

EXPLORING THE CHARACTERIZATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S VILLAINS

by

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## Introduction

When we watch a movie or read a book, we tend to watch out for the hero or villain. For those of us who grew up in the Disney era, we have been trained to watch out for good and evil, with the belief that the heroes will come to save us. Despite anything that happens, we always know that the heroes will always win, and the villain will fail. However, a story does not seem to be complete without the villains. If the heroes do not have any villain to fight, then how do we define their acts as being heroic? Villains provide a conflict that intrigues the audience as well as readers because it gives the heroes conflict and something to look forward to. Without the conflict of the villains, there will be not much to the backstory of the heroes. Therefore, villains are a great addition to the success of a piece of work. The evil the villain does therefore defines the hero. Although villains represent that which is evil, they have a capacity to provoke a reaction from people. Sometimes, we are able to relate to them and understand their points of view. We could be so moved by the actions or backstory of a villain that we grow to applaud them: not because of what they do, but because of what they represent.

According to Marilyn Horowitz, a villain is the obstacle that prevents the hero from getting what he wants.<sup>1</sup> Although this is often true, the lines between hero and villains can be blurred when villains show themselves to be capable of having heroic characteristics. When the villains have some random acts of goodness, it throws off the audience and readers and creates a form of suspense. These villains have backstories, elaborate plans, and have more to them than just being mere evil people. Even if we don't consciously love them, the most evil villains

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<sup>1</sup> Horowitz, Marilyn. "Working Villain Forst. 10 Ways to Create Fascinating Villains." Script 10.4 (2004):

fascinate us more than they repulse us. An example is Darth Vader from Star Wars who started out his life as an ordinary person, and he even got married to his love. However, things changed for him and we see how he gets drawn to the dark side. These back stories add a little bit of mystery to them that intrigues the audience and readers. These backstories also make it possible for us as the audience to sympathize with the villains. A villain who does evil just for the sake of doing evil does not gain the sympathy of anyone. If a villain goes about killing people, we do not find anything to sympathize with. However, if that killer kills people for the sake of revenge, we feel a sense of sympathy for what they do, even though we do not always agree with their methods.

What makes evil so attractive? Are we attracted to the evil that villains do? Are we simply sucked into their manipulations? Why do we love characters that we are supposed to be repelled by? What actions of a villain entice us the most? These are some of the questions that will be addressed in this portfolio. To help us understand the very nature of villainy, we will turn to William Shakespeare, one of the most respected and well-read authors, who he has written several astonishing villains. When writing his villains, he highlights some of their finest moments as well as their worst moments. In their finest moments, they are intelligent, persuasive, and perceptive. However, they can also be conniving and betray the people who trust them. They go to various lengths to achieve their aims; they go as far as murdering people to get what they want. Throughout this portfolio, I will argue that the audience is attracted to the high intellectual abilities of Shakespeare's villains. They are usually very intellectual and talk their way through their despicable acts to sway the other characters and the audience to believe in their propaganda. The audience is cajoled into being active participants in their plots to establish their dominance in the plays.

The construction of Shakespeare's villains shows that he writes his plays based on what he has observed in the real world as their actions make the audience to question their morality. The characters in his plays tell the stories of real people and what they go through in their daily lives. The characters are not just figments of his imagination, but a notice to readers to pay attention to the world they live in.

Shakespeare puts his perspective on life into his villains, making them look less like the stereotypes of villains in that time. According to Erin Miller,

There is no question that, in every tragedy, Shakespeare explores the extent to which evil brings about the downfall of a character. However, a study of four of his plays demonstrates an evolution in his understanding of evil. Beginning from *Titus Andronicus* and ending with *Macbeth*; Shakespeare over time portrays his protagonists becoming more and more consciously aware of the inner battle between good and evil.<sup>2</sup>

Readers sometimes understand the actions of the villains because everyone is prone to having some evil thoughts and might get involved in those actions when faced with the wrong circumstances. Aaron the Moor of *Titus Andronicus* was one of Shakespeare's earliest villains, who seems more one-dimensional when compared with some of his later villains. When writing *Richard III*, we see the change in how he constructs Richard who is one of his best villains. He makes Richard multi-dimensional with the ability to talk his way out of difficult situations. Richard as a villain allowed Shakespeare the opportunity to construct his villains in a way that they can elicit sympathy from their audience. Miller writes that,

Like many playwrights and writers, Shakespeare begins his career pulling heavily from his predecessors and from conventions of contemporary theater. As a result, many of his early plays include characters that fit long-standing stereotypes and are carried over from the stock characters of morality plays.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Miller, Erin K., "The Battle of Good and Evil in Shakespeare" (2015). Master of Liberal Studies Thesis. 9

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 106

Although his earlier works were inspired by the morality plays (which, as Bernard Spivack describes, depicted the battle between good and evil, or vice and virtue, for control of man's soul for the purpose of moral instruction<sup>4</sup>), Shakespeare does a good job of showing that every human is capable of evil and that heroes can make mistakes as well. He also projects people's desire to get away with evil thoughts in their interpretations of his villains. Emma Sherr-Ziarko asserts that Shakespeare's villains are "evil characters, but in them we can perceive the beginnings of an understanding of the dialectical relationship between evil and good within humanity that would come to prominence in the ensuing centuries."<sup>5</sup> Sherr-Ziarko further explains Shakespeare's villains being accepted by the readers as one of the ways that they can get to see how they might have come close to being evil. She writes that

The purpose of the villain is to examine the evil within an individual's human nature that engenders this systemic corruption. He or she provokes audience to confront their sense of morality by making evil uncomfortably visible."<sup>6</sup>

Shakespeare's villains are often portrayed as medieval princes whose quests for power drives them to do everything they can to attain power. Most of Shakespeare's villains share the same similarities with the Machiavellian prince. According to Tim Spiekerman,

There are three references to [Machiavelli] in [Shakespeare's] plays. But I think a case can be made for a deeper connection between Shakespeare and Machiavelli, for their writings share remarkably similar concerns. Both men address the

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<sup>4</sup> Spivack, Bernard. *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*. New York: Columbia UP, 1958. 63

<sup>5</sup> Sherr-Ziarko, Emma Ariane. "Confronting Evil on Stage: The Immoral Villain as a Moral Figure." Wesleyan University. 89

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 92

question of how political power is acquired and maintained; both scrutinize the relationship between morality, particularly Christian morality, and political practice. Shakespeare and Machiavelli confront the same issues.<sup>7</sup>

Most of Shakespeare's villains control the play and communicate effectively with the audience. These villains are attractive and seductive both to the audience and to other characters in the play because they take great pleasure in the roles they play, thereby leaving us in awe of their astonishing work. They have the ability to distract the audience from seeing their immediate despicable acts and get manipulated into accepting their justifications.

Shakespeare delves into the truth of human existence through his villains. Harold Bloom writes that "what Shakespeare invents are ways of representing human chances, alterations not only caused by flaws and by decay but effected by the will as well, and by the will's temporal vulnerabilities."<sup>8</sup> As Shakespeare grows as a writer, he begins to write his villains with a consciousness of their deeds. They go from being inherently evil to having a battle in their conscience about their actions. Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* does not struggle with being evil, but a villain like Macbeth feels guilty and struggles with the consequences of his actions.

Shakespeare addresses the extent to which evil can lead to the downfall of a character. He also demonstrates their motives for doing the things they do. With Prospero, Shakespeare shows that revenge can stir up wickedness in the heart of a noble king. In Richard, Macbeth, and Edmund, Shakespeare shows that the desire for power can destroy a man and lead him down the path of

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<sup>7</sup> Spiekerman, Tim. *Shakespeare's Political Realism: The English History Plays*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. 25

<sup>8</sup> Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. 2

destruction. As he writes his villains, his ultimate plan is to show that evil deeds of the villains do not just destroy the heroes, but the villains as well. In his analysis, A.C Bradley writes that

When the evil in (the protagonist) masters the good and has its way, it destroys other people through him, but it also destroys him. At the close of the struggle, he has vanished and has left behind nothing that can stand.<sup>9</sup>

In his portrayal of his villains, Shakespeare seems to have developed a deep understanding of the psychological complexity of humans. His villains are expressive characters whose personalities have boundless depth. I believe that Shakespeare loved to write his villains because they entertained him and allowed him to explore his interests in what it means to be human. The most captivating villains can make us laugh, tremble, and be filled with compassion for them. In reading about Shakespeare's plays, we as readers encounter an astonishing sympathy for these villains, a strange but remarkable sense of attraction to his villains.

I chose to write about William Shakespeare's exploration of villainy in his plays after taking two classes and an independent study that explored some of these characters. Although the exploration of these characters was tailored to the classes, I found that these villains stood out in my exploration of the plays. After doing the independent study, I loved learning a lot about the language of some of these villains that I decided to base the thesis of my portfolio on Shakespeare's villains. I found these villains to be captivating, so I thought there would be nothing better suited for me than Shakespeare's villains.

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<sup>9</sup> Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures of Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. London: Penguin, 1971. 48



While working on this project, I asked a lot of people if they liked villains or heroes in the movies they watch or in the books they read. Surprisingly, a vast majority of people, just like me, root for the villains. Therefore, I hoped to learn, through this project, why people think that villains are attractive. Although I cannot answer for everyone, I can say for myself why I am attracted to villains.

I am attracted to some villains because I feel they are not just evil but sometimes a victim of circumstances that turned them into what they are and therefore, I sympathize with them. These villains are characters that are not bound by rules and are willing to do anything to achieve their motives. They have a more interesting origin and backstory than many protagonists; authors seem to feel fewer restrictions when creating their evil characters. Sometimes, I also envy the power that these characters wield. When people root for villains, the attraction is about risk-taking and thrill. As humans, we are naturally attracted to power, and wish we could do anything to achieve our means. However, we are bound by rules which stops us from doing despicable things. Therefore, by rooting for villains, we live vicariously through them even if we don't always agree with their methods. We are just envious that they seem to be able to get away with the evil that they do.

The villains always have elaborate plans and flaws that we can relate to. They are smart enough to get away with their wrongdoings. We are drawn to the people who prefer to beat the rules – because secretly we want to do the same thing. It bothers me sometimes that I can root for fictional villains because in real life, such people are despicable to me. However, in the case of one of my favorite villains, Richard, I can almost forgive him for cleverly getting what he wanted, only excepting his plan to murder his young nephews. Perhaps one of the reasons we get easily pulled in by these villains is because we know it is safe to enjoy them in a work of fiction.

