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ENGLISH B
EXTENDED ESSAY
Category 3

Analysis of Shakespeare's Machiavellian character Richard III

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Research Question:

How does William Shakespeare portray Machiavellianism in the play Richard III?

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Introduction

Niccolò Machiavelli, the author of the “The Prince”, was one of the most important influential political thinkers of the Renaissance era. Machiavellianism is a term that emerged from "The Prince", in which Machiavelli describes how to acquire and maintain political power.

Machiavellianism turns into a term used to define a personality trait characterized by cunning, manipulation, and the use of any means necessary to achieve one's political ends (Judge, Timothy A., 867). Machiavellianism, later began to be used in the fields of psychology and psychiatry. In psychology it refers to the person's character which always focuses on their own interests. Machiavellians are first and foremost manipulative: they use, deceive and shortchange others. They always take and even seek the opportunity to benefit from misleading others (Sutton & Keogh 2000, 70). They often do not share information with others unless it is in their favor to do so. They may manipulate otherwise innocuous information and can be very crafty about taking information out of context. Machiavellians are sensitive to the power dynamics in social contexts and can switch between cooperative and competitive tactics. (Nafeesah) In contemporary psychology, Machiavellianism is considered as part of the ‘Dark Triad’, being one of three personality traits that also includes narcissism and sociopathy / psychopathy. The Dark Triad traits (i.e., narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) have been associated with the desire for power, status, and social dominance in the workplace, and these desires have been hypothesized to draw Dark Triad individuals towards occupations affording such outcomes. (AnnaVedel, Dorthe K.Thomsen, 86) Narcissistic personality disorder is a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others. But behind this mask of extreme confidence lies a fragile self-esteem that's vulnerable to the slightest criticism. (Mayo Clinic). Psychopathy refers to the personality disposition to charm, manipulate, and ruthlessly exploit other persons. Psychopathic persons are lacking in conscience and feeling for others; they selfishly take what they want and do as they please without the slightest sense of guilt or regret. (Hare Robert D.) With each of these traits alone making someone difficult to be around, all three occurring in one person can make for someone that is quite dangerous to other people's mental wellbeing. Despite seemingly obvious connections between the three ‘dark triad’ traits and the prevalence of one trait often occurring with the other two, research has yet to be done to concretely prove a correlation. (Jacobson)

Machiavelli's "The Prince", still widely referenced in political literature and the subject of psychological research, was published in 1532 and its distribution to Europe took place later that year. The oldest printed edition of the book in English dates back to 1640. But before this date, it is understood that the original and its translations were known and read in England. This book has influenced not only royal rulers or politicians, but also playwrights, novelists, and anyone interested in the arts. We cannot know that Shakespeare read Machiavelli's seminal work "The Prince". However, it can be said that he built Richard III in accordance with this definition.

Shakespeare mentioned the will to power in many of his works. He narrated how people changed for power, what they gave up and how they became a tyrant. The will to power is among the main motives of his characters in his plays especially on politics and kingdom. The cruelest of these characters, the one who is known as a full Machiavellian, is undoubtedly Richard III. In Shakespeare's play, it tells the story of Richard III (the king who is his elder brother) taking the throne by killing all heirs after his death. We come across dark triads quite often in Richard III. Considering Richard's physical deformities, his narcissistic character can be viewed with suspicion. In fact, Shakespeare depicted Richard III as slightly hunched over and with a glitch in his left arm. Richard III's narcissistic character does not come from admiration for his own beauty. It is mostly because he sees himself as superior to other people. We also observe psychopathy as a morbid personality trait in Shakespeare's character Richard III. Shakespeare portrayed Richard very well as a person who lacks empathy. In the play, especially when he sends his brother to death and orders the murder of his younger nephews (this is still doubtful as a historical reality), his psychopathic character becomes evident. It is clear that the "Dark Triad" in question is shown in Richard III, sometimes very powerfully and sometimes implicitly. However, for the sake of simplicity, mostly, the question of "How does William Shakespeare portray Machiavellianism in Richard III?" will be discussed in the continuation of this work.

The purpose of the study is to examine the Machiavellian character of Richard created by Shakespeare in the play "The Tragedy of King Richard the Third". Some scenes and dialogues in which the character's Machiavellian behavior emerges will be detailed. In particular, Richard III's motivation and the tactics he used while manipulating other characters will be analyzed with quotations from the play. The plot of the Richard III play will not be examined, but the events deemed necessary in the formation of the character will be analyzed.

