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Final Thesis

"To Prove a Villain"
Shakespeare's political villains and the entwining issues of power,
violence, and wickedness from *Richard III* to *Hamlet*

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"This is what I am, and now I'll show you what I can do with frail and foolish humanity."

Bernard Spivack, "Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil", 1958

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Hamlet

A Note on Quoting the Plays

This dissertation comprises quotations from Shakespeare's works. Thus, quotations from Shakespeare's works are cited from the following editions: "*King Richard III,*" J. R. Siemon ed., The Arden Shakespeare (3rd edn., London, 2009). For "*Julius Ceasar*" D. Daniell ed., The Arden Shakespeare (3rd edn., London, 1998). For "*Hamlet*" A. Thompson & N. Taylor eds., The Arden Shakespeare (3rd edn., London, 2016). For "*Macbeth*" , S. Clark & P. Mason eds., The Arden Shakespeare (3rd edn., London, 2015). For "*King Lear,*" R. A. Foakes ed., (3rd edn., London, 1997). For other Shakespeare's quotes cited in the dissertation: "*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*" J. Lotherington ed., Race Point Publishing (1st edn., New York, 2014).

Legend on Quoting the Plays

HAM Hamlet

JC Julius Ceasar

KL King Lear

MAC Macbeth

R3 King Richard The Third

Abstract

Through the analysis of the figures of the stage villains in Shakespeare's works, this dissertation tries to delineate what defines a villain, while trying to create a link between Shakespeare's political villains and modern ones. Thus, this work focuses on some of Shakespeare's greatest villains, starting from Richard III to Hamlet, while passing through the role of ghosts as highly ambiguous characters possibly involved in evil and evildoings. Alongside stage villains, this work tries to compare Renaissance power dynamics and stage power dynamics, in an attempt to assess the consequences of evil on the world and the stage. The central part of the dissertation includes a study on political violence, its victims, and perpetrators.

   Alongside political violence, a section of this dissertation is devoted to gender differences in the performing of evil and violence, when both acts are administered by females. Furthermore, this dissertation dedicates a part to the role of revengers as possible villains, therefore trying to link political interests to personal retaliation. Finally, this dissertation ends with a section dedicated to stage ghosts as possible villains, since they are virtually impossible to completely exorcise from both plot and stage, and arguably from the audience's minds as well. Eventually, this work tries to present how the limit between good and evil is blurred both on the stage and in the real world.

Chapter One: Politics and Plots in the Elizabethan Age in Shakespeare's

staging of power and subversion.

1. Turbulent times: Conspiracies and threats during Elizabeth's reign

Questions of state politics and plots were burning issues during Elizabeth's – and latterly James' – reign. Religion, often mixed with political interests, provided the perfect justification to orchestrate possible subversions in state affairs. As the reality of conspiracies and plots threatened the lives of Elizabethan monarchs, drama reproduced on stage what real life offered. Thus, Shakespeare in his histories, as well as in most of his tragedies, uses the element of political plots and assassinations to reproduce the contemporary reality of Early Modern politics. Unlike stage representations, in real-life plots religion was the foremost motive. Many political plots were devised – and never accomplished – during the reign of Elizabeth by many Catholic detractors. Firstly, in 1571, the Privy Council – particularly Walsingham and Cecil – discovered an ambitious plot, developed by a Florentine merchant, Roberto di Ridolfi. Although, the conspiracy was dismantled before any possible harm could be done, in the eyes of Walsingham and Cecil this plot was reason enough to warn the Queen on the nature of her cousin – Mary of Scots. Mary's Catholicism was indeed a threat for England and Elizabeth's life, as a Protestant and excommunicated ruler. Yet, against the advice of her counsellors, Elizabeth decided to spare Mary's life, whilst condemning the other conspirators to be executed. Religious clashes

continued in fractioning England, as a silent threat – the Jesuit order – hovered in the kingdom. As the number of militant Jesuits and Catholics kept rising, the Privy Council decided to enforce repression. The intense and often violent process of interrogations allowed the practise of "equivocation" to spread among Jesuits and Catholic recusants. Equivocation became a well-known practice to Elizabethans, to the point of permeating drama. Shakespeare introduced the notion of equivocation in one of the most poignant scenes of *Macbeth* (1606), as his Porter comments:

