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Richard III: A Machiavellian Fox?

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ABSTRACT

Among all of Shakespeare's sordid and despicable characters, King Richard III remains one of England's most hated and debated monarchs. Richard III was depicted both in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, onstage and in historical books, in the English popular memory and by most researchers as a Machiavellian fox; a pure portrait of a bloodthirsty monster of Senecan revenge tragedy, an opportunist, and a most treacherous ruler able to squash any potential rival or kin relative on his way posing his eyes on the crown. It is worth remembering that the pejorative accounts that tainted the reputation of Richard III for centuries and were transmitted through different epochs in England was not purposeless. This paper aims to turn an analytical eye on King Richard III as a Machiavellian fox. It first attempts to unveil the circumstances during which his name and status have been notorious, to finally become "a cliché" for any sordid demeanor.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:
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Introduction

Undoubtedly, early modern history plays contributed largely to raising the historical consciousness of the English people. It shaped the contours of generations of descendants about their roots and ancestral rulers. Yet, it is doubted whether what has been chronicled is not 'biased' as "history is written by the victors", and in Richard III's case, it is a Tudor victory and a Tudor history. Among all history plays written by Shakespeare, *Richard III* has by far conquered a particular place among readers, academicians, and world critics, whether Ricardians or anti-Ricardians. The play was probably written around 1592 and none could ascertain the political inclinations of Shakespeare at that time. Richard III's alleged crimes are made amplified in his work to a non-rational degree. A portrait

of a cynical Machiavellian ruler, elusive in words and actions, and ultimately of a corrupt crown, is strikingly present to the reader's mind. It is Shakespeare who depicted Richard III as a "hunchback" stirring a disgust for his physique and, by far, amoral conduct even though accounts state that he only had a slight deformity causing a curvature of the spine.

It is, to a large extent, Shakespeare's depiction of Richard III that made him the most notorious of all English crowns. In this context, the question of whether Shakespeare had any propagandistic aims behind such a portrayal of a villainous and murderous king is quite engaging.

A Wronged King

Communicating to masses of Englishmen an image of a deceiver, a language manipulator playing with words to reach his ends, a vile who managed to put an end to the lives of his nephews by strangling them while they were in bed, was a scheme well-devised by the Tudors who sought to disfigure the reputation of Richard III in a remorseless way. The Tudor dynasty fought for a long time to convince the English populace that Richard III, a zealous follower of the Machiavellian doctrine of "The end justifies the means"[1] was not a worthwhile ruler and the least expected by the English citizens. They portrayed him as a man not to trust and feigning what he is not and full of *rancune* to his detractors. From the Tudor perspective, Richard III is someone whose sole aim is to seek political uplift and "fake" esteem among the men of his court while playing his cards in the dark and scheming conspiracies under the guise of protecting the throne and, by extension the future of his country, while in fact, he was demonstrating sham ethical conduct in public for the sake of his self-interest. That Richard III's name still lingers as a villainous character in Shakespeare's history play is by no means accidental. Henry Tudor and, by extension, the Tudor dynasty loathed Richard III to death and was settled to put an end to his death in the famous war of Bosworth that ended with the downfall of Richard III. Unfortunately, the war ended not only with the end of his reign but, worse than that, the death of his name and in the best possible ways, a fraudulent recollection of a black reign period. This period is stamped in the

1 Widely associated with Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey Mansfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Chapter XVIII.

popular memory as terrifying where, once upon a time, a king dared to kill his own brother, George Duke of Clarence, by sending him to the tower to be eventually killed.

