

Shakespeare on Machiavelli: The Prince in Richard III

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Shakespeare on Machiavelli: The Prince in Richard III

According to many, Shakespeare intentionally portrays Richard III in ways that would have the world hail him as the ultimate Machiavel. This build up only serves to further the dramatic irony when Richard falls from his throne. The nature of Richard's character is key to discovering the commentary Shakespeare is delivering on the nature of tyrants. By setting up Richard to be seen as the ultimate Machiavel, only to have him utterly destroyed, Shakespeare makes a dramatic commentary on the [frailty](#) of tyranny and such men as would aspire to tyrannical rule.

From the outset of the play, it is obvious that Richard subscribes to the majority of the Machiavellian principles. Certainly, he is not ashamed or afraid to plot heinous murder, and he does so with an ever-present false front. "I do mistake my person all this while,"¹ he muses, plotting Anne's death minutes after having won her hand. He will not even entertain the ideas in public, demanding they "Dive...down to [his] soul."² He knows that he must be cunning and soulless to succeed in his tasks. Richard also knows it is essential to guard against the hatred of the populace, as Machiavelli warned.

He breeds anger in Clarence and the populace, not of himself, but of Edward and the rightful heirs. "We are not safe, Clarence, we are not safe,"³ he exclaims as his brother is hauled away to the tower. He preys on the "hateful luxury And bestial [appetite](#)"⁴ of the citizenry, catapulting himself to the thrown over a heap of bodies: deaths that [hang](#) on his head. But, it is Richard's attitude that his end goal of the crown justifies the murderous means that so closely links ...

... middle of paper ...

...t meet Shakespeare's demands the chances are slim. He must be a paradox: amoral and god fearing.

1 Act I. Sc. II. Ln. 257

2 Act I. Sc. I. Ln. 40

3 Act I. Sc. I. Ln. 70

4 Act III. Sc. V. Ln. 79-80

5 Act IV. Sc. II. Ln. 60-5

6 Act I. Sc. II. Ln. 125-8

7 Act IV. Sc. IV. Ln. 51-2

8 Act IV. Sc. IV. Ln. 397-400

9 Act V. Sc. III. Ln. 179

10 Act V. Sc. III. Ln. 201-2

11 Act I. Sc. I. Ln. 1

12 Act I. Sc. I. Ln. 20

13 Act I. Sc. I. Ln. 28, 30

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