Bayan College International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research
(A peer reviewed international Journal)

ISSN (Online)- 2710-2432
ISSN (Print)-2710-2424
Vol-1-Issue-2; June-2021

"Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.": The Aesthetics of Villainy in Shakespeare's *Richard III*

Mr. Moez Marrouchi
Bayan College, English Studies Department
moez@bayancollege.edu.om

Abstract:
Plato informs us that villainy routes to vice while beauty begets virtue. This is quite necessary for his ideal city. Aristotle, however, mentions that the highly poetic representations of objects, good or evil, routes to beauty and enjoyment. Heinous things / people in this sense turn out to be pleasurable, thus, good. The Defense of Poesy by Sir Philip Sidney favors Aristotle's view where aesthetics and the beauty of poetry are so intertwined. The poet dooms to be immortal while the historian dooms to be mortal. Shakespeare's Richard III reflects the debate to raise further questions in relation to ethics and aesthetics. This article expands upon the aesthetics of villainy in the play while analyzing Richard's aspects of ugliness. The article strives to show that the audience chooses him for his poetic abilities, but also for his physical deformity and moral bankruptcy. And in doing so, it analyzes the way villainy and theatricality route to beauty and immortality.

Keywords: *Villainy, Pretense, Ethics, Love, Poetry, Aesthetics*

Introduction:

Richard III, Shakespeare's next historical tragedy after *Titus Andronicus*, is no doubt another mystery on the mysterious character of Richard the third, the only and last notherner king of England. Wicked in personality and deformed in body, he tells the audience about his intentions from the outset not to be a noble person and to strive for proving he is the wicked that can never change into the good where Webster's Lodovico is more apparent than Shakespeare's Iago or Marlowe's Barabas as Bloom (2010) has stated. Henry VI in its three parts informs us more about his early years. While the opening soliloquy confronts us with a wholly sinister person who is ready for all types of devilish stratagems and all types of diabolic deeds (Seimon, 2009), going through the aforementioned plays is helpful in both picturing well the Wars of the Roses era, an intricate yet relevant milieu for *Richard III*and also in tracing the protagonist's whole life-journey. The filthy hero who has already set his mind to killing tends to be the outcome of a seed found earlier in the trilogy. Lull (2009) has reasonably stated that the play continues the narrative of a preceding work to be its quite natural sequel. Shakespeare must have had in mind the image of Richard in his earlier materials. *Henry VI, Part 2* introduces this character as a violent soldier who is at all into usurping power, by eliminating Henry VI, and *Henry VI, Part 3* exposes him as both violent and cunning.

While Edward is not courageous enough to know about the death of his father for the horrifying scenes, Richard the third asks for further details with regard to his unnatural murder. His duty as son is to take revenge where there is no room for tears. They are for weak babies, certainly not for him. Revenge tends to be his motif towards the dramatic action that takes him to rise and later to fall. It looks that the protagonist is into calling the audience to both acknowledge his courage in action and appreciate his skills in cheating. While tears are associated with weak babies, revenge is assigned for the braves, and he introduces himself as brave enough for the purpose, as he has made it firm and final to give no room for love while striving to make himself the king. Richard's

ISSN (Online)- 2710-2432
ISSN (Print)-2710-2424
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mission is to prove himself a villain and that evokes both acting aggressively and speaking cunningly.

Villainy, however, is not an end in itself; it is just legitimate means to get crowned. Ruthless though, he believes he is the only one to excel at setting his devilish stratagems and consolidate his regime while the others are but his instruments.Hicks (2019, p. 261) rightly states that "Richard's accession was achieved by a combination of secretive planning, skilful publicity, surgical violence, and the momentary deployment of overwhelming force. Only Richard himself can have planned it all, timed his coups, provided the necessary leadership and decision making." With his wish list in hand, he deliberately makes the unjustified justice, in his logic and conscience, his route for the kingship, and in doing so, he establishes himself a Machiavellian villain *par excellence*. Where his statement "Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I." (*Richard III*, V.v. 137) is fearfully intensified, to assert "I am a villain. Yet I lie. I am not." (*Richard III*, V.v. 145)and culminate in his profound insight "[a]nd if I die no soul will pity me. / And wherefore should they, since that I myself / Find in myself no pity to myself?" (*Richard III*, V.v. 156-158), the audience tends to experience the aesthetics of villainy at its best, the bitter-sweet experience of vehemently killing while accepting and appreciating that. While tracing Richard's heinous means and ends, his physical as well as spiritual deformity,this paper strives to expand upon his ornate style in speaking and persuasion, his unparalleled ways of 'loving', ruling and killing where theatricality begets beauty and good emerges from evil.