In the aftermath of this tragic event, Richard undertook all the black tactics to ascend the throne, whatever the innocent souls he might have reaped in the long run. It was during the Tudor dynasty that Richard III's aura was utterly smashed. Henry Tudor deployed all the means to blacken the name of a man whose many of his past chronicles and historical accounts contradict with the image as portrayed by Tudor historians and by Shakespeare's nefarious character Richard III in his most popular history play, *Richard III.* It is still questioned whether Shakespeare was following in the footsteps of his contemporaries like Christopher Marlowe, who showed allegiance and adherence to the Tudor reign at the detriment of historical truth. The rare existent chronicles writing in favor of a so thought tyrant, dissembler, and political climber all attest to a fair ruler who revered his subjects and deeply despised what was common behind the close doors of castles; chief among these are intrigues and hypocrisy. Richard III was reported to be a faithful brother, an honorable man, and a right hand to his brother at a time when conspiracies and unavoidable schemes to overthrow the rule and usurp the crown were most common. Richard III, after the death of his king brother, took the fate of his widow and children in his hands. The only time when Richard III challenged his brother, King Edward IV, was when he turned down the proposal of the King of France to receive a bribe, an act which he saw as treacherous to his country's honor (Gairdner, 2010, p.120).

It is worth noting that on his death in the city of York, his lovers and subjects mourned him and sorrowfully condemned his atrocious death at the hands of Henry Tudor, who ascended the throne under the name of "Henry VII". They mourned him by writing elegiac words on an epitaph which reads, "King Richard late mercifully reigning over us was through great treason (...) piteously slain and murdered, to the great heaviness of this city."[2] They deplored him risking the rage and resentment of the new ruler. Ricardians, those who seek to bring back the glow of king Richard III as a man with a deep sense of integrity, reversing the unflattering accounts which, for ages, have stuck to a wronged king, hold that Richard was an utter revocation to what has been circulating in history books written by Tudor chronicles like Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia* and Sir Thomas More's *History of Richard III* who depicted Richard III as a

2 Elegiac words written on the epitaph of Richard III's tomb.

vile *par excellence*, a man of corrupt rule, tyrannical power, and even incest longing to win the heart of his niece for marriage. Added to these works is Shakespeare's history *Richard III* which merely rhymed with the dark image already recorded in historical pedigrees.

For Tillyard, Shakespeare did not depart from the dominant view that was reigning during the time of the Tudor. He was merely following the "mood" of the time, not swimming against the current (Tillyard, 1944, p.320-321). The new Tudor reign erased all the traces of the former ruler. For Henry Tudor, Richard III was nothing short of a usurper who deployed all the illegal means to escalate what is not legally destined for him. This antagonistic perception was engraved in the Tudor court, among the ordinary subjects, and even the artists whose pens served to denigrate the status of Richard III. Under the new Monarch, Richard III was an epitome of despotism. This tenet sprang from the prevailing view that had nourished the Tudor reign and historians. To them, a hector comes to the throne against the wish of the populace. He rules by dint of tyranny using force and power position to enforce transgressive laws that might earn him more power and royal prerogatives, and Richard III was best illustrative of this dim portrait of the Tyrant. Heller writes that Richard shows a pattern of tyranny like all previous tyrannical regimes (Heller, 2002, p.253).

A Machiavellian Fox

By the time *Richard III* was written, Elizabethans could relate between Richard's notorious behavior as a sovereign and Machiavelli's potent ruler in his book, *The Prince*. Richard III was seen as a 'faithful' heir of the amoral conduct dictated by Machiavelli for a leader to ensure stability and security among his subjects. A common demeanor was adopted by these two chiefs, shared beliefs and manners tainted the charisma of the two in such an interlaced array that it was hard to distinguish between both men. The concept of a successful political leading driver has been a ripe source of discussion ever since the dawn of history. The overall human genre has always been interested in a fair and strong leader fit enough to withstand the blows that might shake the firmness and immutability of a kingdom or a state, among which are conspiracies, revolts, and betrayals. In the

case of King Richard, he was a double edged-knife for his people: a protective shield and paradoxically a tyrannical man to fear,

> Richard as a character expresses Shakespeare's fascination with the possibility of a creative, self-assertive individuality [...]. But as a figure exercising his egoistic freedom in the world of other men, Richard presents to Shakespeare the possibilities of terror and destruction which can accompany that freedom. The grotesque proportions of Richard's evil reflect Shakespeare's radical distrust of the individual not controlled by a divine moral plan. (Wheeler, 1971, p.319.)