The method of exploration I follow is the result of my personal response to the plays. Since the reading experience differs from person to person, I realize that there will be some subjectivity in the understanding of this work. For this reason, I will not argue that any particular villain is more attractive than another; rather, I will argue that certain villains are presented in such a way that makes them more than a one-dimensional character. I have chosen to explore these villains because I feel they are representative of the majority of villains present in Shakespeare's works; each of his other villainous characters can be related to one of the six that I have chosen to explore in the following papers.

Shakespeare's villains embody the traits of true people who would go through any length to attain power. This portfolio will discuss six of Shakespeare's villains: Richard in *Richard III*, Edmund in *King Lear*, Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, Antonio in *The Tempest*, Prospero in *The Tempest*, and Macbeth in *Macbeth*. In the first paper, "Languages by Four of Shakespeare's Villains," I will investigate how Shakespeare's characters come alive through the language he used and how these characters publicly display their intellects and get their audience involved in their despicable acts. One of the ways that Shakespeare does this is to use soliloquy to communicate the inner thoughts of the villains to the audience. The villains, especially Richard and Edmund, constantly communicate their thoughts to the audience. This paper examines the language of Richard, Edmund, Leontes, and Antonio. It will show the way the language they use impact the way the audience views them, and how they interact with other characters in the play. Each of these villains have a unique language which distinguishes them from others. Their lines in the play determines how much evil they can do. Some of them control the entire play by being at the center of it all, while others are not at the center of the play but create a form of back story for another character. Villains like Richard use dark humor, which entertains the audience and

pulls them into his schemes. And while Richard's evil is glaringly obvious, Prospero blurs the line between hero and villain, and Macbeth blurs the line between villain and victim. These villains each have a sort of justification for their evil deeds that make it possible for their audience to understand their actions, though the audience do not forgive them. Edmund is a part of a society that does not accept him for sins that were committed by his father; Prospero seeks revenge from those who betrayed him and took over his kingdom; Richard is a victim of nature as his physical deformity was not of his own doing. These are some of the motives that we see as the reason for the evil that they do.

Shakespeare has become a global phenomenon, with his work performed in many different countries. Shakespeare's villains have been appropriated over the years, and lots of actors have worked well in adapting the plays for new audiences. Macbeth is one of the plays that have been adapted into several films over the years. Orson Welles directed *Voodoo Macbeth* in 1936, Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* in 1957, Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* in 2003, Billy Morrisette's *Scotland, PA* in 2001 are a few examples of the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The second paper, "Including a Comic Theme to a Tragedy: The Case of Scotland, PA" will therefore look into how a film director, Billy Morrisette, appropriates *Macbeth*, and translates the villain for a modern audience. This adaptation of Macbeth does not use the language of Shakespeare; however, it caters to the needs of an audience and helps them appreciate the content of the play as it relates to their immediate surrounding. Therefore, Macbeth's villainy is depicted in a different form. The purpose of this paper is therefore to provide a systematic analysis of the changes occurring in the adaptation of a play, *Macbeth*, to a film, *Scotland, PA*. According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptation has been viewed as a process that

depends on those involved in their making.<sup>10</sup> With his audience in mind, Billy Morrisette creates Macbeth in a way that they can accept him and understand his villainy.

The third paper, “Dual Representation of Prospero’s Epilogue,” will look into how people can change their disposition from that of anger to forgiveness by looking at the journey of Shakespeare’s Prospero from vengefulness to forgiveness in *The Tempest*. As mentioned earlier, Antonio in the *Tempest* creates a backstory for the villainy of Prospero. Antonio’s betrayal leads Prospero into exile where he meets with Caliban and Ariel. This story is a journey of Prospero’s plot to revenge on those who betrayed him. However, the story ends up being a story of redemption as he forgives those who have offended him. This play has a lot of religious connotations to it as Shakespeare alludes to some Christian ideologies about forgiveness. Therefore, for Prospero to seek for the forgiveness of the audience for his atrocities, it is required of him to forgive those who have offended him. While exploring the characterization of these villains, the role of the audience cannot be brushed aside. The participation of the audience in the evil committed by these villains is an important factor in showing how attractive a villain is or the level of sympathy they receive. The reason the audience feels sympathy varies from villain to villain because Shakespeare has a different reason for creating Richard than he does for creating Macbeth. These characters represent things that need to be explored by the audience. They exist so that we can reconsider our perception of morality- the idea that nothing could be plain. Or perhaps they may challenge our notion of what is good and evil. Villains are interesting characters to explore as they pique our curiosity.

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<sup>10</sup> Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Routledge. 2013. 84

## **Language Used by Four of Shakespeare's Villains**

Shakespeare's villains tend to be his most interesting and thought-provoking characters. They are worthy of our respect and attention. However, they can be very difficult to interpret. The skillful use of language by some of Shakespeare's villains allows them to persuade the audience as well as other characters in a big way. Shakespeare's language is a crucial source of our pleasure in his plays. For this reason, we enjoy the wordplay of his villains who can talk their way out of difficult situations. In each of the plays where we see these villains, Shakespeare uses his characters' speeches and their comments about themselves to control the perception of those around them and bring people around to their side. We also see that some of these villains spend a significant amount of time relating with the audience which could have some form of implication for the audience. In this paper, I will write about the language of four of Shakespeare's villains, including both the way they relate to the audience, and the language they use with other characters in the play. The villains that will be considered in this section are Antonio in *The Tempest*, Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, Edmund in *King Lear*, and Richard in *Richard III*. Although these villains are distinct in the way they achieve their aims, they all use their words to communicate their plans to the audience.

### ***Antonio: The Persuasive Villain***

Antonio, from *The Tempest*, is a villain who stirs up trouble because he is envious of his brother, Prospero. He gains Prospero's trust and is put in charge of the political affairs in Milan. At first, the power doesn't get to him. However, he soon becomes power-hungry and abuses his power to the point where he teams up with the King of Naples and dethrones his brother. Antonio tries to get Sebastian to betray his brother, Alonso, just like Antonio betrayed Prospero

and offered to help kill him, so Sebastian could become powerful. He begins by flattering Sebastian so that he feels like he deserves to be the King of Naples. This way, Antonio is building Sebastian's trust in him by making him see that he should be the King and not Alonso. Then he convinces Sebastian that Ferdinand is dead and cannot be the heir to the throne if he is not available. Therefore, if Alonso dies, Sebastian will be crowned king since he is next in line. Sebastian, however is skeptical about this plan because he is unsure as to if Ferdinand is indeed dead or not. Antonio persuade him further by emphasizing on the fact that Ferdinand could be lost at sea and never found. He says,

Oh, out of that "no hope"  
 What great hope have you! No hope that way is  
 Another way so high a hope that even  
 Ambition cannot pierce a wink beyond  
 But doubt discovery there. Will you grant with me  
 That Ferdinand is drowned?

When Sebastian still seems unconvinced that he will be the next heir to the throne because Alonso has a daughter, Claribel, Antonio continues to persuade Sebastian to carry out the plan because Claribel is the Queen of Tunis who is very far from them and cannot easily be reached once her father dies. He tells him to get rid of his brother when an opportunity presents itself:

Here lies your brother,  
 No better that the earth he lies upon,  
 If he were that which now he's like, that's dead;  
 Whom I, with this obedient steel, three inches of it,

Can lay to bed for ever.<sup>1</sup>

Antonio's sense of humor and constant wordplay with Sebastian makes him gain the trust that he needs to convince him to get the power that he needs to be in control. Sebastian echoes the cruel way that Antonio got his power when he says,

Thy case, my friend  
 Shall be my precedent. As thou got'st Milan,  
 I'll come by Naples.<sup>2</sup>

Antonio's role as a villain is quite minimal compared to the other villains to be explored in this paper. He has very few lines and does not communicate directly with the audience. However, his role in betraying Prospero provides an important backstory for the evil deeds of Prospero throughout the play. Antonio's power lies in his ability to persuade others to do his bidding. He does this by constantly playing around with Sebastian and persuading him to commit murder so that he can get what he wants.

The pattern of language used by Antonio to achieve his motif is interruption. The verbal occurrences where Antonio interrupts disrupt the plots. Antonio constantly interrupts conversations of others with his puns. The speech by Gonzalo to Alonso is tenaciously interrupted by Antonio and Sebastian with their puns and derogatory remarks. They also anticipate the next words that are coming from Adrian and Gonzalo's mouth. Samuel Coleridge interprets Antonio's constant interruptions by explaining that

The tendency in bad men to indulge in scorn and contemptuous expression, as a mode of getting rid of their own uneasy feelings of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid 2.1.275-9

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 2.1.256-60

inferiority to the good, and also, by making the good ridiculous, of rendering the transition of others to wickedness easy.<sup>3</sup>

Antonio and Sebastian joke about everything, thereby entertaining the audience and distracting them from the bad things that they do. They refrain from using words like “murder” when they actually are plotting to kill people. Although Antonio does not directly address the audience, the entertainment provided by him and Sebastian allows him to communicate with the audience. This makes the audience laugh at his antics and his various attempts to align himself with the next king if his plots are successful.

### ***Leontes: The Jealous Villain***

Leontes, from *The Winter's Tale*, is the King of Sicily who is married to Hermione. At the beginning of the play, he is shown to be a generous host to his friend, Polixenes. However, the play presents a sudden change in his behavior, especially in his language. Leontes is portrayed as a villain who is moved to villainy because of the ideas that he has in his head. He thinks that his wife is unfaithful to him and has had an affair with Polixenes. Unlike the case of Othello, where Iago talks him into believing that his wife is unfaithful, Leontes alone convinces himself of his wife's infidelity. Speaking about Leontes' sudden jealousy as a contrast to Othello's, Lady Martin who was quoted in the *Variorum Edition of Shakespeare* writes that

Shakespeare has therefore dealt with Leontes as a man in  
whom the passion of jealousy is inherent; and shows it  
breaking out suddenly with a force that is deaf to reason,

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor. London: Constable, 1930. 35 [generally speaking, footnotes don't use author's last name first. You save that for the bibliography. I know that is weird, but that is just how it goes. Sorry to insert this here – I can't use a comment bubble on footnotes!]



and which stimulated by imagination tainted to the core, finds evidence in actions the most innocent. How different is such a nature's from Othello's!<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the play, Leontes' language is short and precise, but his language becomes complicated when his jealousy overtakes him. His speech becomes harsh as he spins a web of jealousy in his head. He threatens the people around him when his jealousy becomes uncontrollable. In his rage, he attempts to control Hermione's language. Language is the weapon that Leontes uses to control the people around him. He attempts to shut her up by limiting her speech and demeaning her. He reduces her to a woman who uses her sexuality to get what she wants. Because he could not convince Polixenes to stay, he becomes suspicious when Hermione succeeded in convincing him. He asks Hermione if she was able to persuade Polixenes to stay, and he gets upset when she is successful. He says,

Leontes: Is he won yet?