1. "[H]e is born with teeth"

In his long monologue, the audience is encountered with a sinister character that that establishes killing as the righteous means to do away with the foes. His extreme cynicism when referring to violence and counter violence in relation to his diabolic intentions introduces him as a detested figure promising but inexorable chaos and certain loss. Tracing his strange thoughts, we come to realize that, unlike Edward, who seems to honorably enjoy pretty women, he is more into theorizing for bloody stratagems, and also implementing them for the sake of the crown, than into trivial worldly matters. For him, lady Gray should not give birth to children so that his position is not threatened.Four people are ahead and nearer than him to the throne, but he has to seek all possibilities in order to overcome the difficulties.

Contemplating about the crown and what might happen during the course, striving to have it, the hero speculates to make questions and look for answers. Waiting for the natural course of events to have him the crown means losing it while planning to get that is the only and right way. His physical deformity intensifies both eagerness and theatricality; that he is badly deformed kindles his readiness to be devilish and perform accordingly. The audience follows who looks to aesthetically subvert values. Richard promises to be so hateful in deeds, intentions, and words. There is no room for family bonds where the brother is to be killed when necessary, the niece is to be taken as a wife if needed, and trust is to be given to none. His outer appearance is the way to his inner morality. Ribner (1960) informs us that Richard doesn't need to make any effort to convince the audience that he is a villain as he already bears the sign of that. His body shape does reflect that, an idea Renaissance theorist has highlighted, where the bodily deformity mirrors the soul's bankruptcy. This is the figure to promise death and chaos instead love and order. Ribner (1960) is rightful to see this character as, gradually, and also confidently, moving towards the realm of domination through killing while pouring his hateful venom into society.The point is made clear when pondering over the body of Henry:

> The midwife wondered and the women cried
> '*O, Jesus bless us, he is born with teeth!*'
> And so I was, which plainly signified

ISSN (Online)- 2710-2432
ISSN (Print)-2710-2424
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That I *should snarl and bite and play the dog.*
Then, since the heavens have shaped my body so,
Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.
I have no brother, I am like no brother.
And this word 'love', which greybeards call divine,
Be resident in men like one another
And not in me: I am myself alone.

(*3 Henry VI*, V.vi. 74-83. Italics added)

The dramatist introduces a hateful character that is reminiscent of Lorenzo in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Barabas in Christopher Marlowe *The Jew of Malta*. Despite their initial achievements, they all come to a 'beautified' confusion where alienation deepens their complexity and our sense of joy for that. Seimon (2009)highlights their ability to incite laughter as they move ahead with their tragic deeds.Epistemologically, Renaissance theorists hold the view that the outer must reflect the inner and this applies largely to Richard where his deformity emblematizes his would-be nature. This taken for granted assumption tends to fade away when evil begets good, horror begets benevolence, and hatred begets pity and sympathy. The child born with teeth, and who turns to embody ruthlessness and disgust, tends to be loved by both the audience and the characters in the play. He becomes attractive not for his fake benevolence, but for his being so bad, so ugly. Stolkin (2007, p. 7)reasons that the "play treats its evil and horrible elements as aesthetic objects capable of arousing erotic desire." The hero is a man who aspires not to be high, but to be higher at all costs and in that he proves how self-confident, he is, how strong in will he is, how intellectually powerful he is, how brave in action he is, and how malicious in protecting himself he is. Unprecedented in his sinister malevolence, Richard commits horrible crimes where his victims, instead of loathing him, willingly appreciate his deeds. The poetics of theatricality is aesthetically mixed with that of deformity to negate the epistemological principle when examining ethics in relation to aesthetics (Stolkin, 2007).