Though Niccolo's political treatise might be regarded by some as a blunt political writing, a "teacher of evil" as Leo Strauss (2014, p.15) put it, it is seen as an interesting breakthrough in the political world stemming from the medieval age but still perceived as a reliable document as times change. The Elizabethan playwright's portrait of Machiavellian Richard was "subtle," "notorious," and "murderous", an image that run for most of the Elizabethan period. From the vintage point of many Elizabethans, Machiavelli was no less than "a man inspired by the Devil to lead good men to their doom, the great subverter, the teacher of evil, le *docteur de la Sceleratesse*, the inspirer of St. Bartholomew's Eve, the original of Iago" (Berlin, 1971, p.3). A close reading of Machiavelli's book leaves no room for any skepticism that his doctrine and political insights are associated with fraud, deceit, cruelty, and opportunism among others, traits that characterized Richard III as well.

The Prince which has been a controversial book since its release shows that politics has always been interwoven with deception, treachery, and crime (Cassirer, 1946, p.141). For Machiavelli, a ruler whose reputation has been stamped by violence should be tolerated as long as he has good intentions leading to the benefit of all (Strauss; Cropsey, 2012, p.297). A ruler must know how to conciliate between morality and world politics. Ethics are an undeniable part in a man's life as a general rule, yet should be finely and rationally used to strike a balance between the prince's interests and his due morality. A prince should disregard, on some occasions, moral virtues in order to rule well (Machiavelli, 1986, p.59). Consequently, a ruler must not be overwhelmed by the idea of "reputation" and should act unscrupulously when times call. From Machiavelli's vintage point, it is better for a ruler to be "widely feared" than to be "greatly loved". An apprehended ruler is revered for fear of punishment. As such, a prince should adopt force as a part of his rule to subdue his disobedient

people and challenge his competitors. Violence becomes a legitimate tool for the successful stability of his kingdom.

As a matter of fact, violence may be used to get rid of political rivals, to ruin riots and rebellious citizens, and to "clean" the community of any flaw that might threaten a peaceful establishment (Machiavelli, 1986). It is part of the Monarch's responsibility to impose power on people stirring them to align with the laws and rudiments of the ruler (Reese, 1961, p.119). Yet, it is of paramount importance to grasp the circumstances during which *The Prince* was written in order to understand Shakespeare's play, *Richard III.* Parkinson's expounds on the high-strung political atmosphere of Florence during Machiavelli's time. It was imbued with internal and external threats and Italian politics of the time were fragile. It was an age "divided and weak, the prey of foreign armies of intervention" and overrun by hired "mercenaries"[3]. In this context, Parkinson deems it quite natural "that Machiavelli should think it of prime importance to discover and then to teach the ways in which a strong and lasting state could be established"[4]. Shakespeare's history play, *Richard III,* reflects the turmoil of Renaissance Italy where a powerful ruler had to be merciless in order for him to unite the separate parts of a kingdom. It was a time when promises had sometimes to be broken and when a departure from the world ethics had to be preached. Machiavelli offers a quasi-indifferent view towards deontology when politics is at play. The Renaissance marked, in part, an aberration from faith and Christian belief in favor of a more worldly path. *Virtu* as described by Machiavelli was to replace God and fate. Machiavelli emphasized this concept which he thought every man should cultivate.[5]

To Machiavelli's conceit, there is no opprobrium to put in the frontline the individual prerogatives even if they run opposite to what is perceived 'right'. The latter rather lies in what is "appropriate", not morally correct, a fact made most clear by Richard III when he says, "And thus I clothe my naked villainy/ with odd ends stol'n forth of holy ??/ and seem a saint, when most I play the villain" (I.3.335-337). *In Henry VI: Part 3,* Richard is depicted as a glorious solider, self-confident and determined. We also learn from the scene that unites him with his father in Act III, scene one, that he is his father's favorite who in all pride claims that, "Richard hath

3 Cited in Peter Richardson, *Richard III.* London: Macmillan, 1992, p.54.
4 Ibid, p.38.
5 Cited in Sydney Anglo, *Machiavelli: A Dissection.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970, p.102.

best deserved of all my sons"[6]. Being free from the shackles of any restrictions were it morality, Richard as young as he was dares not only poke fun at the current king but transcends it to challenge the authority of the sovereign king Henry VI. He boldly suggests that his father be the new crown without any anticipation for his words. He says,