Hermione: He'll stay my lord

Leontes: At my request he would not.<sup>5</sup>

Lynn Enterline says that Leontes' attempt to control Hermione is by minimizing "his wife's superior rhetorical skill by interpreting it narrowly as the consequence of her erotic power."<sup>6</sup> He also interprets her speech as lies by saying her speech is just as pretentious as the vows, she made to him when they got married.

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<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, William. *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*. Edited by Horace Howard Furness et al., 1898. 366

<sup>5</sup> *Winter's Tale* 1.2.85-7

<sup>6</sup> Enterline, Lynn. "'You Speak a Language That I Understand Not': The Rhetoric of Animation in *The Winter's Tale*." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 48, no.1, 1997, pp.17-44. [JSTOR](#).

He tries to prove that his wife is truly unfaithful by making every other person see her as such. In his conversation with Camillo, Leontes convinces him that the speech is not the only reason he suspects that his wife is cheating on him. He says,

Is whispering nothing?  
Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?  
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the carer  
Of laughter with a sigh?--- a note infallible  
Of breaking honesty; --horsing foot on foot?  
Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift?  
Hours, minutes? Noon, midnight?<sup>7</sup>

In this speech, Leontes strips Hermione of her humanity, referring to her only as a collection of small actions and isolated body parts. Leontes' language is manipulative and he also manipulates the languages of others. Lynn Enterline notes that,

To the woman who will later be restored to life as a version  
of Pygmalion's statue, her husband's "language," like his  
jealousy, violates her sense of herself.<sup>8</sup>

Due to his jealous rage, he loses his friendship with Polixenes and makes moves that leads to the death of his wife. According to William Matchett, "the situation is handled in the first three acts as a complete, if condensed, tragedy, ending with the death of Hermione and the clear declaration that Leontes is unforgivable."<sup>9</sup> Leontes spins ideas in his head about his wife who clearly proves that she is not cheating on him even with her words. She refrains from speaking when Leontes persuades Polixenes to stay. Her silence implies that she knows how

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<sup>7</sup> *Winter's Tale* 1.2.284-90

<sup>8</sup> Enterline, Lynn. "'You Speak a Language That I Understand Not': The Rhetoric of Animation in The Winter's Tale." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 48, no.1, 1997, pp.17-44. JSTOR,

<sup>9</sup> Matchett, William. *Shakespeare and Forgiveness*. Santa Barbara: Fithian Press, 2002. 33

limited her speech is in the marriage. She waits for Leontes' approval before she speaks to Polixenes. Leontes attempts to control Hermione's speech and when she can speak. Due to his irrational jealousy, Leontes begins to control the speech of the people around him, especially Hermione, so that all her speech would be manipulated to feel like she is indeed unfaithful to him. He gets jealous when Hermione is successful in convincing Polixenes to stay. After the "death" of his wife, he changes his behavior as well as his language when he realizes his faults for working based on false suspicions. He says that, "I have too much believ'd mine own suspicion"<sup>10</sup>

Leontes' language changes as his feelings changes. He starts out with words that shows that he is in love with his wife and happy with the friendship he has with Polinexes.

Why, that was when  
Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death,  
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand  
And clap thyself my love: then didst thou utter  
'I am yours for ever'<sup>11</sup>.

Then his language becomes reckless when he becomes jealous of the relationship which he actually instigated between Hermione and Polixenes. According to Jonathan Smith,

Leontes moves from confrontation to accusation and explosion. "Hermione" becomes "she" not "you" as he pronounces as if from the oracle. He line halts at every foot, the words shorten, losing their weight and ironically judicial flavour, building up to the complete breakdown of the speech's intended context with "that she's a bedswerver." Here he is crazed, his mind chopped into messes. His language is vulgarized. Barbarism, the proper opposite of civilization, has

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<sup>10</sup> *Winter's Tale* 3.2.151

<sup>11</sup> *Winter's Tale* 1.2.125-30

overcome civility at precisely the moment when he is trying to maintain the concept.<sup>12</sup>

His language reflects his thoughts; through his language, we see that he is obsessive. He is obsessed with the idea that his wife has cheated on him with his friend Polixenes. He misinterprets their relationship and falls into a jealous rage. He starts to speak in ways that his audience cannot really understand as he justifies the reason for thinking that his wife is truly unfaithful to him. However, his speech becomes disjointed and difficult to follow. His inability to properly piece his words together shows that he has no real rationale behind the distrust that he has towards his wife and friend. He demonstrates this when he speaks with his son, Mamillius:

Come, captain  
 We must be neat—not neat, but cleanly captain  
 And yet the steer, the heifer and the calf  
 Are all called neat—Still virginaling  
 Upon his palm?-- how now, you wanted calf,  
 Art thou my calf?<sup>13</sup>

His words make it feel like he has no trust for women and even assumes that his wife's pregnancy does not belong to him. He says that "all's true that is mistrusted."<sup>14</sup> By saying this, he believes that his convictions about his wife's promiscuity is correct. He thinks that the baby she is carrying is her love child with Polinexes, which is why he abandoned Perdita. By asking if Mamillius is his "calf," he shows how easily it is for him to become jealous of his wife's

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, Jonathan. "The Language of Leontes." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Autumn 1968), pp. 322-323

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 1.2.121-6

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 2.1.48

relationship because he assumes that all women are unfaithful. He doubts if Mamillius is truly his son or a love child that was born out of wedlock. He does not only question his paternity, he also wonders if Mamillius looks like him. However, Leontes does not refuse his claim on him as a son. He sees him as his son who will inherit what belongs to him, but he does not want Hermione to be a part of their lives because she is not to be trusted. Janet Adelman talks about the way Leontes feels about his son when she says, "in this construction of likeness, the signs of Mamillius' difference from him are signs not of an illegitimate father, but of his mother's contaminating presence in her son: if he is her child, then he is not fully his father's."<sup>15</sup>

Leontes first tells the audience in an aside about his suspicions about his wife's adultery. In the lines between 1 and 108 of act I scene ii, he expresses his feeling about not being able to convince his friend to stay but his wife was able easily convince his friend to stay. In this scene, the audience becomes aware of his passion and jealousy as he includes them in his thought process. Shakespeare does not reveal Leontes' jealousy before the aside. Therefore, the audience were the first ones to know about his jealousy.

### ***Edmund: The Bastard Villain***

Edmund in King Lear is one of Shakespeare's later villains. He wasn't the only villain in the play; however, he is able to justify his actions. Edmund's fight for power is mainly against the social construction of the society as he feels blamed for how he was conceived. His society does not create an avenue to cater to the needs of those born out of wedlock. Therefore, he

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<sup>15</sup> Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to the Tempest*. New York and London: Routledge, 1992. 225

resorts to criminal activities, such as forgery, to justify the inadequacies he feels. Edmund appeals to the audience through the use of soliloquies by making them understand that he has the same rights as Edgar. In his first soliloquy, Edmund feels like an outcast who is not a legitimate son, through no fault of his own. He believes that he was conceived out of passion and rejected by the society.

Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take  
More composition and fierce quality  
Than doth, within a dull, stale, tired bed.<sup>16</sup>

Edmund is upset that he loses the right to have a proper family and cannot share in the inheritance because of his father's sins. Therefore, he decides to create chaos in the family he does not have access to. He openly declares his plans to the audience in his opening soliloquy. According to Waldo McNeir, "Edmund reveals in soliloquy his thoroughgoing malevolence."<sup>17</sup>

Well then,  
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land  
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund  
As to the legitimate: fine word,--legitimate!<sup>18</sup>

He believes that the system of declaring legitimacy has deprived him of his rights. Francois Laroque argues that, "in his first soliloquy, Edmund enviously rails against legitimacy and primogeniture, suggesting that it is Edgar who fulfills Edmund's—by stealth."<sup>19</sup> He is unashamedly jealous of his brother, and he wants access to his inheritance. He is contesting the right that the society has placed on Edmund who is the legitimate child because he was

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<sup>16</sup> *King Lear* 1.2.11-3

<sup>17</sup> McNeir, Waldo F. "The Role of Edmund in *King Lear*." *Studies in English Literature* 8.2 (1968): 188

<sup>18</sup> *King Lear* 1.2.15-8

<sup>19</sup> Laroque, Francois. "And That's True Too": *New Essays on King Lear*. Eds. Pierre Iselin, and Sophie Alatorre. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009. 15

conceived on a matrimonial bed. The idea of legitimacy is Edmund's biggest problem and his cause for villainy. Anthony Gilbert contends that

In line 19, Edmund refers to his natural brother Edgar in sarcastic colloquial terms, as "my legitimate," which must surely be a pun on the legal sense of the word as a noun, with some secondary stress derived by its adoption from medieval Latin *legitimus*, "my legiti- mate," that is, "my 'legal' fellow, partner, equal," silently breaking yet another word up into its syllables. He is saying that since he and Edgar are equals in an informal sense, as natural sons of their father, he is, by consequence, an equal partner and so Edgar is "my legiti mate," "a legally equal partner" in terms of natural law.<sup>20</sup>

Edmund draws a wedge between Edgar and their father by preying on his brother's good nature when he gets the opportunity. To prove his brother's guilt, he frames him by forging his signature on a letter which is meant to prove the downfall of their father. When Edmund gives the letter to Gloucester, he tries to speak on behalf of his brother by proving that he is a good person. He tells his father not to conclude that Edgar has indeed written that letter against him, but to wait till there are better evidences to prove that Edgar is indeed innocent. He tells his father that,

If it shall please  
you to suspend your indignation against my  
brother till you can derive from him better  
testimony of his intent, you shall run a certain  
course; where, if you violently proceed against  
him, mistaking his purpose, it would make a great  
gap in your own honour, and shake in pieces the  
heart of his obedience.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gilbert, Anthony. "Unaccommodated Man" and His Discontents in *King Lear*: Edmund the Bastard and Interrogative Puns." *Early Modern Literary Studies* 6.2 (2000): 9

<sup>21</sup> *King Lear* 1.2.79-85

Edmund sets a trap for both Edgar and Gloucester by pitting them against one another. He sets himself out to be an advocate for his brother in order to gain the trust of their father. He also appears to be the son who looks out for his father's interest by pointing out the traitor. Since his main struggle was to fight the view of legitimacy in the society, he counts on gaining the trust of his father. The purpose of gaining this trust is to show that children who are not legitimate can be loved by their parents. He says this in his opening speech when he says that "our father's love is to the bastard Edmund."<sup>22</sup>

Edmund's language is respectful and formal. He knows that his illegitimacy makes him unlovable, so he decides to use wit as a weapon.