With verbal violence and intense physical force resorted to as the major means, Richard moves vehemently, yet confidently, to usurp power. The play opens with a promise to rise quickly in the course of dramatic events and as we trace the hero's intentions, and also deeds, it appears clear that seeds of self-destruction prevail. The cycle Richard has followed tends to be clever in chain; he moves with the intention to set his heinous stratagems, and later on, implements that or gets another instrument to do it for him. Kingship and elimination are so intertwined for him. Meron (1998) tells us that his nature is so deceptive that the audience at times believes his claims to respect virtues and ethics. Art emanates from his superbly implemented demonic deeds to make good emerge from evil and villainy underline the aesthetics appreciated by the audience and the reader alike.

2. The Oxymoronic Love

The what seems to be a Platonic love we are presented with in the wooing scene is meant to be misleading. Richard convinces the audience, and also Lady Anne, that beauty is what matters most for him and that her beauty causes him to get rid of her husband. Where she laments her tragey by reducing him to the level of animalism "unmannered dog, stand'st thou when I command"(*Richard III*, I. ii. 39), he fearfully, yet very beautifully, poeticizes his devilish deed "Your beauty was the cause of that effect."(*Richard III*, I. ii. 125). Her eyes are the cause of his defect. His 'readiness' to be killed by the sword he used to kill her husband "If thy revengeful heart cannot forgive,/ Lo, here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword,"(*Richard III*, I. ii. 182-183) is met with her falling off the sword. A "hero-villain and a highly active melodramatist," Bloom (2010, p. xiii) calls him at this particular stage. Her inability to do so encourages him to put a ring on her and she is entrapped. She can neither refuse the ring nor answer. Love tends to be oxymoronic where the

ISSN (Online)- 2710-2432
ISSN (Print)-2710-2424
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killer of Lady Anne's husband ironically, and also unexpectedly for her, turns out to be her great lover. On the other hand, the victims have to suffer the wrong deeds in addition to their later on unavoidable entrapment.Richard's success in convincing Lady Anne and the latter's willingness to accept his offer, after entrapment, causes the audience to appreciate his mastering of the art of villainy despite the fact that such a success would ultimately yield his downfall.In sarcastically celebrating the achievement, Richard seems to further intensify the sense of appreciation for this is but one step and many more are ahead. Though bitter and disgusting, the audience is seemingly promised to encounter other pleasurable demonic deeds"Was ever woman in this humour wooed?/ Was ever woman in this humour won?/ *I will have her, but I will not keep her long*."(*Richard III,* I. ii. 237-239. Italics added).

Queen Margaret's bitter curse "Thou-evilish marked, abortive, rooting hog,"(*Richard III,* I. iii. 226) does not prevent him from carrying on outlining his manner of dealing with his enemies "I do the wrong, and first begin to brawl."(*Richard III,* I. ii. 325). The moment the two murderers have come to kill Clarence, he starts giving them instructions to do it very quickly and not to be merciful on him. This Machiavellian villain, who hires murderers to kill and utilizes his keen insight to be politically shrewd, seems to be aware of the psychology of both his victims and instruments. Murderers are not to give chance for their victims to argue with them. There is no room for mercy or hesitation. Killing is to be done quickly and at once. This is what the two murderers have to do with Clarence as one of them stresses "Tut, tut! My lord, we will not stand to prate:/ Talkers are no good doers. Be assured./ We go to use our hands and not our tongues."(*Richard III,* I. iii. 351-353). With the killers individualized as remorseless and remorseful and the task assigned to be done with hand and not tongue, the conceptual value of love appears to be blurred; Richard is in deep love with, and quite faithful to, his diabolic tactics, definitely not pretty women.