> You are old enough now, and yet, methinks, you lose.
> Father, tear the crown from the usurper's head (VI.1.113)

Following this, Richard starts to dispute Edward's preponderance pushing his father to take action against him even if this means to break the oath he gave to the king. This stance best crystalizes the true nature of Richard. Consumed by an inner greed for rule, he is willing to sweep all the obstacles that might cross his path even it shakes his morality or endangers the political position of others. Instrumentality is a substantial tool for Richard to reach his ambitions no matter the costs he might pay. Having his eyes laid upon the final prize dissipates all the probable contestations. Richard's arguments prove Machiavellian in essence. Richard's standpoint in defending his father's legitimacy case for the title of king is very telling. Endorsing all the means to where dreams might pose is his essence for being. For Richard, what is man if not without goals but an empty vessel? He goes on to escalate his speech towards king Henry VI in an indomitable way that leaves no room for any skepticism that Richard is about to wage war against him and take arms for the sake of having his father wear the crown.

After his father passed away, the one and only supporter in the life of Richard, the latter became certain that he, himself, is the only one to rely on. The dream of seeing his father snatch the crown has become his. Now, more than any other time, Richard is seen ready to undertake a new action: becoming the king of England by all means. The speech he delivers is once again Machiavellian in substance where he dares uncover his twisted character and reveals his colors, for the sake of any privileges:

> Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,
> And cry "Content" to what grieves my heart,
> And whet my cheeks with artificial tears,
> And frame my face to all occasions. (III.2.182-185)

6 William Shakespeare, *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixth.* In: *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington. 3rd ed. Glenview: Illinois, 1980, I.1.17

For the sake of his prerogatives, Richard is willing to even murder his own brother fearlessly. He threatens to sweep him as he feels that he is overshadowed by him. The death of Richard's father is not the only obstacle to his well-being. For long, Richard III felt precarious because of the presence of the two princes, his nephews, perceived as the legitimate heirs of the crown: King Edward V and his brother Richard, duke of York who were aged 12 and 9. Once arrived to London, the first idea that Richard entertained was to put Hastings to death as he was the primary supporter of the young princes and cared for their lives. Ironically enough, it later turned out that Hastings, himself, was conspiring to take the crown. He schemes a well-determined plot that enables him to be a "legitimate" ruler in the eyes of the court and the public. Bestowed with the skills of prudence and foresight and characterized by a graceful eloquence, Richard moves with steady steps towards his goals leaving behind all morality. He acts hastily when he senses that his goals are endangered. In Act III, he determines to execute Hastings before dinner,

> I will not dine until I see the same (Hastings head)
> Come, come dispatch: the duke would be at dinner;
> Make a short shrift; he longs to see your head (III.5.77, 94-95)

Killing Hastings was not the end of the long tunnel as Richard III faced a new challenge: the ever-existing threat of the two young princes who make him feel constantly unsettled. To manage his fears and overcome his malaise, Richard III entertained the idea of getting rid of them by asking Tyrell to put an end to their lives in the Tower, a charge that has for centuries blemished his reputation. When Tyrell comes back with the fresh news of having the young princes killed, he does not shy to feign all the world's regret and melancholy for the loss of the two innocent kids. He mourns them in a wistful soliloquy stating,

> Tyrell: 'The tyrannous and bloody act is done,
> The most arch deed of piteous massacre
> That ever yet this land was guilty of (III.4.1-3)

It is worth examining, however, Richard III's elusive nature. Being pragmatic, *par excellence,* he plays on the court's sympathetic feelings and his subjects' loyalty. king Richard does not slacken his efforts to display a heroic image of himself, a would-be kingdom's savior. He genuinely manifests skills of fitting into any situation with wit and intellect, something that those around him fail to perform. Even though he realizes that it is safer and wiser for a king to be more "feared"

than "loved", he tries to cutely exhibit the humane side in him trying to put in evidence Machiavelli's doctrine of the necessity of a ruler to win the support of all and avert any issue which might incur the hatred of his people (Machiavelli. 1986, p.149). In so doing, "Richard the master of palace politics does everything possible to prevent himself from attaining his broad base in popular support, which in England was manifested in the strength of the nobility" (Wheeler, 1971, p.310). Commenting upon King Richard's "Machiavellian" conduct, Moseley writes:

> The opposite of a true King is the tyrant, for whom power and its exercise is merely selfish. Richard as King demonstrates in his tyranny the true nature of Machiavellian ambition and ignoring of the moral law, and as we have seen, it is when he became King that he ceases to personate; he shows what he personally is. (Moseley, 1989, p.78.)