A credulous father and a brother noble  
Whose nature is so far from doing harms  
That he suggests none; one whose foolish honesty  
My practice rides easy. I see the business  
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit.<sup>23</sup>

He refrains from words that would jeopardize his plans and make it obvious that he is there to disrupt the stability on the family. He cons his father into trusting him by always referring to him respectfully as "my lord." His father feels a kind of security because he believes that Edmund does not look upon him as the cause of his misfortune.

In his soliloquy, Edmund engages the audience in a commentary on the analysis of human relations. Through a series of interrogative puns, he engages in a monologue on conventional thinking. He prepares the audience for a demonstration of the deception in the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid I.ii. 17

<sup>23</sup> *King Lear* 1.2.195-200



practices that the society chooses to engage in by making him an outcast. He is deprived of his inheritance even as the love child of his father because he was born out of wedlock. His intimate address to the audience announces one of the themes of his reflection

***Richard: The Witty Villain***

Language is an important contribution to the success of Richard III's plots. He uses language in three ways: to gain the trust of the other characters in the play, to elicit sympathy from the audience, and to manipulate other characters to do his evil deeds for him. Shakespeare uses soliloquies to express the deepest thoughts and plans of his villains to their audience who have no ability to warn the other characters in the play of these plots. Throughout the play, Richard updates his audience on his next course of action. Albert Shepherd comments on this connection with the audience when he says, "in the case of Richard III, we have a great many asides and soliloquies, some of them very long, giving an insight into his plans and motives, and revealing something of his character."<sup>24</sup>

Richard feels like he has to be a villain because he is deformed and cannot be looked on as a good person. Richard elicits sympathy from the audience because of his deformity. He says that he is "not shaped for sportive tricks"<sup>25</sup>, therefore, he would use his words to become powerful. He describes himself as someone who is 'deformed,' 'cheated,' and someone that the dogs bark at.

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks  
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass

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<sup>24</sup> Shepherd, J. Albert. "The Self-Revelation of Shakespeare's Villains." *The Sewanee Review*, (1902): 10, 3, 342

<sup>25</sup> *Richard III* 1.1.14

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  
 Into this breathing world scarce half made up.<sup>26</sup>

In the first act of the play, Richard openly declares his plans to the audience, and he also explains why he must be a villain. He says that

Since I cannot prove a lover to maintain these fair well-spoken days  
 I am determined to prove a villain.<sup>27</sup>

Wolfgang Clemen argues that "Richard's physical deformities, which excludes him from the enjoyment of love, cause him to seek compensation in his villainous undertakings; not Richard himself, therefore, but the twisted body foisted upon him by nature, must be held responsible for his criminal behavior."<sup>28</sup> His deformity makes it easy for his audience to sympathize with him.

As the play continues, the audience begin to see how these plots unfold and how he holds on to his promises by doing everything he mentioned in the first scene of the play. By informing the audience of what he plans to do, he involves them in his plans. They cannot inform the other characters of the evil plans that Richard has for them. This way, he manipulates us into being a part of the plot that he tells them about. The audience have now become just as evil as Richard as they have been rendered powerless by Richard.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid 1.1.14-21

<sup>27</sup> Ibid I.i.28

<sup>28</sup> Clemen, Wolfgang. *Commentary on Shakespeare's Richard III*. London and NY: Routledge, 1957 (Re-issued 2013). 6

Richards flatters the other characters and pretends to love them, thereby manipulating their feelings towards him. He says that,

And thus I clothe my naked villainy  
With odd old stol'n forth of Holy Writ;  
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.<sup>29</sup>

He makes people believe that he will fulfill the promise that he makes to them, whereas he does not intend to fulfill any of their promises. Because of his ability to entice people with his words, some of the characters, including the audience, fall for his plan. Clarence believes that Richard will help him out of prison and set him free, but Richard's words are filled with irony. He makes Clarence believe that he would get him out, but he was planning for his death. After Richard's first soliloquy, Clarence enters, and Richard plays his part in being the honest soldier who is determined to get Clarence out of prison. Richard's use of irony in this conversation is only detected by the audience and not by his fellow characters. Following Clarence's arrest, he stresses the fragility of his pretense while reminding the audience of his plan to get rid of Clarence.

'Tis not the King that sends you to the Tower,'  
Simple, plain Clarence, I do love thee so  
That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven  
If heaven will take the present at our hands.<sup>30</sup>

Richard's ability to use words to gain the love of the people around him makes it easy for him to deceive them. Characters like Lady Anne who are aware of how cruel Richard is fall for his tactic when they are seduced by Richard. Despite being aware that Richard killed her

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<sup>29</sup> *Richard III* 1.3.336-8

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 1.1.118-20

husband and her father, she was seduced by his words. The seduction of Lady Anne shows Richard's intellectual superiority by engaging her in a wordplay. He exploits her vanity with unexpected declarations of his love for her by making her share the burden of his atrocities. He does not seem deterred by the denial of her feelings for him, so he threatens to kill himself, but he asked that she should be the one to kill him.

This hand, which for thy love did kill thy love  
Shall for thy love kill a far truer love.<sup>31</sup>

By saying this, he makes her an accomplice to his crime because he only killed those people because of the love he has for her. He says that the motivation behind his actions is her beauty, and he is willing to kill the whole world just to spend an hour with her. He says that,

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.<sup>32</sup>

At first, his attempt to seduce her does not work, but he continues to do so. He resorts to flattery in order to gain her trust and get rid of the hatred that she has towards him. Richard gave Lady Anne two difficult choices; to accept him as her lover or to kill him. He knows that she would not exact her revenge on him by being the one to kill him, so he preys on his ability to manipulate her feelings. Eventually, she gives in to his request, although unwillingly. She gives her consent to his proposal because she could not kill him with the sword. However, her words also have double meaning when she says, "to take is not to give."<sup>33</sup> She accepts his proposal because it has been imposed upon her without her having more options. She takes the ring from

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid 1.2.194-5

<sup>32</sup> Ibid 1.2.126-9

<sup>33</sup> Ibid 1.2.188

him but does not give herself totally to him. Clemen notes that the wooing scene has "the diabolical undertones, the sharp brilliance, and the breathtaking impetus of Richard himself."<sup>34</sup> He does not seduce Lady Anne because he truly loves her, but because she would fit in to his plan later.

Richard is a villain who carries the play completely. According to E. Pearlman, Richard is a creature of his deformity and jealousy: a character hated by his own mother and who hates all women in return.<sup>35</sup> He is an entertaining speaker who uses rhetoric without letting irony show in his language. R.F. Hill writes about the language of Aaron and Richard that,

In *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III*, the characters of Aaron and Richard crookback constantly disturb the rhetorical mode. Their vigor is presented with a naturalism that makes the language of the other characters look, indeed, frigid, thin, and artificial.<sup>36</sup>

### **Conclusion**

These villains are entertaining as some of them use puns, while others use dark humor to express themselves. The soliloquies employed by many of these villains help them communicate with their audience, and inform the audience about how they intend to carry out their evil plans. Richard makes his audience an accomplice to his crimes by informing them of what he wants to do. Although Richard is evil, his witticism temporarily distracts his audience from the severity of his crimes. Richard acts for the other characters so that they can be easily deceived, but he shows

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<sup>34</sup> Clemen, Wolfgang. *Commentary on Shakespeare's Richard III*. London and NY: Routledge, 1957 (Re-issued 2013). 42

<sup>35</sup> Pearlman, E. "The Invention of Richard of Gloucester." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43.4 (1992): 424

<sup>36</sup> Hill, R.F. "Shakespeare's Early Tragic Mode." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9.4 (1958): 464

his true nature to the audience. Richard Moulton describes Richard's ability to perform by saying that "Richard has become an artist in evil: the natural emotions attending crime- whether of passionate longing, or horror and remorse have given place to artistic appreciation of master pieces."<sup>37</sup> He enjoys manipulating the other character's perception of him. In Act 1 scene iii, he says "I seem a saint, when most I play the devil."<sup>38</sup>. Richard takes up different roles depending on how it fits into his plan on becoming a king. He appears to be the loyal brother to King Edward, whom he murders; he proves to be the impassioned lover when he seduces Lady Anne and he is seen as a kindly uncle to his nephews, who he kills eventually. After his confession of enjoying being manipulative, Sherr-Ziarko writes that "he then concludes the following two scenes with soliloquies in which he marvels at his own cleverness and talent for deception, much like the traditional vice, and invites the audience to share in his victory."<sup>39</sup>

Edmund however makes his audience to agree with him that the society is wrong for making children who are born out of wedlock to feel like they are outcasts. Edmund's drive for approval is driven by a deep seethed hatred for the way he is viewed as an outcast by the society. Edmund becomes repentant of his actions at the end of the play when he finds out that both Regan and Goneril died because of him. He says that "Yet Edmund was beloved."<sup>40</sup> His ability to admit his wrongdoing makes his conscience obvious as it shows that he became a villain not because he is inherently evil, but because of his drive for recognition by the society.