Motives Behind Richard III's Manipulative Machiavellian Attitudes

At the very beginning of the play, Shakespeare reveals the mood of the character and the plot. Richard is the Duke of Gloucester and the kingdom is actually far away. However, Duke of Gloucester prepares his elaborate plan on the way to the royal kingdom. He tells this plan as a monologue to the audience in the very first scene. But first, he talks about his physical deformity to clarify his own situation or to offer the rational reason why he is a (Machiavellian) villain. Of course, instead of creating a pure evil character, Shakespeare wants to present the motivation behind this character's being a villain.

“But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
I, that am rudely stamped and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time” (Shakespeare 9)

William Shakespeare portrays the Duke of Gloucester as a hunchback. As can be seen from the quote above, Duke of Gloucester (Richard III), while describing himself in the first scene, says that he was sent long before its time, like an unfinished project with physical problems and deformations. He is not at all satisfied with his physical appearance and capacity.

“That dogs bark at me as I halt by them
...
I am determined to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.” (Shakespeare 9)

In this part of his tirade, Duke of Gloucester, by describing his situation even more dramatically, almost expects empathy from the audience. He says that even the dogs he passed because of his physical anomaly barked at him. He regrets that he cannot do anything but watch his own formless shadow. For this reason, he must do more lofty things to hold on to life.

Thus, why Richard III wanted to be king and why he turned into a villain character is conveyed in his own words and from his own point of view. Shakespeare wanted to emphasize as much as possible the (problematic) physical features of Richard III so that his villain was believable. This was perhaps the only scene where the audience could empathize with Richard III. It is very difficult for an ugly and disabled person to be accepted and loved by others. In Richard's case, more "power" was the only thing that would make him happy and prove his existence to other people.

Outlining the reasons behind his villain character, the Duke of Gloucester begins to explain his plan as follows:

“Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the King
In deadly hate, the one against the other;” (Shakespeare 12)

His plan, which he started to tell the audience, is like a manifesto of Machiavellianism. He will reach his plan step by step and insidiously, like a classical Machiavellian. In "Prince" Machiavelli describes the process of obtaining and retaining power by the ruler. He did not touch upon the question of why power is sought. Richard's motivation is entirely within the framework of "will to power". Focusing on this issue, Nietzsche introduces the concept of "will to power" as follows: "that the will to power is the primitive form of affect, that all other affects are only developments of it; that it is notably enlightening to posit power in place of individual happiness (after which every living thing is supposed to be striving): there is a striving for power, for an increase of power ;-pleasure is only a symptom of the feeling of power attained, a consciousness of a difference; that all driving force is will to power, that there is no other physical, dynamic or psychic force except this." (Kaufmann, Walter, and R. Hollingdale 366)

With "will to power" as his main motivation, Richard puts his detailed plan into action. His brother, King Edward, is ill. If he dies, the person most likely to take the throne is his other brother, Duke of Clarence (George). In this case, he must first eliminate his beloved brother and he must do this not by himself, but by the king's hand.

Deception and Manipulation

Shakespeare's Richard III deftly uses the techniques of deception and manipulation to outwit or take his opponents, especially in Act 1 and Act 2. The main theme here is the use of language to achieve political power. Richard's skill at using words allows him to manipulate, confuse and control those around him.

Deception of Duke of Clarence

Richard puts her elaborate two-layered deception plan into action. He will advance his plan by deceiving first the king and then his brother. Richard starts a rumor like a prophecy convincing King Edward that his brother Duke of Clarence will be very dangerous for him. He says to the King:

“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”
Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.” (Shakespeare 12)

This rumor spread by Richard tempts the king and has his brother Clarence (Clarences' other name is George) imprisoned. Richard, approaches his brother (Clarence), whom the king has imprisoned in the tower, in friendship. This approach is a classic Machiavellian deception. One of the most famous quotes of Niccolò Machiavelli is: “the one who deceits will always find those who allow themselves to be deceived.” (Machiavelli 146). Richard makes Clarence feel that he is on his side and supporting him. Thus, Clarence is deceived and adopts Richard as his closest ally. However, Richard wants to mislead his brother and give him an apparent (but not real) enemy. Thus, he will both prevent himself from being suspected and put his own enemy (Lady Grey, Queen Elizabeth) in a difficult situation.

He points to the person responsible for all this:
“Why, this it is when men are ruled by women.
'Tis not the King that sends you to the Tower.
My Lady Grey his wife, Clarence, 'tis she
That tempers him to this extremity.” (Shakespeare 14)

This is an obvious Machiavellian statement. He presents his own action as if someone else did it, and at the same time sets an enemy as a target. Thus, he showed that he was very close to Clarence and supported him, but also showed his loyalty to the king. If things go wrong, Richard will be able to look like an ally on both sides.