Machiavellian Even in Courtship

It is ironic to find out that King Richard is even Machiavellian, not only in world politics, but also in matters of love and feelings. The man who looks physically "repulsive" for women has his own bewitching secrets which he genuinely displays to gain more power and awe among the nearest to him. Act I, scene 2, records one of the most influential scenes of Richard III's manipulative manners. He wittingly steals the glamour of Anne's dark heart and takes total hold of her mind. Killing her husband is barely the last stage of his scheme. Richard III goes on tampering with her feelings magnifying her beauty while condemning her for his demeanor. Indeed, it is Anne's fairy charm that causes him to murder her husband. Therefore, he is not to blame while she is the one to bear the contempt of this crime.

> Your beauty was the cause of that effect:
> Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep
> To undertake the death of all the world,
> So I might live one hour in your sweet bosom (I.2.126-129).

Richard III claims that his outrageous deed was nothing but an act of love for the Queen, that he rid himself of her husband in order to ally with her. His conspicuous dedication leaves no room for any doubt for poor Anne whose wrath gradually faded out that he is truly infatuated by her charm. The scene reaches its apogee when in a highly romantic move, he hands her his sword offering his chest for her in retaliation. Overtaken by his ferric words, Anne replies, "Though I wish thy

death, / I will not be thy executioner" (I.1.172-173). Following what Richard III regards as a 'conquest' of her mind and heart, he slips his ring into her finger proposing to her and making an affirmation that he cannot live without her love. Of Richard's masterful and playful manners Keeton writes,

> Richard has mastered the Machiavellian technique. It also strikingly illustrates the fact that although everything which Richard does is evil, and although his appearance is repulsive (…) he is nevertheless generally trusted, has a reputation for blunt honesty and fidelity, and even has made himself attractive to women. (Keeton, 1967, p.330.)

Lady Anne Neville, whom Richard III courts, is, surprisingly, Prince Edward's widow and the daughter-in-law of the late King Henry VI, whose Richard is thought to have murdered. It is still a puzzle how Anne, who was made a victim because of King Richard's despicable machinations easily succumbs to a man she formerly described in Act I, scene 2 as "foul devil", "a dreadful minister of Hell". Though she recognizes her foe's murderous schemes against her husband and father-in-law, still she falls into his emotional trap. Anne utterly succumbs to the enchantment of Richard and his presence that she agrees to marry him. Even worse, Richard III courts Anne in front of Henry VI's corpse and at the height of her melancholy. Anne was the only one to walk in the funerals of her father-in-law, Henry VI, and lead him to his last place while mourning him. Suddenly in the middle of her bleakness and heartache, she switches from a sad mourner to a joyful lover whose heart is beaming with love for her victimizer. Unable to resist Richard's charms, she finds herself totally under his spell. The courting scene puts in evidence Richard III's masterful skills, a man with towering dexterity and cleverness capable of turning agony into brilliant deals which he best uses to achieve his ends. Because Lady Neville has some affiliation with the killed king, Henry VI, Richard outweighs her with his gentility and softness to obtain what he cherishes the most: the throne. Even after his presumed killing of her, he turns to his niece young Elizabeth to bewitch her, creating one of the most notorious images enveloping him, added to his already infamous act of murdering his nephews, that of incest. Yet, to all his avidity and thirst to wear the crown, Richard III manages in the courtship scene to display another important feature of him: of persuasion. Snatching the attention of a recent widow while being totally heart-broken, immensely hurt and betrayed, and deeply tortured by the departure of her dearest ones is an affair hardly to be

redeemed. In the midst of her torn being, Richard III towers over his masculine competencies by bringing some light to her dim soul. "In spite of his deformity", Keeton writes, "almost everyone falls victim to his charm of manner and persuasive tongue" (Keeton, 1967, p.331). Richard, famous for his rapacity and ruthefulness, has now turned into a docile lamb flirting with the woman he just caused her the greatest pain. Shakespeare, via this scene, unfolds a new Richard III, rare to see, running opposite to the image the reader has already shaped in mind about him.