> […] Faith, here's an equivocator, that could
>
> swear in both the scales against either scale;
>
> who committed treason enough for God's sake,
>
> yet could not equivocate to heaven: O, come in, equivocator
>
> (MAC,1.7.8-11)

Thus, the passage is rich in evocative allusions to equivocation, uncannily mentioned thrice in the passage above. Equivocation and its implications pestered the authorities, leading to an increase in violent repressions and new restrictions. This new rigidity towards religion cast a shadow of preoccupation on both religious factions – as the Protestant felt that "English state was under assault from an enemy within" (Castor, 2018, p. 67) whereas English Catholics dreaded to suffer "a campaign of brutal repression" (Castor, 2018, p. 67). The situation further aggravated in 1583, when yet another plot devised by the Jesuits was unravelled by the Privy Council. Once again, Cecil and Walsingham

deciphered some letters regarding a plot involving a young Catholic – Francis Throckmorton. Unmistakably, the aim of such a plot was deposing Elizabeth, in favour of the Catholic Mary of Scots. As the plot was unravelled, both the Privy Council and Elizabeth could no longer forestall on matter of religious dangers and ever-rising conspiracies. Eventually, Throckmorton was executed, while Mary Queen of Scots was spared once again. The culmination of plots against Queen Elizabeth was reached only three years after the Throckmorton Plot, in 1586. On this occasion, the orchestrator was a well-bred Catholic, Anthony Babington – frequent correspondent to Mary of Scots – and eager to restore the Catholic faith in England. Babington's plan was to assassinate Elizabeth, precipitating Spain's invasion and therefore securing Mary on the throne. Only once Elizabeth's Council had enough evidence to prove Mary of Scots' involvement, they dismantled the conspiracy. The intelligence they gathered was sufficient evidence to sentence Mary to death by beheading. Eventually, Mary of Scots was executed in Fotheringhay Castle, while wearing a blood-red robe just like a religious martyr.

In conclusion, Elizabeth ruled over England for more than forty-four years, surviving plots, religious clashes, domestic and foreign politics. Despite the tyrannical attitude exerted by the Queen during her last years of reign, her death came to her subjects as a tragedy, and possibly as a case for civil war. Only when Elizabeth had to face her own mortality, she appointed an heir to the throne. Elizabeth's choice fell onto James of Scotland – Mary of Scots' sole heir.

Finally, England could return to the proper course of nature, as a male ruler would sit on the throne. Elizabeth's choice proved to be a successful one as – after the announcement of the new monarch – there was "no tumult, no contradiction, no disorder in the city" (Bruce & Manningham, 2009, p. 147).

As Elizabeth's reign concluded, a new male monarch would sit on the throne of England. Yet, although James I was sitting on the throne, plots never stopped brewing up in England. Religion always remained the central focus around which conspiracies were orchestrated. As the Gunpowder Plot will later show, religion and politics frequently intersected in the most violent ways. Thus, the role of drama was that of reproducing the feelings of anxiety and terror created by the recurrent and unsettling conspiracies of the time. Plots on stage were ordinary occurrences in Shakespeare's histories and tragedies, as well as in comedies and tragicomedies. Likewise for real-life plots, Shakespeare's political intrigues revolved around power and the subverting of rulers. Yet, religion in Shakespeare stayed in the background, while power and ambitions constantly took the lead in the devising of conspiracies and royal assassinations.

2. Order and Disorder: Chaos and Villainy in Shakespeare's Political Works

Elizabethans approached life from different perspectives. Religious and social clashes were an ordinary part of life in the Early Modern period, thus creating a heterogeneous society. As Tillyard points out, Elizabethans "had in common a mass of assumptions about the world" (Tillyard, 1998, p. 12), creating a shared

knowledge – which Tillyard believed to be accepted and interiorised by almost everyone. Hence, such assumptions massively shaped Shakespeare's life and literary works.