Leontes makes himself to believe a lie and work well with it. This lie drives him to become a king who rules his people with words that are contradictory to the way he talked to

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<sup>37</sup> Moulton, Richard G. *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker*. New York: MacMillan, 1907. 40

<sup>38</sup> *Richard III* I.iii.339

<sup>39</sup> Sherr-Ziarko, Emma Ariane. "Confronting Evil on Stage: The Immoral Villain as a Moral Figure." Wesleyan University. 60

<sup>40</sup> *King Lear* 5.3.238

them from the beginning of the play. He becomes suspicious of every woman because he believes they are incapable of being faithful in their marriages. And Antonio uses puns and his wit to get the attention of the people he wants to manipulate.

Shakespeare portrays these villains as people who understand humanity and can easily gain the trust of the people around them, even those who know what they are up to. All of the people that are close to these villains suffer the consequences of trusting them. Richard betrays Buckingham who is aware of his schemes; Edmund betrays the love of the two sisters who fall in love with him, as well as his father; Leontes betrays his wife and friend, Hermione and Polixenes; Antonio betrays Prospero and the King of Naples. In these plays, evil is not seen as a thought or a theme that runs through the play. Rather, it is shown in the acts of the villains and on their abilities to get away with evil. These villains deliberately choose evil as their source of power. Although Antonio manipulates events and people around him to get the power he wants without resorting to any form of bloodshed. Shakespeare writes Richard and Edmund in ways that will elicit sympathy for them from the audience; Richard is fighting for power as a way to get recognized because he is physically deformed and would otherwise not be noticed, and Edmund is exacting his vengeance on the society for putting a stigma on him because of how he is conceived. Shakespeare shows that the evil that these villains do results in their self-destruction as they eventually suffer the consequences of their actions. The comedy used by some of the villains is in line with the superiority theory of humor as defined by David Monroe: “according to any superiority theory of humor, the laugher always looks down on whatever he laughs at, and so judges it inferior by some standard.”<sup>41</sup> In the case of Richard, he laughs at his

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<sup>41</sup> Monroe, D. H. 1988. “Theories of Humor.” In *Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*, 3rd edition, edited by Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen, 349–355. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company. 349

ability to get away with his evil deeds even though they are clearly pronounced without being considered as bad. An example of this superiority theory is Richard's soliloquy after his wooing scene with Lady Anne. He indicates that he does not love her after she accepts his proposal. He even congratulates himself for being successful in convincing her to marry him.

With the exception of Leontes whose villainy is as a result of his jealousy, the other villains take pride in their work. However, Leontes and Antonio believe in their own lie and begin to work with the lie that they believe. They also strive to make others believe this lie. Shakespeare's villains mirror the innate desire for humans to do evil. Therefore, they capture the audience's attention with their soliloquies. Through these soliloquies, the audience could see how fast Leontes' jealousy was spinning out of control, and how fast he was going in order to convince himself that his wife was truly cheating on him.

Even though these villains have different ways and motives for doing what they do, their language reflects that they are manipulative when dealing with other characters in the play. Some of them even implicate the audience by making them a part of their schemes. They all use words to make others believe that the image they are portraying is the right image.



## Including A Comic Theme To A Classic Tragedy: The Case Of Scotland, PA

Film adaptations of Shakespeare are magical in that we, as the audience, are more or less handed a certain interpretative experience; one given to us by the choices made by the directors. How a director approaches Shakespeare for performance is a textual attempt as he or she cuts, edits, or re-arranges the play. The director often has a certain vision he or she wishes to focus on. Emma Smith notes that "stage history is as much an account of reception as it is of production, and often audiences do not experience what directors intended them to experience."<sup>1</sup> According to Greg Jenkins,

Adaptation represents such a dark and enigmatic thread that it has elicited disparate and sometimes diametric opinions. Even among those who champion faithful adaptations, there is no clear formula concerning how generally to implement the procedure, or afterwards how to evaluate the procedure's success or failure.<sup>2</sup>

When working on adaptations, the director must consider different factors as to what would make the film work. They have to figure out the important pieces of the text that are relevant to the adaptation, what has to be edited out of the film, the context to which the film will be alluding to, and how much of the text will have a direct impact on the film.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a tragedy brought to the 21<sup>st</sup> century by Billy Morrissette in his 2001 adaptation, *Scotland, PA*. The film presents a substantial amount of plot modifications. Alan Dessen argues that directors generally fall into two categories: either they rescript, and in so

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Emma. *Henry V (Shakespeare in Production)*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. Pg. 2

<sup>2</sup> Jenkins, Greg. "Stanley Kubrick and the Art of Adaptation: Three Novels, Three Films." Jefferson: McFarland, 1997. Pg. 8

doing make "changes (that are) made by a director in the received text in response to a perceived problem or to achieve some agenda" or they "rewrite and in so doing move closer to the role of the playwright so as to fashion a script with substantial difference from the original."<sup>3</sup>

Morrisette, who puts a spin on a classic tragedy by turning it into a black comedy, falls into the second category; taking liberties with the script by re-arranging scenes, cutting large chunks, and sometimes imposing elements upon the play that are not otherwise there. In the director's commentary, Morrisette says that the idea to write *Scotland, PA* came from when he was working at Dairy Queen. *Scotland, PA* revolutionizes the play by turning it from a tragedy into a comedy; and therefore, sidesteps some of the play's serious issues. However, through comical approach, the film serves the purpose of social criticism. Morrisette sarcastically comments on fast-food restaurants, small towns, and the culture of the 1970s. The viewer sees how the lack of opportunities in the 1970s creates the appropriate atmosphere for greed, lust, and dishonesty to multiply. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to show how Morrisette moves *Macbeth*, a classic tragedy, into a black comedy. The paper will also show how Morrisette comments on capitalism in the 1970s by focusing on how Joe Macbeth tries to get the restaurant for himself.

Corrigan, in *Comedy: Meaning and Form* explains that "comedy is an escape, not from truth but from despair: a narrow escape into faith."<sup>4</sup> He further explains that "comic method can serve to create an imaginative but dispassionate attitude; to create the conditions for thinking; to free the dramatist in his attempt to tap certain rational resources of mind in his audience."<sup>5</sup>

Morrisette renders the plot of *Macbeth* into a black comedy and capitalizes on the play's food references by placing the story in the midst of the 1970s fast-food expansion. He moves food

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<sup>3</sup> Dessen, Alan. *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters*. Cambridge, 1984. Pg. 3

<sup>4</sup> Corrigan, Robert. W. *Comedy: Meaning and Form*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981. Pg. 17

<sup>5</sup> Corrigan, 163

from the margin to the center of the film. Setting Macbeth in a greasy fast-food restaurant, Scotland, PA makes burgers the foundation of Mac's grab for power. The addition of comedy to a play like Macbeth gives the audience a sense of peace and hope that it is possible for the dark moments to be erased from their minds. According to Corrigan, comedy no longer focuses on the evil of the day, but it rather "ridicules the staunchly honest, the intellectual, the chaste, and the peaceful."<sup>6</sup> Scotland, PA, is considered a black comedy because it makes light of power struggles and greed. Corrigan explains that "the best comedy teases and troubles an audience; it can be painful."<sup>7</sup> Although Scotland, PA does not totally cause riotous laughter, the sequence of the scenes from dark moments to the inclusion of humor makes it easy to follow. An example is the justification Pat gives Mac about their quest for power. She says, "we are not bad people, we are just underachievers that have to make up for lost time."<sup>8</sup> This lightens up their situation and consequently, the crimes they commit. The commentary about underachievers making up for lost time makes Pat and Mac less evil; rather, it gives a real-life attitude which college kids could relate to.

Morrisette's decision to use dark comedy in a tragedy work for various reasons. Dark comedy is often used as a means to comment on some things in the society. Alan Pratt notes that black humor literature is similar to the literature of existentialism in that it begins with the same assumption- that the world is absurd.<sup>9</sup> Dark comedy is not only used at times where laughing comes at complete odds when compared to the situation it is used for; it is also useful in fortifying and creating awareness for the challenged, thereby demeaning the possible

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<sup>6</sup> Corrigan, 156

<sup>7</sup> Corrigan 156

<sup>8</sup> Scotland, PA

<sup>9</sup> Alan R. Pratt, ed. *Black Humor: Critical Essays*. New York: Garland, 1993. Pg xvii

challengers. In this film, Morrissette uses the dark comedy to comment on the nature of consumerism in America through the tale of deceit and murder. For Duncan, Pat, and Joe, financial success, greed, and promotion lead to tragic deaths. Morrissette's film does a good job of highlighting the main theme of the original play as Joe and Pat's lust for power and control of the restaurant leads them down a destructive path. The film focuses on the temptation that the capitalist government imposes on the citizens. From the beginning of the play, the McBeths are driven by greed and ambition. In George Moore's analysis of the film, he writes about what Morrissette aims to achieve with the film and how it connects to the setting in the mass consumerism of rural America in the 70's:

Operating in the reflective mode, *Scotland, PA* exploits America's own conflicted memories of the 1970s as an era defined by both the growth of mass consumerism and the persistence of a countercultural remnant from the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The Transformation***

In order to adapt Macbeth as a dark humor, Morrissette rearranges the text to heighten issues the director wishes to emphasize. Although worlds apart, the fast-food fantasy mirrors Shakespeare's story of royal deception and assassination. Morrissette alters the plot while maintaining the basic themes of power, ambition, and greed from Shakespeare's Macbeth. The separate tone from the play is obvious; while Shakespeare intended for the audience to go through the gruesome tragedy of Macbeth, Morrissette creates a comedy to make light of the culture of the 1970s. The way

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<sup>10</sup> Moore, George. "Literature/ Film Quarterly." *Macbeth Goes to Carnival: Otium and Economic Determinism in Scotland, PA*. Salisbury University, 2018, [lfq.salisbury.edu/\\_issues/45\\_3/macbeth\\_goes\\_to\\_carnival.html](http://lfq.salisbury.edu/_issues/45_3/macbeth_goes_to_carnival.html).