Richard supports Clarence while he is in prison and gives hope that he will save him. In this turmoil, Clarence sees Richard as his savior. When his executioners come, he tells them that he is under the protection of his brother Richard and that Richard can give as much money as they want. (Shakespeare 79-89) Clarence always has a hope of salvation until the executioners tell him that it was Richard who sent them.

Manipulation of Lady Anne

Richard III's Machiavellian manipulative skills are clearly visible in his dealings with Lady Anne. In Act 1 Scene 2 of the play Richard comes for Lady Anne while she mourns her dead husband Henry, who had been killed by Richard III. (Shakespeare 23-37) At this point, it is essential to describe the scene in order to understand the success of Richard's manipulation. When Richard enters, Anne insults him, as she swells in fury. Her style is initially aggressive and dreadful and however her warrior-like stance is quickly disappearing once Richard begins to talk. In this manipulation, Richard does anything to deceive Anne (just as a Machiavellian prince would). Anne's greatest conflict actually lies with Richard's actions; he was the one who murdered her husband and father-in-law, however Richard refuses to accept the blame. He even attempts to use flattery in order to woe Anne, explaining how her majestic beauty was the initial cause of such crimes:

“Your beauty was the cause of that effect

Your beauty, that did haunt me in my sleep” (Shakespeare 36)

Firstly however, his kind words are not enough to deceive Lady Anne completely. Lady Anne is still aware of her dark deeds and narcissistic personality and therefore does not break her defenses so easily. But as Richard III speaks, he manages to impress Lady Anne with her ability to use words. Here, Richard successfully applies the tactics of rapprochement and, if necessary, lying, as Machiavelli stated in "Prince". He finally manages to soften Lady Anne by putting his life in her hands. Tactics work and Lady Anne hesitates and drops the dagger, commanding Richard to rise up. It is at this moment that Richard achieves his victory.

After Richard III succeeds in using his Machiavellian strategy to deceive Lady Anne, he tells the audience his real aim.

“I’ll have her, but I will not keep her long.

What, I that killed her husband and his father,” (Shakespeare 40)

Here, Richard openly confesses the deception and manipulation he has just made. This “Act” is similar to Machiavelli’s step-by-step explanation of what the prince should do on the way to power in "The Prince".

After marrying Lady Anne, he continues his insidious plan to become king. He mercilessly kills anyone who gets in his way. When Edward IV dies in April 1483, Richard becomes Lord Protector of the kingdom for Edward's son and successor, the 12-year-old Edward V. With his cousin Buckingham, he spreads rumors that the children are illegitimate. (Shakespeare’s Richard has often resorted to this method, as spreading rumors is an effective method of deception.) In “The Prince”, Machiavelli recommends the use of violent remedies against those who block political power and Richard does so. (Machiavelli 68-78) Immediately after the rumors he spread, Richard orders the murder of the princes, who are the only obstacle in front of him.

“[The prince] should appear all mercy,
all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion”

(Machiavelli, 71)

Religion and Power

In Act 3, scene 7 of the play, we witness how Richard uses religion to become the king of England. Richard has to convince the mayor and the people of London. For this, he must pretend as religious, forgiving and soft-hearted. He devises a plan with his followers. Before meeting the mayor, his followers tell Mayor, how religious Richard is. The scene set by his follower Buckingham who is Richard’s key accomplice on his way to the throne. The main reason Buckingham sided with Richard is self-interest. Buckingham expects to expand its territory and receive various concessions after Richard becomes king. Richard sees these personal ambitions of Buckingham and plays on it. This is clearly a Machiavellian intervention. He identifies the desires of the person he wants to be close to, and implies that he can help him achieve those desires. Richard says or implies many times that if he becomes king, he will make Buckingham his right-hand man, giving him land and concessions. Thus, he makes Buckingham a useful servant to use on his way to his kingdom. He promises Buckingham as follows:

“And look when I am king, claim thou of me
The Earldom of Hereford, and all the movables” (Shakespeare 145)

His followers, especially Buckingham, play the scene that shows Richard as a religious man, his eye on God, not the throne. In Chapter eighteen of his work, the Prince, Machiavelli has a similar reflection: “[The prince] should appear all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion. And nothing is more important than this last quality. Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands, because seeing is given to everyone, touching a few. Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are” (Machiavelli, 71). This description of Machiavelli coincides with Shakespeare's scene. The power of a religious ruler, who treats everyone with compassion and has no eye for worldly blessings, is undoubtedly very effective. Shakespeare also portrays this situation very well. When the Mayor arrives to meet with Richard, Catesby (supporter of Richard) tells him:

“He (Richard) is within, with two right reverend fathers,

Divinely bent to meditation,

And in no worldly suits

would he be moved to draw him from his holy exercise” (Shakespeare 182).