Crucial to Elizabethans' understanding were the concepts of order and chaos. According to Tillyard's "world picture," order had an implicit nature, rarely mentioned or challenged, as it was a God-given structure for the universe. Order was reassuring, as it represented constancy in an era of sudden changes and uncertainty. Contrariwise, chaos was a major preoccupation, a threat, and a potential sign of alterations in God's plans. Chaos became an obsession for the Elizabethans who were "appalled by the visible tokens of disorder" (Tillyard, 1998, p. 24). Chaos corresponded to the upheaval of nature as a response to men's actions – as if chaos became nature revolting on men's wayward ambitions and desires. Shakespeare frequently stages scenes of chaos to indicate a terrible exceptions in the given order. For instance, in *Macbeth* instances of chaos come as King Duncan is murdered and the order subverted. Thus, chaos is already at play in Scotland, as Lennox comments on the previous dreadful night, as Lennox comments:

> The night has been unruly: where we lay,
>
> Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
>
> Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,
>
> And prophesying with accents terrible
>
> Of dire combustion and confused events

New hatch'd to the woeful time: the obscure bird

Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth

Was feverous and did shake. (MAC, 2.3.54-61)

Chaos presented itself in a tangible and disturbing form. Indeed, the night "Twas a rough night" (MAC, 2.3.62), as Macbeth himself acknowledges. Yet, the meaning of such statement is double when spoken by Macbeth. For instance, to Macbeth, the night was rough not only because he had to kill a king – and a kin – but also because he had to temper the unruly night of his own soul, whilst outside nature rioted against his cursed actions. Nature continues its unruly course as the play progresses and Macbeth's rule gets bloodier. Scotland quickly turns into a land of sickness and famine, and the only solution is exemplified in the English king's healing powers. Thus, only a natural and legitimate succession to the throne can grant the return of order. In the last scene of the play, triumphant Malcom directs his royal succession to Scone – order seems finally restored in Scotland. However Macduff's words sinisterly echo what was said by the Weird Sisters at the beginning of the play, as he comments:

Hail, king! for so thou art: behold, where stands

The usurper's cursed head: the time is free:

I see thee compass'd with thy kingdom's pearl,

That speak my salutation in their minds;

Whose voices I desire aloud with mine:

Hail, King of Scotland! (MAC, 5.9.20-25)

Through Macduff's speech, it can be inferred that some order has returned in Scotland, yet chaos cannot be entirely banished. Just as much as wickedness, chaos is endemic in the land of men, and order can be established only for a limited span of time. *Macbeth* is not the only play where wicked actions create an upheaval of nature. In fact, another boisterous gale appears in the Roman tragedy of *Julius Ceasar* (1599). As Caesar's conspiracy is ripening in Rome, a terrible storm befalls on the Urbe. As the event is so appalling, Casca – one of the conspirators – comments the terrifying phenomenon, as Casca comments:

> Are not you moved, when all the sway of earth
>
> Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,
>
> I have seen tempests, when the scolding winds
>
> Have rived the knotty oaks, and I have seen
>
> The ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam,
>
> To be exalted with the threatening clouds:
>
> But never till to-night, never till now,
>
> Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.
>
> Either there is a civil strife in heaven,
>
> Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,
>
> Incenses them to send destruction. (JC,1.3.3-13)

As Casca describes, the "civil strife in heaven" is a clear token of chaos brewing up in Rome, as Caesar's assassination fast-approaches. The heavens send messages of doom, in order to prevent straying in actions. Nonetheless, men

misinterpret those messages. For instance, Cassius joins Casca on stage, commenting on the appalling night as "A very pleasing night to honest men" (JC,1.3.43).Unlike Macbeth, Cassius perceives the night as portent of good auspices for his future enterprise. Cassius believes the gods to be on his side, as they send dreadful messages to warn the Romans against Caesar's monstrosity. Eventually, Cassius is so certain that his interpretation is correct that he rebuffs Casca's worries and discards the messages sent by nature. Just like Macbeth, Cassius ignores the real meaning of nature turning against men and their limitless ambitions.