Morrisette fits Shakespeare's characters and story into the 1970s milieu is amusing. Unlike Michael Almerayda and Ethan Hawke's 2000 film of *Hamlet*, Morrisette does not rely on Shakespeare's dialogue. However, some of the play's most famous lines can be heard in the background, often coming out of McDuff's meditation tapes. An example is Macbeth's "tomorrow" speech which had turned into a meditation tape for McDuff. We hear in the tape as Macbeth begins his speech:

Tomorrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow  
 Creeps in the pretty pace from day to day  
 To the last syllable of recorded time  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
 Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury  
 Signifying nothing<sup>11</sup>

He plays with tone and intent, thereby resulting in a motion picture that is undeniably Macbeth and ultimately a comedy. The major transformation in the film is based on presentation and context. He alters the way the course of events occurs and gives the audience a different understanding of the development and representation of the characters, especially Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Pat wants her husband, Mac, to take over the restaurant so that they can get the credit for the new ideas and not have a boss that underestimates them. She manipulates her husband into doing her bidding, often using sex as a means of getting what she wants.

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<sup>11</sup> *Macbeth* V.v.19-28

The basis of the plot remains intact, but Morrissette reduces the setting of the play from a whole country to a small town in the state of Pennsylvania, and the first part of the eleventh century becomes the 1970s. The castles have been transformed to a local fast-food restaurant, and the horses have been replaced by a Camaro. The weapon which is used to commit the murder in this film adaptation is not a sword, but a greasy spoon which knocks Duncan unconscious. In Scotland, PA, Duncan's death seems to be an accident as it wasn't Mac and Pat's intent to push Duncan, face down, to the hot oil. Also, the witches' cave is now a tavern called "Witches Brew" where Mac, Banko, and their friends constantly enjoy alcohol. Also, Mac encounters the witches alone at the site of the carnival.

An example of a change which does not translate into Scotland, PA is the attempt to murder McDuff's family. As a response to the suggestion of the first hippy to kill McDuff's family, the second hippy says, "Oh, that'd work..... About a thousand years ago. These are modern times, you cannot go around killing everybody."

The sounds of thunder and lightning, as indicated by the witches in the play has been replaced by songs in the 1970s. One of such songs is "Beach Baby," which was playing when Mac and Pat appear to be relaxing in their pool after the successfully become the owners of the restaurant. The song was popularly played amongst those who are in the upper class in the society. According to George Moore, "Beach Baby" verges into restorative nostalgia by attempting to recall a lost American golden age, a time "when everybody drove a Chevrolet."<sup>12</sup>

### ***Characters***

*Joe "Mac" McBeth*

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<sup>12</sup> Moore

Mac, who assumes the semblance of Macbeth is a fry-cook in Duncan's little burger joint. Although he is stripped of his royal regalia, Mac's rank is equivalent to that of Macbeth. Like Macbeth, Mac is a brave and ferocious champion who seeks to defend the honor of his employer and his restaurant. An example of this bravery is the scene where he jumps over the counter to stop a group of troublemakers from wrecking havoc. This act is considered as brave because we see the restaurant's manager, Douglas, hiding in the restroom. Despite his bravery, Duncan refuses to promote him, and it takes a little bit of snitching for him to be promoted to the rank of assistant manager. It is difficult to take Mac seriously in his role at the diner especially because he constantly spaces out.

Urged on by Pat and the hippies, Mac hopes for the opportunity to rise from fry-cook to the restaurant's manager. However, he is reluctant to do anything about his present situation. He is driven insane by the pressure that his wife puts on him, and that pushes him to kill Banko.

### *Pat McBeth*

Pat, like Lady Macbeth desperately seeks power and social status. She is portrayed as a sexy compliment to her admiring husband. The McBeths are a loving couple who are constantly seen making out. They are a passionate, and power-hungry couple who are willing to do anything to get out of the confines of hardship to a higher class. However, Pat knows that her husband will not make his dream possible unless she influences him. The difference between Lady Macbeth and Pat is the medium through which they achieved their goals. While Lady Macbeth plays on Macbeth's masculinity and assumes the role of the male, Pat assumes a motherly role by giving Mac pep talks, yet she uses her sexuality to control Mac. An example of

such is when she say "We are not bad people. We are just underachievers who have to make up for lost time. Don't you think we deserve it Mac?"

Her controlling attitude makes her push Mac to kill Duncan in order to gain access to the restaurant. One of the ways Morrissette uses comedy to cover up a sad scene is where Pat, like Lady Macbeth gets a stain on her hand as a sign of her guilt. In the film, Pat has oil spill on her hand from the oil in which Duncan was killed. As in the play, Pat is driven insane by the spot, which had long since healed. This causes her to visit her pharmacist to get ointment in order to rub on the spot. Her guilt drives her to keep seeing the result of her devious acts and she goes to any length to cover up her sins. An example of this was where she wore an oven mitten over her hand, in order to cover up the evidence, when McDuff pays them a surprise visit.

### *The Witches*

In Scotland, PA, the witches are replaced by two hippies and one fortune-teller. The film begins with the "witches," just like in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The film opens with a crane shot of the hippies in a carnival, where they are seen riding a roller coaster and eating chicken. The first encounter with the witches seems indecently to invite the spectator behind the scenes, into the kitchen, to the sources of creative energy and dramatic power before it unfolds in its proper place.<sup>13</sup> We partake in the 'dismembering' done by the witches, and it alludes to the lines in the play: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." The supernatural constantly overlaps with the real world. The hippies seem to put Mac in a trance-like state as the first time he meets with the hippies, they

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<sup>13</sup> Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality*. London: Methuen, 1987. Pg. 93



give him marijuana. As a result, the fortune-teller's voice seems to have been modified even though she is uncertain about prophecies.

### *Banko*

Banko is Mac's best friend, and he is the one that reveals Douglas' habit of stealing from the restaurant which Mac and Pat capitalizes on in order to gain favor with Duncan. He becomes suspicious of Mac when he sees his interaction with the hippies and realizes that Mac is keeping something from him. Due to the fact that Banko was constantly drinking, he does not agree with the fortune telling done by the hippy like Mac did, as in the play. However, he was present at the press conference which Mac was using to promote his restaurant.

### *Duncan*

He has been reduced from a king to the owner of a burger joint who has no control over his two sons, Malcolm and Donald. Duncan is portrayed as a domineering father who forces his son, Donald, to play football. Neither son has an interest in taking ownership of the restaurant. As a result, they sell it to the McBeths immediately after their father's demise.

### *McDuff*

He is the detective who investigates the death of Duncan. He is introduced as a vegetarian who could not stand Mac and Pat because of their love for meat. This idea that a vegetarian is the one to restore order to the small town makes light of animal rights. This inclusion makes it seem like animal eaters are blood-thirsty and would go to any length to achieve their aim. Mac is portrayed

as a meat lover, and even his car is decorated with bulls' horns. Malcolm also alludes to this idea when he calls him a "dead butcher" who has accumulated a number of dead bodies. Elizabeth Deitchman argues that "In the contrast between the McDuff family's vegetarianism and the McBeth's carnivorous eating habits, the film again articulates a clear connection between taste, class, and moral character."<sup>14</sup>

In Dietchman's analysis of McDuff's character, she shows that McDuff is a moral character who does the right thing by working hard to see justice done. She makes a comparison with their choice of food by making it seem that eating veggies and taking care of one's self dictates the right choices in life. The choice of what they want to eat determines their class in the society. A preference for meat and how the meat is prepared at the restaurant shows a kind of cruelty that a vegetarian would not get involved in. Dietchman further observes that Pat and Joe's bad taste follows them as they climb the social ladder. She writes that, in its adherence to Macbeth's plot, the film links social class directly to morality, vilifying the white-trash McBeths actually trapped in their class category.<sup>15</sup>

**Social Commentary** Morrissette shows a clip from an old TV series *McCloud* to point out that the difference between tragedy and comedy is that of context and the interpretation of the audience. The show was not considered a comedy when it was originally aired. However, when it is shown in Scotland, PA, it does not come off as very serious. This move by Morrissette shows that the way a film is viewed by the audience determines the tone which the film takes.

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<sup>14</sup> Deitchman, Elizabeth. "White Trash Shakespeare: Taste, Morality and the Dark Side of the American Dream in Billy Morrissette's *Scotland, PA*." *Literature/ Film Quarterly*, 34 no. 2, 2006. 144

<sup>15</sup> Dietchman, 140

The scenes in the series did not change, but the context has. Corrigan tries to explain the place of the audience when watching comedy. He says that:

In Comedy..... we seek to cure the sores and boils that have formed on the susceptible flesh of history. This can be accomplished only by a controlled and reasoned disgust; a disgust that doesn't release the intellectual from the problem of witnessing man and his actions in the theatre; a disgust that involves and yet does not excuse one from responsibility; a disgust of such a nature that it leaves room for hope and engenders a feeling within us that the wrongs can be and ultimately must be righted.<sup>16</sup>

This can be applied to this adaptation of *Macbeth*. Scotland, PA shows that, with few real re-arrangements, comedy can be found in the most tragic stories.

Morrisette uses dark humor to expose and comment on issues, such as capitalism in the society. Courtney Lehman believes that the appeal of the play in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century may lie in the fact that its portrayal of ruthless ambition resonates and accords with the spirit of capitalism.<sup>17</sup> Lehman observes that "the bizarre, capitalist' consumer ethos' proleptically embedded in Shakespeare's play explains, I think in large part, the flurry of recent films and spin offs of *Macbeth*. Humor is introduced so that the audience can get some relief and lighten up from the dark moments."<sup>18</sup> Occasionally, the film provokes different emotions of discomfort and laughter from the audience. An example is the conversation between Mrs. McGuire and Malcolm when Duncan died:

Mrs. McGuire: Donald, Is that you?

Malcolm: No

Mrs. McGuire: How are you?

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<sup>16</sup> Corrigan, 164

<sup>17</sup> Bladen, Victoria. "Weird Spaces in *Macbeth* on Screen." *Shakespeare on Screen: Macbeth*. Eds. Sarah Hatchuel, Vienne- Guerrin and Victoria Bladen. Presses Universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2014. 83

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 83

Malcolm: Lousy

Mrs. McGuire: How's your father?

Malcolm: Dead

Mrs. McGuire: Hahahahahaha.