When pathetically yelling out on the battlefield in the end "A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!"(*Richard III,* V. iv. 8), the audience understands well the king is in danger and doesn't like to leave the war field, but that is also a sign the lover is on the verge of losing his love, wicked stratagems, when facing death and is therefore ready to sacrifice his whole kingdom for a horse: Platonic love subverted in Richard's manner. In Plato's *Symposium*, Diotima clarifies, as White (2004, p. 378 / 368) pithily asserts, that the real object of love,"whatever the conscious aims of the lover (the philosopher) maybe, is not the contemplation of Beauty but the permanent possession of the good in the form of true virtue [while] its function is begetting in the beautiful."This is not the case with Richard: for him, while the real object of love is the everlasting retention of vice, its function is begetting in the ugly.Ethically, this is arrogantly horrifying with the king ready to give away his realm for a horse. Aesthetically,this creates immense pleasure seeing the devil defending his fiendish tricks. The triumph of villainy as art paradoxically urges the audience to choose the glory of the ugly over that of the beautiful.

3. Beautifying Pretense

When beauty is raised in relation to poetry, knowledge and epistemology, one is at once reminded of the old philosophical debate between Plato and Aristotle. Where Plato's ideal city requires "banning only one part of imitative poetry and preserving the poetry that imitates virtuous actions" (Espindola, 2017, p. 235)in order for harmony and virtue to prevail,suggesting thus the necessity of beauty for virtue, Aristotle's principle of mimesis, the imitation of the real world, tends to make the representation enjoyable irrespective of the objects being represented.Beauty in its positive sense is not hence an essential requirement for poetry, as we learn from his *Poetics*, since it may beautifully imitate heinous objects as in fearful tragedies.The philosopher's idea, as Ford (2015) clarifies, is to connect tragedy with epic poetry, trace their dramatic elements, and determine the beauty resulting from such a combination. It is hence clear that this embodies the delight

ISSN (Online)- 2710-2432
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emerging from poetry when poetically, and to a large extent tragically, composed regardless the objects being imitated.*The Defence of Poesy* of Sir Philip Sidney, thought to be based solely on Aristotle's *Poetics*(Lazarus, 2015), and considered as the most important document to expose the Elizabethans' reflections of ethics and aesthetics, defends poetry as much higher than history whereits beauty grabs the reader's attention while masking further beneath (a)moral truths unlike history that only recounts incidents chronologically.Sidney's *Defence* highlights the very sweetness of poetry, irrespective of the bitter realities it usually depicts, in relation to the poet's immortality: the historian is doomed to be forgotten, the poet is doomed to be remembered for ever.

Shakespeare's Richard the third fits well in such a context. As we move on reading the play, we realize that he continues to plot against his foes throughout Act three. On the one hand, Prince Edward seems to know fairly well that he is manipulating him"God keep me from false friends, but they were none."(*Richard III*, III. i.16) as he heard Richard stating that the uncles he wants are dangerous. His nephew is advised to beware their nice words for they just conceal wicked intentions. Being false relatives, Richard ironically prays to be away from them. But Richard, on the other hand, appears to be aware of the young Prince's mental ability and promises that he shall not live long "So wise so young, they say, do never live long."(*Richard III*, III. i. 79) since he is smart enough, and also dangerous enough, to convey many messages in very few words. For him, "Short summers lightly have a forward spring."(*Richard III*, III. i.94) even though he has to face a prince who is actually "Bold, quick, ingenious, forward, capable./ He is all the mother's from top to toe."(*Richard III*, III. i. 156-157). In order to get rid of Hastings in the beginning, Gray, Rivers and Vaughan later on, Richard has to diabolically, yet quite beautifully, set a plan through which he can convince both Mayor of London and people of England of the traitorous nature of Hastings, an aim that cannot be achieved without having another instrument. The following conversation clarifies well his great ability to plan and use the others as tools to carry out his aims "Come, cousin, canst thou quake and change thy colour, / *Murder thy breath in the middle of a word, / And then again begin, and stop again,*"(*Richard III*, III. v. 1- 3. Italics added).Knowing that getting rid of Hastings passes necessarily through the Mayor of London, he cleverly persuades him of execution as the ultimate punishment "What? Think you we are Turks or infidels? / Or that we would, against the form of law, / Proceed thus rashly in the villain's death."(*Richard III*, III. v. 41-43)Having been entrapped, the Mayor seems to unconsciously pave the way for Richard to be crowned "Now fair befall you! He deserved his death,/And your good graces, both have well proceeded/ To warn false traitors from the like attempts"(*Richard III*, III. v. 47-49).