Additionally, Shakespeare places another king – although a destitute one – in a storm-hit heath, joined only by what he has left of his royal entourage – a Fool, an old knight, and a "feigned" madman. In *King Lear* (1606), nature rages onto an old king – and a foolish one – who has lost everything, yet he has still to atone for his folly. On the heath, King Lear enrages with the forces of nature, in a desperate attempt to equate his fury to nature's, as he states:

> Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
>
> You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
>
> Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
>
> You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
>
> Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
>
> Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
>
> Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!

Crack nature's moulds, an germens spill at once,

That make ingrateful man! (KL,3.2.1-9)

Once more, chaos has distraught the world – all condensed into Lear's heath. Once more the night is unruly and unforgiving – as the Fool observes "here's night pities neither wise men nor Fools" (KL,3.2.11-12). For the first time, nature does not rebel against ambitious men, rather against a delusional one. Lear is tricked by those he loved the most, and now – maybe for the first time – he has to face the consequences of his actions alone. Lear's rage slowly turns into a sad realisation, as no man – not even a king – can battle against nature's ferocity. Thus, Lear is left with his own pain in the middle of a raging storm, which might be not only natural but also psychological. Consequently, Lear's bewitched heath is not dissimilar to Macbeth's Scotland as nature unveils her terrible face to faulty men and their actions. Nevertheless, this is also Lear's private storm, a depiction of a personal struggle outside and inside himself. Lear's ultimate companions will be sorrow and old age – those he cannot ban nor execute but only endure, as he laments:

Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! spout, rain!

Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:

I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;

I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,

You owe me no subscription: then let fall

Your horrible pleasure: here I stand, your slave,

A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man:

But yet I call you servile ministers,

That have with two pernicious daughters join'd

Your high engender'd battles 'gainst a head

So old and white as this. O! O! 'tis foul! (KL,3.2.14-24)

The storm breaks on the heath as Lear's former kingdom is contended between sisters. As the king is banned by his "two pernicious daughters," chaos reigns in the land. Lear mentions Goneril and Regan's wickedness, as he imputes on them, and their malice, the uproar of nature. As chaos and malignity befall on Lear, he becomes hopeless and weary as he cries "O! O! 'tis foul!" (KL, 3.2.24).

Thus, it appears that villainy and nature share a bond of reciprocal influence. Nature breaks its normal course as it riots against men when wickedness is at play. Villains create the preconditions for the upheaval of nature, as they subvert order. Storms, hurricanes, and earthquakes are tokens of chaos, harbingers of incumbent misfortunes in a world already plagued by villains. Nature becomes incensed when vile deeds are about to be fulfilled, as if nature were the final deterrent for wicked actions. Yet, nature's messages are often misread or interpreted by wicked characters, who persevere in their mishaps. Different is the approach of other characters, those who are not directly mischievous, as they look at nature with fear and preoccupation. As nature infuriates, characters fear for their future, yet they can seldom prevent what is already bound to happen. Chaos is already ruling over the land, as villains reach their ephemeral glory.

Thus, order and disorder were considered part of the universe in which the Elizabethans lived. Chaos was not in disagreement with God's plan, as havoc was part of the God-intended design. Chaos was created by men and inflicted onto themselves through their malevolent actions and boundless ambitions. Chaos was believed to exist in the world because men decided to leave God's path and chose instead to wander in a God-forsaken darkness. The decision of renouncing God's directions will be a damned one, as no Shakespearean villain will ultimately survive their ambitions and unchecked desires.

3. Political Drama: Shakespeare and the dangerous representation of Power on stage

Politics and political games were a fundamental part of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama. Still, political drama was not "a distinctive genre" (Heinemann, 2003, p. 167) such as comedies and tragedies. Politics and power games were particularly central in Renaissance history plays and tragedies. For instance, Shakespeare used power and politics as main elements for his *Henriads* and many of his tragedies. Political drama and representations of power were popular among contemporary audiences, as Elizabethans noticed similarities between their past and their present. Political drama had its root in real events, often belonging to English national history. Thus, political plays did not only create a bond between Elizabethans and their predecessors, they also helped to shape national identity. Political battles, often represented in the plays, were differently fought. For