He transforms the tragic play about the ambition of a couple to attain monarchical power, backed up by a prophecy, to a modern film about a couple with dead-end jobs. Despite their patience in climbing up the social ladder, they cannot seem to achieve their aim fast enough. Therefore, they hatch a plan to get what they want by any means. Although a number of the elements which makes *Macbeth* work are absent in this film, Morrissette's effort to create awareness about the social struggle in the capitalist world is clearly portrayed in the film. However, the representation of the supernatural, which is a focal point of the play, is simply downplayed by the hippies who are constantly stoned, and whose prophecies are a result of guesses.

Morrissette claims that the idea to set Scotland, PA in a fast food restaurant came to him when he was a teenager. The target-audience for any film adaptation is important as it dictates its reception. Morrissette claims that he wrote Scotland, PA for teenagers like him, who did not pay attention to their Shakespeare books, but were constantly stoned and looking at notes in order to follow the text. Morrissette trades the storyline and makes it into a black comedy film that can be enjoyed with only a basic knowledge of the play itself. He uses the tragedy of *Macbeth* to create a comedy that exposes a socio-cultural need to strive for social status and misuse power. Morrissette shows that even in today's world, it is possible for a person to be so power-hungry to the extent that they commit murder. The killing of Duncan seemed inevitable as he was the only stumbling block to the couple's success. With his death, they were able to implement the changes they had in mind before the restaurant became theirs. Just like Shakespeare's original

play, the film clearly portrays a picture of a couple's struggle to get to the top. Joe's lust for power is strengthened by his wife's determination to succeed by all means and the prompting of the three hippies. At the opening of the play, Joe was a well-liked character for his bravery. However, he quickly becomes a villain when his thoughts become controlled by greed and ambition for power.

## Dual Representation of Prospero's Epilogue

Have you ever wondered the length you would go to if you had the opportunity to take revenge on those who have gravely offended you? The opportunity to get them to pay you back for every tear they have ever caused you to shed? That was the case with Prospero; the foundation of the play is Prospero's desire to get back at his younger brother, Antonio, for betraying him and stealing his title and properties. However, in the end, Prospero decides against revenge and settles for forgiveness, as in the popular saying, "There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness." The goal of this paper is to investigate the ways in which Prospero was portrayed as a character in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. I will argue that Prospero's acts cannot be only considered as heroic because of his evil acts towards Caliban. Although various scholars argue that his forgiveness of the people who wronged him could be considered heroic, his relationships with other characters in the play in the first few acts do not portray him as heroic. His speech in the epilogue has also been considered as a form of connection between Prospero and Shakespeare as each of them comes to a turning point in his life.. Therefore, this paper will also delve into some aspects of the epilogue and how they are parallel to the life of Shakespeare.

Prospero is the Duke of Milan, but his brother, Antonio, overthrows him with the help of the King of Naples. The betrayal by his brother probably serves as a form of justification to revenge by causing the storm which led to his brother's shipwreck. Prospero is perhaps the most complex of Shakespeare's villains. He blurs the line between a hero and a villain in various aspects of the play. He is manipulative and selfish, but he is also forgiving of his enemies and protective of his daughter. Shakespeare shows his display of power as the play progresses. He moves from being betrayed by his brother in the beginning of the play by exiling himself to an

island through his magic, to taking over the island and having servants work for him, to his causing a tempest for the boat in which his brother, who betrayed him, was travelling.

As a man of power, Prospero successfully portrays different images of himself to the different characters based on the kind of relationship he has with them. To his daughter, he is a passionate man who wants to see that his naïve daughter does not end up in the wrong hands. He is aware that Miranda is trusting of all the creatures she sees on the Island. Therefore, he sees to it that she does not fall into the wrong hands, but rather into the hands of Ferdinand who he has found worthy of his daughter's love. However, he became controlling and dictatorial as he imposed on the two lovers on how their lives should be. This comes as no surprise to his servants, who see him as a controlling master who treats them with contempt. According to Lee Jamieson, Prospero is quite a foreboding character, dealing out punishments, treating his servants with contempt and raising questions about his morality and fairness.<sup>1</sup> However, his relationship with these servants sometimes breaches the gap between good and evil. His relationship with Caliban also starts off as good when he teaches Caliban to speak the human language as opposed to his usual cursing. However, his treatment of Caliban takes a turn for the worst when Caliban attempted to rape Miranda. He frees Ariel from a terrible fate which was bestowed on the spirit by Sycorax, but he also threatens Ariel that a worse fate can befall the spirit for twelve years if Prospero's orders are not carried out properly. He warns the spirit:

I will rend an oak  
And peg thee in their knotty entrails till  
Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jamieson, Lee. "What to Know About Prospero From 'Tempest'." *ThoughtCo*, 18 Sept. 2018, [www.thoughtco.com/prospero-in-the-tempest-2985277](http://www.thoughtco.com/prospero-in-the-tempest-2985277).

<sup>2</sup> *The Tempest* I.ii.294-6

At the beginning of the play, it is difficult for the audience to identify with Prospero because of his selfishness and greed to get more knowledge. He seemed to be more interested in his books than in the advancement of his kingdom. When he was telling Miranda of their lives outside of the Island, he admits that: “I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated/ To closeness and the bettering of my mind.”<sup>3</sup> His quest for more knowledge at the detriment of his kingdom is what afforded his brother the opportunity to usurp the kingdom from him. When his brother betrays him, and he is exiled to the island, he uses his power and knowledge of magic to get everything he wants on the island. He uses every means available to him to achieve his objectives, even if it means hurting people. His goal is to gain back his dukedom and see that those that betrayed him are punished for their actions. His domineering personality allows him to control Ariel, a powerful spirit, to cause the storm of the ship carrying his enemies. Throughout the play, Prospero is depicted as someone who lacked emotion and wants to control everything, including the environment, as well as the supernatural, and he does this by using his knowledge of magic. His actions are so well calculated that he told Miranda as much about what would happen in the play. He says:

I have with such provision in mine art  
So safely ordered that there is no soul  
No, not so much perdition as an air  
Betid to any creature in the vessel.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid I.ii.89-90

<sup>4</sup> Ibid I.ii.27-30



Although he ensures that none of his victims were harmed, he makes sure that they suffer the consequences of their actions. He separates father and son, Alonso and Ferdinand, thereby making Alonso feel the pain of losing something that is precious to him.

The character of Prospero is often portrayed as heroic because of his final acts, thereby overlooking some of the evil deeds earlier in the play. His treatment of Caliban especially taints his image as a good person and exposes some of his evil acts. Some scholars have argued that Prospero's relationship with Caliban is that of the ruler and the ruled, much like the European colonialism of some certain countries. Caliban accuses Prospero of taking over the island which rightfully belongs to him as he is the son of Sycorax, the witch that was in charge of the island. He says that, This island's mine, by Sycorax, my mother/Which thou tak'st from me.<sup>5</sup>

Caliban did not mind the presence of new people who were willing to teach him new things at first, much like the people who were being colonized. Prospero and Caliban started off with a good relationship where Prospero and Miranda taught him the language, and Caliban taught them how to survive on the island. Caliban recalls that Prospero treated him well at the beginning but started to mistreat him later. He says, Thou (Prospero) strok'st me and made much of me.<sup>6</sup>

The relationship between the two changed when Caliban attempted to rape Miranda. Prospero stopped to see Caliban as someone he could teach, he started to treat him like a servant. He also verbally abused Caliban on different occasions. One of the ways he insulted him was by insulting

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid I.ii.331-2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid I.ii.336

his mother, Sycorax. Prospero says to Caliban, Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/Upon thy wicked dam, come forth.<sup>7</sup>

Prospero's abuse of Caliban was not only verbal. He also physically abused him by sending the spirit to pinch him on some occasions. This maltreatment of Caliban makes him to feel tormented by Prospero to the extent to which he cries out, Do not torment me, prithee!/I'll bring my wood home faster.<sup>8</sup>

Meredith Skura posits that recent critics who are comparing Prospero's treatment of Caliban with that of the European colonists are doing so because that was how people reacted to strangers. She writes that they put Caliban in the center of the play in order to put the theme of colonialism as an important aspect in the play. She argues that

If Caliban is the center of the play, it is not because of his role in the play's self-contained structure, and not even because of what he reveals about man's tendency to demonize "strangers," but because Europeans were at that time Exploiting the real Calibans of the world, and *The Tempest* was part of the process.<sup>9</sup>

This interpretation of the text and some of the justifications of Prospero's treatment of Caliban seem similar to Edward Said's idea of orientalism. Orientalism has an "us versus them" connotation where one culture is the ruled and the other is the ruler. When trying to understand the culture of the countries where they are colonizing, the West developed a notion of superiority where they can introduce some atom of civilization to these countries. According to Said,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid I.ii.322-3

<sup>8</sup> Ibid II.ii.68-9

<sup>9</sup> Skura, Meredith Anne. "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in "The Tempest"." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1989), page 45

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.<sup>10</sup>

The play alludes to the ideology of racial otherness by putting Prospero in a position of power, and Caliban in the position of his servant. This notion is peculiar to the ways in which Caliban is portrayed in the play. He is depicted as an abominable monster, much like the ones the European travelers encountered. However, with the advent of post-colonial interpretations, Caliban began to gain the sympathy of the audience. With the help of Prospero and Miranda, he was able to learn new things. Despite Prospero's mistreatment of him, Caliban would not be able to communicate with other humans like Stephano who he met later in the play. Prospero domesticizes Caliban by making him do chores that are not only outside. He treats Ariel with more preference and makes Ferdinand to oversee Caliban.

With all of his cruel deeds, how is it that Prospero is not usually considered to be one of Shakespeare's villains? I would argue that his epilogue is of key importance. In this epilogue, he shows mercy to all those who have wronged him, and this seems to be the last act that leaves a lasting impression in the minds of the audience.

Now my charms are all o'erthrown  
 And what strength I have's mine own  
 Which is most faint. Now, 'tis true  
 I must be here confined by you  
 Or sent to Naples. Let me not  
 Since I have my dukedom got  
 And pardoned the deceiver, dwell

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<sup>10</sup> Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, pg. 11

In this bare island by your spell  
 But release me from my bands  
 With the help of your good hands  
 Gentle breath of yours my sails  
 Must fill, or else myproject fails  
 Which was to please. Now I want  
 Spirits to enforce, art to enchant  
 And my ending is despair  
 Unless I be relieved by prayer  
 Which pierces so that it assaults  
 Mercy itself and frees all faults  
 As you from crimes would pardoned be  
 Let your indulgence set me free.