Buckingham waits for the perfect time and approaches to the mayor and tells:

“Two props of virtue for a Christian prince,

To stay him from the fall of vanity;

And, see, a book of prayer in his hand,

True ornaments to know a holy man” (Shakespeare 184).

Shakespeare gives “props” a double meaning. The bishops are “propping” Richard up in the eyes of the public, but also, they are literally staged props. If the audience perceive the meaning of props as “stage props”, can realize Richard presenting himself as something he is not. This is one of the turning points of the play. Buckingham makes a persuasive and long speech in which he praises Richard’s Christian morals. After his speech he immediately suggests that Richard should become the next King of England. At this point Richard plays his part and refuses the offer of the throne,

“Alas, why would you heap this care on me? I am unfit for state and majesty.

I do beseech you, take it not amiss;

I cannot, nor I will not, yield to you.” (Shakespeare 192)

Richard pretends not to want the kingdom and tries to make himself look religious. His aim here is to consolidate his position and hide his previous crimes. He knows that he will be stronger if he comes to the kingdom not eagerly but with the will of others.

Buckingham then performs another long speech advising and urging Richard to take the throne.

Religious Richard (plays his part very well) eventually yields to insistent demand and accepts the invitation to become England’s next King. Then Buckingham announces:

“Then I salute you with this royal title:

Long live Richard, England’s worthy king!” (Shakespeare 197)

In the first three acts of the play, Shakespeare shows Richard ascending the throne and seizing power using Machiavellian tactics. But after ascending to the throne, we see that Richard is stricken with power. Now, instead of using those around him with subtle tactics and consolidating his throne, he has turned into a ruder and crueler person. Machiavelli notes in Chapter 18 of “The Prince” that a ruler should firstly try to do good “but know how to enter into evil, when forced by necessity” (Machiavelli, 70). In short, according to Machiavelli, ruler can use cruel methods to obtain and maintain power when conditions and necessities arise. But

Richard's cruelty (especially after becoming the King) is far beyond Machiavelli's definition. Richard becomes an increasingly wicked ruler and loses his support. In the struggle to seize power, the power has taken over Richard.

Conclusion

In this study, how Shakespeare portrayed the Machiavellian character of Richard III is examined. For this, the similarities between Niccolò Machiavelli's descriptions in "The Prince" and Shakespeare's character Richard were scrutinized.

The play, *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third*, based on actual history. Therefore, the historical events in Richard's succession to the throne are very close to the truth. However, Shakespeare's presentation of this path and the lines he wrote to Richard make the character look more sinister than he was. Shakespeare presents Richard III, whose reign was short-lived, as one of the cruelest Machiavellian characters ever lived. While doing this, he successfully adapted the manipulation and persuasion techniques used in the work of Machiavelli, who lived before him, to the character of Richard. Of course, we cannot know whether Shakespeare had read "The Prince". However, we can easily claim that the character created by Shakespeare in "The Tragedy of King Richard the Third" acted like a Machiavellian, at least in the first three acts. Shakespeare's lines to the character of Richard are clever, deceptive, and full of fancy words. Despite his physical shortcomings, Shakespeare's Richard appears as a character who has a great command of the language and knows how to influence people. For this reason, the character of Richard, portrayed by Shakespeare, has no difficulty in deceiving people in order to achieve his political goals.

Although Shakespeare's handling of Richard III is in line with historical facts, his portrayal of him as a cruel Machiavellian created a controversy. The main criticism of Shakespeare is that he wrote the play during the Tudor dynasty, and he portrayed Richard III as a more villain character than he was, to benefit from the Tudor Dynasty. In 2012, King Richard's bones were found in a tomb under a park in Leicester, and the controversy reignited. Was it the resurrection of the devil, or was it the will of an innocent king for justice? The British are still debating this issue. But beyond these questions, it is an indisputable fact that, in the perception of many people, Richard III is one of the most villainous Machiavellian characters in history. This is undoubtedly due to Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard III as a ruthless Machiavellian in his play "The Tragedy of King Richard the Third".

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