instance, politics could be conducted while sitting around a table, discussing matters of national interest – as we see in *Richard III* during the royal council in the Tower (Act 3, Scene 4). On the other hand, politics can be literally fought on battlefields such as Bosworth (R3, 5.3) or Philippi (JC, 5.1). However it is fought with words or weapons, politics always resulted in violent conflicts and tragic outcomes. Occasionally, political dominance and assertions of power took the connotations of sexualised battles. According to Adelman, Macbeth's murder of King Duncan is not only the political assassination of a ruler, but also a "display of male sexual aggression against a passive female victim" (Adelman, 2010, p. 38), turning political murder into rape. Sexualised power confrontations are also used in *Julius Ceasar* as Cassius depicts Ceasar as a weakened ruler, by equating Caesar's infirmities to those of "a sick girl" (JC, 1.2.128). Once again, unfit governance is equated to the female gender, while steady power is embodied by assertive masculinity.

In 1590s a new taste in political plays allowed the rise in fame of military heroic figures such as Talbot and Henry V. This new fashion also originated a fast-growing sense of nationalism in Elizabethans theatregoers. Moreover, as political plays drew massively from the chronicles of Holinshed and Hall, the dramatic reshaping of history contributed to make the "past accessible" (Heinemann, 2003, p. 175) to most Elizabethans. The outreach of such plays was wide and controversial as they "helped both to create a consensus of support for a powerful monarchy and, paradoxically, to undermine it" (Heinemann, 2003, p.

175). The political scene performed on stage was often characterised by a general sense of cynicism and hypocrisy. Princes and tyrants often revealed their ruthless ambition to their audiences, providing fitting contexts for their intrigues. Thus, it is not unusual for royal characters to present "the grim realities of the power-game" (Heinemann, 2003, p. 176) during a stage-monologue. Villains express themselves through asides and monologues, which not only reveal their ambitions and plans, but also create a bond between characters and the audience. Comments uttered by characters are observations on their current situation and emotions, a true glimpse in their "personal psychology." As Shakespeare penned many political works, his political views never clearly emerged from his works. Shakespeare's political situation might have been reflected on stage, yet his own perspective never clearly transpired.

A common element in political plays was the notion of human causality. In political plays, men and their actions are the real culprits of what happens on stage – they are the real cause of violence and intrigues. External forces, such as preternatural apparitions of ghosts, dreams and prophecies have the only intention to "influence the audience's moral attitude to the action" (Heinemann, 2003, p. 177) – as they cannot change the course of actions. Another crucial notion, often depicted in Elizabethan drama, was the question of deposing a bad ruler. Shakespeare already dealt with such a theme in his *Richard II* (1595). Yet, such topic frequently haunted some of his major works, posing the question of whether it was right to depose a bad sovereign. Deposing a monarch had some

grave consequences, not only in terms of political outcomes, but also in terms of morality. As the king was the repository of God-given order on Earth, to depose one was the worst possible crime – as only God could remove monarchs. Nonetheless, Shakespeare's political villains take different perspectives on such a matter. Insomuch, Macbeth drives himself mad while thinking about his "deed," whereas Richard of Gloucester seems to have no conscience when plotting various regicides. Similarly, Cassius is eager to depose Ceasar on account of potential tyranny, while Brutus' conscience is troubled by the act. Thus, justifications for removing a bad ruler could be "easily" mustered in light of political interest, yet Shakespeare enlightens how scarcely those justifications worked in term of human conscience. Nevertheless, wicked characters were highly fascinating. Although their actions were despicable and – most of the time – unjustifiable, the audience frequently ended up sympathising with them. Shakespeare created highly humane characters who, if not relatable, at least were as humanly flawed as their audience. As the plays unfolded before their eyes, the audience had to confront their shifting sympathy. For instance, Richard's audiences were lured into his mischiefs through eloquent speeches and sound logic, transforming spectators into witnesses. Macbeth's paranoid fears made him more pitiful than fearful, as he delivers his last monologues before defeat. Even Brutus is lastly redeemable, as he always acts with the best interest of Rome at heart. The situation gets murkier with *Hamlet* (1599) as the yoke of wickedness is constantly bartered between Claudius and the Prince of Denmark.