The end of Act three marks Richard's victory and his rise in the course of dramatic action. What he has genuinely planned, and poetically conveyed, tends to come true. Call it a scene-within-a-scene, a scene-within-an-act or even a "play-within-a-play", the deception this villain provides us with is incredibly hypocritical. His supporters, evil followers, though some are innocently assisting him as in the case of London Mayor, are grouped to speak in one voice, to rhetorically poeticize in the same manner, to introduce a usurper as the right King, to resist any possibility for the birth of suitable opposing forces. The whole picture is now about pretense that is pleasurably beautified. He pretends till he makes people believe he is rightful, till he misleads and entraps the victim. When Buckingham says "Refuse not, mighty lord, this proffered love."(*Richard III*, III. vii.201) and Catesby stresses "O, make them joyful, grant their lawful suit!"(*Richard III*, III. vii. 202), the villain should deliberately refuse the offer to deceive the crowd "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."(*Richard III*, III. vii. 203-206). And upon his fake, yet sweetly conveyed, refusal, Buckingham should intentionally warn that if he continues refusing the title, all citizens "will entreat no more"(*Richard III*, III. vii. 218) despite their mutual love for him. Such a pretense is made to accept and not to reject with the beauty of the language serves to conceal the hateful amorality. The

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ISSN (Print)-2710-2424
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reader needs to read between the lines and the audience has to go beyond the mere utterances of Richard to understand the much of violence, and also the much of beauty, his speech embodies. What seems to expose him as a humanist at heart "I am not made of stones/ But penetrable to your kind entreaties,/ Albeit against my conscience and my soul."(*Richard III*, III. vii. 222-224) tends to introduce him as an artist of a malevolent character. His beautiful pretense starts with a false rejection to end up with his 'humble' acceptance to "have patience to endure the load"(*Richard III*, III. vii. 228).

Buckingham, however, is not the first or the last instrument to be utilized by Richard. An ideal one for him must be a violent killer, and Buckingham does not seem to be like that at this stage. "'Honor among thieves' does not apply to this world", Cahn (1996, p. 361) has aptly said. When Richard asks him "I wish the bastards dead,/ And I would have it suddenly performed"(*Richard III*, IV. ii. 20-21), he appears to be hesitant "Give me some little breath, some pause, dear lord,/ Before I positively speak in this"(*Richard III*, IV. ii. 26-27). This is enough for him to announce him a useless counsel "The deep-revolving witty Buckingham / No more shall be the neighbour to my counsels."(*Richard III*, IV. ii. 45-46)

This is Richard: brimful of sins. What matters most for him now is not being the king because he has already achieved that; it is how to remain the king for a long time. And he has to resort to killing for him to do that. Blood has become for him an ideal way of avoidance, his foes in the beginning and his relatives later on. Lady Anne must finally find her route to death. Edward's sons are to be killed despite their age. Clarence's young son is to be imprisoned and his sister, Richard's niece, is to be his future bride. He is a murderer *par excellence*, a concealed-within the beautiful language-horrible reality as both Aristotle and Sidney suggest. Time (1999, p. 30) mentions that:

> The type of killing pertinent to this discussion is first-degree murder—murders that are deliberate and leave no doubt in the mind that the intent is to take away the life of the victim. Although Richard himself was handicapped and thus could not do the actual killings, he hired murderers to do the killings for him. He used his position to exercise terror. His actions were premeditated and carefully designed.

Richard is ready for the battle the aim of which is to remain the rightful king. The blood-thirsty maniac stands where later the French philosopher René Descartes triumphantly defines his existence through thinking "*Je pense, donc je suis!* / I think, therefore I am!", but in his own poetically exultant manner; that: I kill, therefore I am. The following utterances further stress the point"Come hither, Catesby, *Rumour it abroad/ That Anne, my wife, is very grievous sick* […]*I must be married to my brother's daughter, /Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass. /Murder her brothers, and then marry her"* (*Richard III*, IV. ii. 53-54 / 66-68. Italics added). The tactics are fearfully fascinating, strangely beautiful, with Richard planning to incestuously marry his nice and kill his nephew. Sinister, yet quite pleasurable, pretense is a major tool where appreciation tends to override. Slotkin (2007, p. 6) aptly mentions that "this allows us to see more clearly the complex play of moral and aesthetic ideas that gives Richard III its poetic energy. I will argue here that the play encourages audiences to appreciate Richard because of his evil, not in spite of it, and that this response to a literary representation is not inherently pathological or corrupt."