Scholars have long tried to decipher what the epilogue could really mean. Certainly, it is subject to different interpretations; some think there is no hidden meaning in the epilogue, since *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry VIII*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* all have epilogues that no one seems eager to read beyond the confines of the play, but some think it serves as a retirement speech by Shakespeare to his audience, and some think it is a form of prayer in which Prospero asks for forgiveness for the wrongs he has done to those he manipulated. Prospero's epilogue takes place after every other person leaves the stage and he is directly addressing and engaging the audience; this is a kind of "play within a play" as it allows the audience to alter an aspect of the play. According to Northrop Frye, In *The Tempest*, the play and the play within the play become the same thing; we're looking simultaneously at two plays; Shakespeare's and the dramatic structure being worked out by Prospero.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Frye, Northrop. *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*. Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1986. Pg. 172

There are a few similarities between Shakespeare and Prospero which support the idea that it is Shakespeare's voice speaking. In the process of searching for the parallels between Prospero and Shakespeare, it is easy to get distracted as there is little, or nothing left to work with when it comes to getting proper information about Shakespeare's life. However, perhaps Prospero helps to fill the gap in the records of Shakespeare's life. Prospero and Shakespeare are both old and planning to return to relinquish their gifts and return to their place of birth: Prospero relinquishing his magic and returning to Naples, and Shakespeare, his art, and returning to Stratford.

Both Prospero and Shakespeare manipulate the way people think: Prospero, the people who are on the island, and Shakespeare, the characters in his plays as well as their audiences. The intent of their manipulation is not to cause harm as they both have good reasons for their actions. Shakespeare manipulates the characters in the play in order to create entertainment, while Prospero does his in order to recover what belongs to him, that is, his dukedom. Additionally, there is a strong connection between Miranda and Prospero which makes their bond stronger. Shakespeare also has a daughter and the way he portrays a strong relationship between father and daughter in his plays, like Juliet and her father, is an indication of a good relationship with his daughter.

Shakespeare requires that the audience applaud his art by sending him off with an applause, so that he will retire without feeling that they do not approve of his work. He does this by saying, But release me from my bands/With the help of your good hands.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Epilogue 9-10

He also realizes that the way he has gotten his art recognized is because of his audience who continues to support him; therefore, he needs them to set him free. He has successfully made us think in certain ways, for instance, to get us to believe in magic, and now he is bound by the audience's attention and requires their forgiveness to be set free. Prospero needs the applause of the audience to leave the stage, since he has renounced his magic. Shakespeare on the other hand, requires the audience to clap so that he can be reassured that he has not failed in "his project ... / which was to please" by delivering another work of art.

Many scholars have supported the idea that Prospero's epilogue allows Shakespeare to speak directly to his audience. For example, Dowden said:

We identify Prospero in some measure with Shakespeare himself ... because the temper of Prospero, the grave harmony of his character, his self-mastery, his calm validity of will ... and with these, a certain abandonment, a remoteness from the common joys and sorrows of the world, are characteristic of Shakespeare as discovered to us in all his latest plays."<sup>13</sup>

Beauregard also thinks that there is an autobiographical element in Prospero's representation in *The Tempest*. He said:

At the finish of the action of the play itself, Prospero-as-character is not bound, he is no longer confined to "this bare island." His project has not been merely to please, he is not in despair, and he has no need of the aid of others, discontinuous details which would seem clearly to provoke an autobiographical interpretation of the speech. Shakespeare-as-actor is bound and confined to the stage, he has been concerned to please, his old age would dispose him to despair, and he clearly would have need of others. These dramatic discontinuities force us to look for referential continuities outside the speech itself in the actor's life.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dowden, Edward. "Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art." *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art*, Harper & Brothers, New York and London, New York, 1875, pg 371

<sup>14</sup> Beauregard, David N. 1997. "New Light on Shakespeare's Catholicism: Prospero's Epilogue in the *Tempest*." *Renascence* 49 (3): 163

The closeness in reality to the idea of the person created by Shakespeare, as well as to the timeline at which he stopped writing makes it possible for us to make assumptions about whether the epilogue is indeed his voice. Even though he went on to write *Henry VIII*, many scholars claim it is a speech declaring the end of his career as an actor and now a playwright. If it is interpreted to be the voice of Shakespeare, it might very well be a means of connecting to his audience as there were not much information about him, therefore creating an alternate character, and ending with the epilogue would allow the readers and audience to give the play an interpretation of their own.

However, even if the epilogue does indeed serve as an opportunity for Shakespeare to speak directly to his audience, that does not exclude the possibility of other interpretations. There are several religious references found in Prospero's epilogue. These references include both the Protestant and Catholic ideologies, so perhaps the epilogue is also Shakespeare's opportunity to propose a bit of religious unity after generations of religious upheaval in his country, which began during the rule of Henry VIII as he attempted to get a divorce from his first wife, Katherine of Aragon and subsequently broke away from the Catholic Church to establish the Church of English:

From 1536 to 1540, Henry VIII began to dismantle the Catholic churches in England. As Supreme head of the Church, (he) began to confiscate monastic property, eventually suppressing all the religious houses in England and Wales.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> BBC- History: British History, Tudors. *BBC News*. BBC, n.d. Web 28 Oct. 2018

After Henry VIII's death, and the death of his young son Edward VI, his daughter, Mary became the Queen of England. She was a devout Catholic who was determined to get rid of Protestantism which was started by her father. She was determined to halt the growth of Protestantism initiated by her father and return England to Roman Catholicism.<sup>19</sup> Mary I of England died in 1558 and Elizabeth became the new Queen of England. Elizabeth was not a Catholic, therefore, she tried to bring back Protestantism.

The 1559 Act of Uniformity declared the new hastily-printed Book of Common Prayer, a revision of Edward VI's Protestant prayer book of 1552, the only prayer book to be used in the parish churches throughout England and Wales. The Catholic mass or any other form of worship was henceforth illegal.<sup>16</sup>

Even though Shakespeare was not born during these times, the events had a lingering impact that survived into Shakespeare's life and beyond. With all the alternating religions from Catholicism to Protestantism, it would be difficult to keep track of the changes and many people in England secretly held onto their Catholic beliefs. According to Robert Miola, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* reveals that Shakespeare draws on rich traditions of Catholicism to create his drama.<sup>17</sup> Todd Edmondson compares some of Prospero's characterization in the play to that of the Catholic priests:

Just as Prospero is presented to us as a character in flux between a former life and a future one, so the Roman Catholic priests of Shakespeare's England were also in flux. As their nation went through a religious reformation, new questions were

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<sup>16</sup> BBC- History: British History, Tudors. *BBC News*. BBC, n.d. Web 28 Oct. 2018

<sup>17</sup> Miola, Robert. "Shakespeare's Religion." *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life* 183 (2008): 25. *Academic Search Premier*



constantly emerging about the Catholic clergy's status within a new and rapidly changing order.<sup>18</sup>

Prospero's final speech has many religious connotations. The language in Prospero's epilogue contains some of the elements of the Catholic doctrine as described by Beauregard: the efficacy of intercessory prayer, the justification and remission of sin, and a reference to indulgences.<sup>24</sup> In the epilogue, Prospero requests to be "released by prayer," and pleads for their "indulgence." The lines appeal to the audience, hence calling for, " the help of your good hands."<sup>19</sup>The prayer has to be made to God, and it requires that someone steps in and pleads on behalf of the offender. In this case, Prospero is calling out to the audience to pray to God on his behalf, so he can be free from his mistakes.

In his epilogue, Prospero hopes to give up his old ways and start afresh. This concept of starting afresh is connected to the Christian ideology of being washed free from sin; he hopes to give up his past life, as well as his magic, and start a new life.

Scholars believe that Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a play about reconciliation and forgiveness and this act is evident in Prospero's decision to forgive those who wronged him. However, this was not always the case. Although he made sure that their ship was safe, his enemies had to suffer for a while before they were forgiven. According to Frank Davidson,

Desire for vengeance has apparently lain dormant in Prospero through the years of banishment, and now, with the sudden advent of his foes, the great wrong of twelve years before is stirringly present again, arousing the passions and stimulating the will to action.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Edmondson, Todd. "Prospero's Exile And The Tempest Of The English Reformation." *Religion & The Arts* 14.3 (2010): 253. *Academic Search Premier*

<sup>19</sup> Epilogue 10

<sup>20</sup> Davidson, Frank. *The Tempest: An Interpretation. In The Tempest: A Casebook*. Ed. D.J. Palmer. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1968. Pg 225

Prospero forgives those who betrayed him only after he has seen them suffer. The hidden message behind the epilogue could be linked to the lines in the Lord's prayer where it says:

And forgive us our trespasses  
As we forgive those who trespass against us<sup>21</sup>

Prospero hopes that as he has forgiven them, the same measure of forgiveness would be granted him by the audience as he has openly admitted his faults in their presence.

His initial plan for revenge is to see his enemies go crazy by causing Ariel to torment them. When his revenge was really working, and he saw how pained Gonzalo was, Prospero changed his mind. He says to Ariel:

Though with their wrongs I am struck to th' quick  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part. The rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further. Go release them, Ariel  
My charm I'll break, their senses I'll restore  
And they shall be themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Prospero realizes that his anger was moving him towards a path of vengeance. He decided against that option in favor of a nobler one where he could reconcile with those who have wronged him. At the end of the play, Prospero gives up his magic and aims to build a better relationship with his family and pay more attention to his kingdom. As a result of his forgiveness, he no longer holds his power and knowledge of magic over his people.

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew 6:12

<sup>22</sup> *The Tempest* V.i.25-32

As the play concludes, its plot takes a surprisingly different turn. , Prospero does not choose revenge as the beginning of the play suggests; rather, he forgives those who have hurt him while creating a loving environment and working his best to secure his kingdom. Through Prospero, Shakespeare deals with questions about what someone should do when they are wronged. Should you seek vengeance on others for the evil they have done to you? Or must you be the bigger person and choose to forgive? The play highlights the path that Prospero takes and how he eventually decides to forgive his enemies. The decision to forgive comes from being able to control the emotion of anger and move on from a place of bitterness to a new one where peace is restored.

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