That Richard III declares a "psychological" victory over Lady Anne by seducing her first and having her succumb to his whims tells a lot about a king closer to the Machiavellian school of thought than any other king that the British Monarch witnessed. Richard's glory is first and foremost a challenge for himself and a defeat for the popular mind that he was not born to please women, a complex that he carried all along his life and which made him as ferocious as a fox. Richard brutally shows his claws when he unveils his spurious intentions proudly stating,

> Was ever woman in this humour wooed?
> Was ever woman in this humour won?
> I'll have her, but I will not keep her long.
> What, I that killed her husband and his father (I.2231-234)

A Misleading Eloquent Speaker

The importance of rhetoric to Renaissance men in general and to rulers in particular was of paramount importance. Richard III not only proves to be a diplomatic manipulator in political issues, but also a manipulator of feelings marvelously playing upon words, an excellent orator, capable of persuading his adversaries in the most unexpected manners. In Act III, scene 5, he splendidly earns the mayor's trust convincing him of the necessity of executing Hastings even if the latter has not been proved, "a traitor", in order to enact peace in the kingdom. Later, with the help of Buckingham, he eloquently persuades the people to crown him a king while paradoxically denying any aspiration to become a ruler. He says,

> If I should be? I had rather be a pedlar.
> Far be it from my heart, the thought thereof (I.3.147)

In a very semblable manner, Richard III plays the victim in front of Queen Elizabeth who had always been aware of his double demeanor and skeptical manners. She realizes that she is a hampering stone on his road towards the crown

because of her two young princes. She fearlessly faces him and fiercely protects her sons from a potential threat. In Act I, scene 3, Richard, who wishing to get rid of Clarence tries to reverse the whole situation by accusing her of the same indictment. Her dead king husband along with her brother had previously fought for the House of Lancaster in the anterior war, thus giving a more plausible reason for involving her in an imminent crime. He, boldly, reminds her of his loyalty towards him, implicitly, insinuating that he would be free of any charge upon his death while he was secretly hiding in his pocket an execution warrant soon to be enacted by the Tower murderers.

Once again, this scene manifests Richard's Machiavellian portrait, a potent man capable of reversing the course of things even when he is held accomplice in a particular crime. Richard III's proficiency in feigning what he is not, in making appear what is not real, his art of persuading others when proof is almost existent, his capacity to turn foes into the best allies, is one of the most bewildering aspects of him. Being a talented actor, after getting the attendees to believe in what he said, he soaringly says:

> And thus I clothe my naked villainy
> With odd old ends stol'n forth of holy writ,
> And seem a saint when most I play the devil (III.I.336-338)

As soon as the news of Clarence's death spread in the court, Richard III wittingly finds fault with the king for Clarence's vanishing and talently plays the political moralist.

> But he (poor man) by your first order died,
> And that a wing'd Mercury did bear;
> Some tardy cripple bare the countermand,
> That came too lag to see him buried (II.1.89-92)

Richard III's words in front of the Mayor of London and the citizens sound religiously-laden. He compares his future plight to that of Jesus Christ to raise sympathy among all and to manifest the religious side within him, which he knows would give comfort and peace among his people. According to Lyons, the language of Richard III bears images of Christian endurance.

> He suggests that the 'burden' of kingship which he is reluctantly agreeing to assume is a cross which he has to bear, like his hunchback, or that he is like the emblem representing religious Hope as a man with Fortune's wheel

> strapped to his back, who walks along, doubled over by his burden, yet supported by his staff of Hope. (Lyons, 1978, p.23.)