4. On The Beauty of Downfall

The scene where Richard is to tempt Queen Elizabethis yet another moment for the audience to enjoy the pleasurable ironies evoked during the discourse.While Queen Margaret appears with her lust for revenge "Bear with me: I am hungry for revenge" (*Richard III*, IV. iv. 60) and bitter curse "Cancel his bonds, dear God, I pray/ That I may live and say, 'The dog is dead!'"(*Richard III*, IV. iv. 76-77) Richard emerges with hisnow 'false' strong belief that he has won Queen Elizabeth's

ISSN (Online)- 2710-2432
ISSN (Print)-2710-2424
Vol-1-Issue-2; June-2021

daughter the way he got Lady Anne. His utterances "But in your daughter's womb I bury them,/ Where in that nest of spicery they will breed/ Selves of themselves, to your recomforture"(*Richard III*, IV. iv. 53-68) are just misleading. His knowledge of Queen Elizabeth's plans is incomplete, and meant to be dramatically like that. The contradiction opposing his plans to hers marks his failure to control the course of events. His belief that his niece shall be his future wife is met with her mother's tactics to avoid his doing that. This innocent, rather 'stupid', lady, he sees her, has deceived him. Richard doesn't know about Queen Elizabeth's decision to reward Richmond after defeating Richard. Such a sudden turn in the course of the dramatic action in the play is highly significant as Richard will no longer be able to move ahead with his devilish stratagems: a moment to mark the beginning of this villain's collapse, the beginning of his, for the audience, beautiful tragic downfall. From now on, he will not be able to "sustain a language of being- 'I am', 'I am not'- because he keeps coming back to particular roles ('villain') and actions (murdering)."(Bate & Rasmussen, 2007, p. 1301)

The last Act strikingly dramatizes an image of two contrastable characters: Richard and Richmond, the antagonist and the protagonist. It is a contrast that astonishingly, and to a large extent poetically, opposes the first's death, tragedy, to the second's ascension, jollity, where violence remains a recurring theme and appreciation prevail. For the dramatist to do so, he has sensationally paralleled two melodramatic scenes as a prelude to the day of fighting: one is unfortunate for Richard the villain whereas the other is promising for Richmond the good. Shakespeare causes both of them to sleep and start dreaming at the same time. Richard is meant to be mentally tortured and irritated while Richmond is intended to be glorified and praised. Commenting on the new characters' roles, Leggatt (1989, p. 50)writes:

> He (Richmond) takes the play from Richard more decisively than Margaret did, and once again the language of the theatre makes the point, this time in the split staging: two tents, two sets of addresses by the ghosts, two battle orations, a prayer for Richmond and a guilt-sticken soliloquy for Richard, the fussiness and *bonhomie* in Richard's camp, the calm unity of purpose in Richmond's. This time the repetitions in the dialogue, notably in the ghost scene, are used not for mourning, brooding or cursing but for balancing good against evil.

The large procession of ghosts, the eleven spirits of Richard's victims, deprecatingly disparages Richard's hateful manners promising ultimate despair and certain death. Bate and Rasmussen (2007, p. 1301) believe that "[t]he ghosts who appear to him in his dream the night before the last battle make him realize that actions have consequences: murder will bring him 'to the bar' and a verdict of 'guilty' will be pronounced." Violence is conventionally stressed in their utterances, but the audience pleasurably follows the gradual tragic downfall. When the ghosts promise spiritual hopelessness "Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow!" (*Richard III*, V.iii. 122/135/143), the ghosts of Hastings, Lady Anne and Buckingham announce his inexorable bloody end. Hastings starts his condemnation by saying "Bloody and guilty, guiltily awake/ And in a bloody battle end thy days!"(*Richard III*, V.iii. 150-151). Lady Anne stresses in her objection that "Tomorrow in the battle think on me,/ And fall thy edgeless sword: despair and die!"(*Richard III*, V.iii. 166-167). Buckingham has rebukingly reprobated Richard " … die in terror of thy guiltiness! / Dream on, dream on, of bloody deeds and death: / Fainting, despair; despairing, yield thy breath!" (*Richard III*, V.iii. 1741- 176)