As the new Jacobean era begun, a new style in political drama developed. The new predilection of audiences shifted from military heroes and epic battles to politics as "the machine, the 'set-up' caging in the heroes" (Heinemann, 2003, p. 184). This new tendency in drama could have reflected the new monarch's interests. King James was indeed a prolific writer with a keen interest in politics, along with other topics such as witchcraft and religion. For instance, his political treaty – the *Basilikon Doron* (1599) – was surely a testament to his political interest as well as a possible source for some of Shakespeare's works.

In conclusion, staging politics has always been dangerous, as "staging an obviously political play must always have been a calculated risk" (Heinemann, 2003, p. 170). Elizabethan playwrights were familiar with the unindulgent reality of censorship. One of the weapons to enforce control during the Renaissance, as much as nowadays, was political censorship. Yet, drama never ceased to be subversive or thought-provocative, rather it became less direct and more subtle.

Chapter Two: Violence and politics: bloody confrontations between tyranny,

violence, and revenge in Shakespeare's tragedies

1. *"Ceasar should be a beast without a heart"*: the character of the tyrant in the historical and theatrical tradition of Early Modern England

The role of the tyrant, both on stage and in real life, is one of ambiguous characteristics. Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle and Plato, extensively argued about what defined a tyrant and who could be defined as such. Early Modern political thinking drew from both theorists while integrating new concepts and ideas on Machiavelli's vision of the prince. Tyrannical discourse in Early Modern England was a much-heated political argument that never relented during both Elizabeth I and James I's reigns. Accusations of tyranny and tyrannical rule were widespread, yet troublesome issues that monarchs had to confront and address. Still, the liminal identity of the tyrant was, and arguably still is, a challenging conundrum. Renaissance political thought highlighted how tyrannical rulers defied a stable definition, creating highly unstable and shapeshifting identities. The tyrant was not believed to be merely a bad ruler, it was something abhorrent, an "animal masked as a human being" (Bushnell, 1990, p. 11). Indeed, bestiality is one of the main prerogatives of the tyrant. Slave of his or else her passions, the tyrant renounces humanity to satisfy their passions and desires. Thus, a tyrant is no longer human, but rather becomes "a beast without a heart" (JC, 2.2.42). The discourse on desire is of crucial importance for the

discourse on tyranny, as a lustful and unrestrained ruler is no good ruler in the first place. Unhinged tyrants are, as much on stage as in real life, equally depicted as a threat to a given moral order. The tyrant's unchecked desires and ambitions are not just despicable feelings but they become a threat to law and order. To use a definition from contemporary psychology, tyrants' psychopathological narcissism swallows up everything and everyone, leaving out just what suits the tyrant's wish. Indeed, to tyrants "the lives of others do not matter" (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 105). Tyrants also discard common laws and morality. They feel superior and untouched by mortal rules, as they are deeply conscious of the moral and legal obstacles posed by such laws. In other words:

> a tyrant is not merely indifferent to the law; he hates it. He hates it because it gets in his way and because it stands for a notion of public good that he holds in contempt. (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 53)

Thus, a tyrant does not rule to provide for his subjects, but only to gratify his endless ambition. Tyrants unhealthily dedicate their lives to reach an ever-moving goal. Tyrants are never satisfied, they live in a constant state of unsatisfactory expectations, nothing is ever enough; as nothing is ever reached stably and fast enough for them. Their ambition, like their bloodthirst, becomes obsessive and pathological. Every act done to satisfy ambition requires further acts to stabilize or increase their dominance and power. Since ambition is primarily fulfilled through acts of criminal violence, every subsequent act follows a path of bloodshed. For instance, Macbeth and Richard III, indeed Shakespeare's