A son of a king and a prince born and raised in a castle where all the political debates take place and secrets are hidden behind the closed doors of castles, Richard III as a shrewd character seems to have understood all the political game. What makes a ruler successful in the eyes of his people is to show them what they yearn to see and, on this basis, he acts accordingly. He speaks the words the court is thirsty to hear and proudly displays what it long to see. Only through these manners, would it be possible for the new king to win the trust and love of all. Richard III does not hesitate to seize any occasion to prove the opposite of what the rest of the court might think of him. He perfectly grasps the gaze of others and what it means. He strongly feels that he is abhorred and discarded among all those surrounding him. The only man who used to back him in bitter and joyful times; his dearest father and companion was gone. Now, he has to endure it all alone sealing himself to a fate where only foxes can survive in a vile game. When times become most cruel for him, only a "fitting" play could be his unique savior and this play lies in showing what he inherently hides.

Act III, as events reach the peak, marks the most Machiavellian manoeuvres of Richard III who is about to be named king. Always oscillating between the 'apparent' praiseworthy and the contemptible 'hidden', he designs a scene ornamented with Christian elements and fraught with the smell of religiosity in order to appear most chaste and devout, a "saint", while what he is playing again is "the devil" (I.3.337). Buckingham, in the presence of Richard III, eager to give a pious impression in front of the Mayor exhorts,

> Two props of virtue (in reference to the clergymen standing by Richard) for a Christian prince,
> to stay him from the fall of vanity;
> And see a book of prayer in his hand
> True ornaments to see a holy man (III.7.97-100).

It is worth noting that the ambivalence between semblance and substance has been a recurrent motif throughout the play. Richard III knocked all down: enemies and even allies. Buckingham, his cousin and most faithful companion, was not exempt from Richard's conspiracies and even his killing of the young princes did not bring him any favor after all the risky concessions and sacrifice he

made bringing his life to ultimate danger. Of his relationship to Richard III, Buckingham says,

> We know each other's faces; for our hearts,
> he knows no more of mine than I of yours;
> Or I of his, my lord, than you of mine (III.4.11-13)

Fearless in blood and dauntless in thinking and conduct, he plays it very well against the most astute and artful characters in the play. He feigns goodness and virtue to all while he harbors evil deep inside. A puzzling character to be more than questioned by both readers and critics alike, Richard III seems to be the most transparent yet impenetrable character of all of Shakespeare's heroes. However rascal he might be, he manages to win the trust of others. His enemies call him, "bottled spider," an "abortive, rooting hog," and a "poisonous bunchbacked toad" and to all these curses, Richard III exercises a compelling charm and a great appeal to the public thanks to his cleverness, wit, and dark humor. He is aware that, "The key to success is to maintain a harmony between the quality of one's time, the quality of general time, one's temperament and humor, and one's actions" (Parel, 1992, p.76). When the hired murders promise to make Clarence suffer, he replies: "I like you lads" (I.3.30). Richard III seems to perfectly understand that wearing a mask is an unavoidable tool against all the storms he can go through and he brilliantly succeeds in his attempts. He knows that what people commit to is what shows to them as the heart remains a secret place, hard to unlock. About this Machiavelli writes in Chapter XVIII of *The Prince*, "Men in general judge by their eyes rather than by their hands; because everyone is in a position to watch, few are in a position to come in close touch with you. Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are." (Machiavelli, 1985, p.72.)

The Machiavellian tenet is constructed upon the idea of shaping a successful leader who is not necessarily loved, popular, and just. Instead, a dynamic leader should be endowed with the characteristic traits of manipulation, wit, and intelligence that help him stand in the face of all crises. Shakespeare brewed Richard III as a reflective mirror of Machiavelli's doctrine. Richard perfectly fits into this role. Being inventive, soulful, with a highly charismatic profile, he seemingly spreads a message of security and protection to all, while he does not flicker or pauses to think twice about any man posing a threat in his route. Devoid of any friends, he even uses his family members and turns them into preys when they challenge his goals. For the

sake of his own privileges, Richard is willing to turn the castle into a bloodbath and his kins into scapegoats while simultaneously maintaining high degrees of fake morality. He is convinced that only deception and craftiness, could he be where he first planned. Richard's realization in Act V, scene 6 that "conscience is but a word that cowards use" sums up his restricted vision and speaks up an amoral thinking. Through deceit and craftiness, he becomes a good student of Machiavel or most probably even his teacher reversing roles.

Very persuasive, though, he feigns to be innocent and protective; the seeker of England's goodness and the implacable heir of goodwill to the kingdom's past historical triumphs. He lies to the Mayor of London and pretends to be a holy man to seek gratification and esteem while he is 'out of joint' when morality and virtue are at play. For Richard III, religion in general and virtue in particular were a true hamper to achieve his ends. Obsessed by power, he saw it his duty to stand up in the face of any obstacle, even if this means standing against religion itself. Moral imperatives have no place in politics and in order to survive among wolves trying to snatch the English crown from every side, it is a 'must' to defend oneself and one's interests at all costs and by all ferocious means. Walking in the footsteps of Machiavelli, Richard falls victim to his never-ceasing ambition eventually crossing a line between *virtu* and ambition.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Richard III remains one of the most memorable characters in world drama and not only Elizabethan drama. That parallels be drawn between one of England's most notorious rulers, Richard III, and Italy's most cunning politicians and philosophers, Machiavelli, is barely coincidental. Richard III bears a tremendous amount of Machiavellian traits. He preaches most of his doctrine both in theory and practice. Machiavelli's recommendations in his everlasting constitutional work, *The Prince* and Richard III's political strategies have a lot in common than in part. Richard III mirrors Machiavellian manoeuvres in English Renaissance kingship. Yet, to all this verisimilitude to Machiavelli's *The Prince*, it is still debatable whether Shakespeare's portrait of Richard III was not a severe criticism for the whole philosophy of the Florentine political thinker. At the end of the play, Richard III was finally doomed to a tragic end despite his adoption of the

Machiavellian theory supposed to make a ruler a strategic and felicitous leader. In Richard's case, the dream of winning the crown was brought to hands but, unfortunately, did not persist. The Machiavellian fox won neither the support of his countrymen, nor survived the attack of Lord Richmond who went on to become the first Tudor King. He died alone as he had always been. On the eve of his final combat in Bosworth battlefield, shaken after a nightmare he had, he says: "I shall despair. There is no creature loves me / And if I die, no soul will pity me" (V.3.200). Worse than that, he plunged his kingdom back into a new civil war bringing about the collapse of the House of York. It appears that Shakespeare's flawed character is a key to deciphering Machiavelli's failing ideology about the infallible ruler. Shakespeare seems to deliver a message that tyrants like Richard III are not destined to last, that their itinerary is fragile and that Machiavelli's plea for the shortcomings of Christianity on the basis that it poses a threat to Man's pursuit of Roman worldly great achievements proved to be a total fiasco. In so doing, Shakespeare rejects the Machiavellian political enterprise and its short sightedness all together in the name of a despotic ruler "so well fitted to Hitler and Stalin alike" (Heller, 2002, p.253).

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Ricardo III: uma raposa maquiavélica?

RESUMO

Entre todos os personagens sórdidos e desprezíveis de Shakespeare, o Rei Ricardo III continua sendo um dos monarcas mais odiados e debatidos da Inglaterra. Ricardo III foi retratado tanto no drama elisabetano quanto no jacobino, no palco e em livros históricos, na memória popular inglesa e pela maioria dos pesquisadores como uma raposa maquiavélica: um retrato puro de um monstro sanguinário da tragédia de vingança à maneira de Sêneca, representado como um governante oportunista e traiçoeiro, capaz de esmagar qualquer parente ou rival em potencial que esteja de olho na coroa. Vale lembrar que os relatos pejorativos que mancharam a reputação de Ricardo III por séculos e que foram transmitidos por diferentes épocas na Inglaterra não são sem razão. Este artigo visa lançar um olhar analítico sobre o Rei Ricardo III como uma raposa maquiavélica. Tenta desvendar as circunstâncias em que seu nome e *status* foram notórios, para em seguida tornarem-se um "clichê" aplicável a todo comportamento sórdido.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:
Ricardo III
Maquiavel
Monarquia
Poder
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