

ENGLISH: LIST 1

The play demonstrates that immoral actions have inevitable consequences for the wrong doer. Discuss.

“Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame”

Shakespeare's *Richard III* is a historical tragedy, celebrating the divine authority of Tudor inheritance in English history. The play opens with the backdrop of the war of the roses, establishing the political instability of the State in which Richard III thrives. Through the protagonist Richard, Duke of Gloucester, Shakespeare explores the dichotomy of good and evil, celebrating the ultimate triumph of divine retribution over sin. The relationship between conscience and sin is emphasised to demonstrate the inevitability of divine justice for wrongdoers as the characters are unable to escape their conscience. Set in a Christian Social world, it is inevitable that Richard's godless mockery of piety and tradition will in fact result in his demise as he will eventually face divine retribution as he commits the heinous crime of usurpation. Richard's power stems from his skill in articulation and manipulation; however Shakespeare subtly undercuts Richard with the irony of his deceptions, and thus Richard can never completely succeed in his deceptions. Serving as the antithesis of Richard, Richmond's final triumph echoes Shakespeare's indication that good will triumph over those who deny England of its rightful heir.

In his opening soliloquy, the “rudely stamped” Richard frankly reveals his devious and malignant character as he “determines to prove a villain”, boasting of his “subtle” and “false” nature, introducing us to both his corrupt psychological and physiological deformities. Initially, Richard appears to be motiveless in his malignity, as if each “plot” for evil is sufficient of itself because of the pleasure he takes in having a world to “bustle” in. However, as Richard has no belief in divine authority, Richard places himself at the centre of the universe as he “knowst no law of God nor man”, stopping “all hopes whose growth may damage me”, but it is in fact Richmond's “bruising irons of wrath” that destroy this “usurping boar”. This destruction of immorality by righteousness reveals the inescapability of the consequences of evil as even the “dreadful minister of hell” faces the consequences of his actions. As Shakespeare explores his fascination with evil, he also confirms the inevitable triumph of good over evil as in Shakespeare's time; the King was God's representative on Earth. As Richard inverts the social and natural order of the political world, his usurpation is an act against God. Through the extended metaphor of the royal tree, England is presented as a garden, where Richard is the “idle weed” which is “fast in growth”. Shakespeare emphasizes a particular aspect of evil that once you embark upon such an act as this usurpation; you must continue to cover your tracks until “sin will pluck on sin”.

Shakespeare further explores the dichotomy of good and evil as he continues with the extended metaphor of the royal tree, contrasting the actions of Richard against that of the Princes, describing them as “four red roses on a stalk”. This imagery of the Princes creates an image of fertility and growth, as Shakespeare believes that England may have flourished under the rightful reign of Henry V. Not only is this “heinous” as he murders two innocent children, but it is both an act against the political state and God as the play is set in a Christian Social world, where the wage of sin is death.

Thus, as Richard denies England the rightful heir to the throne as he usurps the “chair”, he renders his death as inevitable as in a Christian Social universe, evil cannot prosper.

As Richard possesses autonomy of will, he suppresses his “cowards conscience”, rendering him bestial and inhuman, a “deadly boar”. Shakespeare's use of graphic imagery of bestiality to portray Richard highlights the inversions of what has occurred as he usurps the throne, foreshadowing the fate of the “bloody dog” who is “falsely set” upon the throne. The audience is thus invited to view Richard as a mere beast, devoid of humanity and incapable of using his God-like capacity for reason. In doing so, Shakespeare portrays a powerful reversal of the Great Chain of Being, where a

morally corrupt animal has risen to the throne, which can only be restored from its “tottering state” by the “beast’s” “bloody end”. Fear

The curses of women “pierce the clouds and enter heaven”, foreshadowing and essentially determining the future events of the play. Margaret refers to him as the “the troubler of poor worlds peace”, asserting Christian providence as she demands “a right for right”, depicting the fall of Richard as inevitable. Margaret’s curses also “fall heavy” on Buckingham’s neck as he too finds his “fearful soul” doomed on final judgement day. He feels the “certain dregs of conscience” as Shakespeare illustrates those who have committed immoral exploits will have imminent death, realising that “wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame”.

Shakespeare uses Richmond to exemplify the triumph of good over evil, “now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again”. Through the dichotomy of good and evil, Richards evil is juxtaposed against Richmond’s nature. Despite being presented as one dimensional, Richmond is important symbolically, speaking with rhetorical flourish. He embodies Shakespeare’s ideals of kingship, including a mutual contractual bond between king and subjects. Richmond is also a usurper of the throne, but as Shakespeare asserts his moral right to the throne, as “God and good angels fight on Richmond’s side”, his death is not imminent. Although “every man’s conscience is a thousand men, to fight against this guilty homicide”, Richard goes on to remind them that “conscience is but a word that cowards use”. In contrast to this, Richmond promises his troops they will “sleep in peace”, reminding them they are fighting for honour, compassion and loyalty, “putting a tyrant down” as a result of their actions. Through the use of a split stage, Act V further emphasises the evil of Richard as his actions are clearly juxtaposed against that of Richmond’s. Richmond is prepared to “unite the white roses and the red”, restoring the throne to peace and harmony. Through the actions of Richard, Shakespeare contends that those who delight in evil will be inevitably defeated by those men of virtue and “die in terror of thy guiltiness”.

By committal of the most “heinous deed”, the usurpation of the throne, it is inevitable that Richard will meet his downfall as he suffers the punishment from both the Divine and nature. Richard’s ability to detect and attack weakness in those who are “true and just” allow him to “bustle” successfully in this world, yet Shakespeare presents him as exercising autonomy of will and thus his corruption and demise are of his own doing. Richard’s autonomous choice of evil ultimately seals his fate to “despair and die” at the conclusion of the play. Shakespeare demonstrates how once a sin is committed, we must “leave it to God” for the perpetrator of evil will meet “the doom of destiny” because “bloody thou art, bloody be thy end”.