most famous tyrants, are the products of bloody ambition and unbridled desire. They do not seek to overthrow a political order to establish something new or better, they just want to seize power for personal gratification and psychological compensation. They seize power because they feel like they are entitled and capable to grab it. They function as if moral conscience has no grip on them, only to confront it at the dramatic end of the play. Thus, maddening desires and ambition create an unhinged tyrannical character, defying labels and even gender norms. The inability to restrain themselves often wins tyrants the label of effeminacy. According to Bushnell, Renaissance political thought saw effeminacy as linked to tyranny in the sense that, just like women, tyrants were slaves to their impulses and passions. In clear binary opposition to the assertive male ruler, the effeminate tyrant was a farce of whimsical behaviour. Nonetheless, associating tyrants with female power is also an ill-concealed effort to deny the terrifying aspect of female power. After Elizabeth I's death and the return to a God-intended male ruler, associations between power and female gender rebounded, if they were ever abandoned, to fearful suspicion towards female power. Thus, equating effeminate tyrants to women only strengthens the dualistic notion that "tyrants and women were seen as threats to the civilised order" (Bushnell, 1990, p. 22). Thus, the tyrant is a crafty liar, a shapeshifter with the ability to defy gender and human classifications. The tyrant's ability to transform reality and himself create a dangerous parallel with the role of the stage actor. Just like an actor, a tyrant could "dress up and perform" all the roles he needs to achieve his

goal. Theatrical abilities allow the tyrant to show "a multitude of different faces, pretending to be good while being full of malice" (Bushnell, 1990, p. 7). The staged identity of the tyrant is so well-crafted that it is believed to be true by others. For instance, in *Richard III* both Gloucester and Buckingham play the actors; Richard performs "the holy man" (R3, 3.7.98) while Buckingham loyally performs as a sidekick in Richard's schemes, endorsing Richard's lies with his dishonesty:

Ah, ha, my lord, this prince is not an Edward!

He is not lolling on a lewd day-bed,

But on his knees at meditation;

Not dallying with a brace of courtezans,

But meditating with two deep divines;

Not sleeping, to engross his idle body,

But praying, to enrich his watchful soul […] (R3, 3.7.70-76)

Although in Act 3 scene 7 of *Richard III* the Duke of Gloucester is not yet a tyrant, his tyrannical nature is already on display. Indeed, Richard III does not need to seize the crown to become a tyrant as he is "a natural tyrant even before becoming one" (Dall'Olio, 2017, p. 490). Similarly, Macbeth deliberately lies to his once-kinsman Banquo, showing how callously tyrants lie:

[…] Who's there?

MACBETH

A friend. (MAC, 2.1.10-11)

At this point in the play, Macbeth is already planning the assassinations of Banquo and his heir, Fleance. Unremorsefully, he will end the lives of those who stand in the way of his tyrannical rule. Ambition, jealousy, and corruption make Macbeth a liar and a tyrant, but surely not a friend. Nonetheless, Macbeth is not the only royal Scotsman who can lie to friends and subjects. Interestingly, in Act 4 scene 3 another royal liar seems to unseat Macbeth. For instance, Malcolm proclaims to have all the characteristics of the tyrant, putting himself in an even worse light than Macbeth. Arguably, he profusely lies to Macduff to evaluate his loyalty, but he lies even so. Malcolm's lies and his real identity become uncannily blurred as one is left to ask which of the two identities is the real one. Equally uncanny as Malcolm's ability to lie is Richmond's ability to multiply himself on the battlefield, as Richard comments: "I think there be six Richmonds in the field" (R3, 5.4.11). Additionally, the potential for tyranny does not lie only in the current tyrant but also in the rising political class, as the acting performance of the tyrant threatens legitimate princes as well. As legitimate rulers are always seen in regal robes, performing the spectacle of legitimate rule "comes dangerously close to the tyrant's hypocrisy" (Bushnell, 1990, p. 61). The liminality of these two roles relies on blurred lines of legitimacy and morals which further complicate these political roles.

Another important aspect that defines tyrants both on stage and in real life is fear. Fear is both the weapon and the curse of tyrants. On one hand, tyrants need an audience to scare and control, someone who will unquestionably bend to their

despotic rule. On the other hand, tyrants live in constant fear as they cannot trust anybody, not even themselves at times. