall not sleep quiet in the Tower”, and we pity them, as theyare young and afraid, and are forced to go there because, as the Princesays, “My Lord Protector needs will have it so”. The children had appearedhappy , and the Prince had shown wit and intelligence in his conversationwith his uncle. This appears to be the greatest tragic loss in the play,which is heightened because of their youth and innocence. The tragedy ofthe protagonist is felt because of his attractiveness as a villain and assomeone who is not constrained by the rules of society. However, theaudience never forgets that he is wicked and therefore we cannot feel asense of great loss of potential or waste in his death.