His mental confusion is proof enough of his sense of being guilty. The dramatist has intentionally moved us from one scene to another: from a scene where the ghosts address both Richard and Richmond to a scene where Richard pathetically addresses Richard. That is: the villain speaks to himself to further attract the attention of the audience. Such a psychologically extravagant episode in the play is significantly meaningful in the sense that we are at last presented with Richard

ISSN (Online)- 2710-2432
ISSN (Print)-2710-2424
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the human being as scared of Richard the villain: a beautiful dramatic juxtaposition to reflect on the essence of human nature. It is clear for us that after his dream, Richard's 'coward conscience' tends 'to blame' him for all his immoral and wicked deeds. Amid such a moral dilemma, he moves from asking questions "What? Do I fear myself?" (*Richard III*, V. iii. 186) and "Is there a murderer here?" (*Richard III*, V. iii. 188) to asserting statements "I am a villain: yet I lie, I am not." (*Richard III*, V.iii. 195) and expecting his tragic end "Methought the souls of all that I had murdered/ Came to my tent, and every one did threat/ Tomorrow's vengeance on the head of Richard." (*Richard III*, V. 208-210). Shakespeare has introduced the hero, in the end, more as a contemplator who is deeply speculating the ultimate consequences of evil doings than as a violent killer who does not repent with the audience tracing the scenes with much humanity and much hilarity.Questions arise as the beautiful tragic downfall comes to an end: Who is Richard? A mere villain in the course of history's events? Or the project of a tragic dramatic character that moves to unshackle from the essential dramatic conventions characterizing revenge as mentioned by Seneca and later by Thomas Kyd? Or else the unfortunate deformed hero that kills and pleases? The answer could very well be this and that and for sure other answers.

Conclusion

Would it have been possible for critics to pluck out the mysteries of Richard the villain if he hadn't been physically deformed and morally bankrupt? The answer surely raises the concerns of aesthetics in relation to those of ethics which are central in *Richard III*.Plato tells us that good exists mostly in virtue while Aristotle informs us that the highly poetic representations / imitations of objects, good or evil,begets good. Villainy can hence be beautiful when seen aesthetically. The play, in this sense, may be viewed as a combination of Plato's and Aristotle's theories altogether while Richard alone as a combination of Aristotle's and Sidney's articulations on poetry and beauty irrespective of the overwhelming malevolence; the aesthetics of villainy. This is what this paper has strived to expand upon. Macbeth moves from a loyal truthful general to a deceitful malicious traitor,but Richard moves from a wicked man to a blood-thirsty maniac, from worse to the worst! A detester leading a detested journey,but he is attractive to characters and audiences alike. Shakespeare allows his tragi-historical character to kill artfully and speak poetically, die tragically and live long dramatically. His seeming doesn't make him great as his being does.He vehemently seduces Anne to artfully manipulate her, for instance, and she blindly follows him to find herself entrapped. Evil dooms to be his unavoidable necessity (Pomerleau, 2016). Shakespeare allows him to theatrically instruct characters where irony has its pleasurable effects on the audience.

Written between 1592 and 1594, rightly after *Titus Andronicus*, and called a history and sometimes a tragedy, *Richard III*, despite the piled horror, still proposes through Richard the Third, the only notherner king of England (Kim, 2019), the possibility to enjoy ugliness and villainy through poetry and theatricality. Slotkin (2007, p. 26) says that "the career of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, like that of Milton's Satan, suggests that evil can appeal to us aesthetically – that the socially given rules governing our appreciation of the good, true, and beautiful also recognize the power and beauty of monstrous evil." I just agree with such a view, as many nowadays (non-)Shakespearean critics do.

ISSN (Online)- 2710-2432
ISSN (Print)-2710-2424
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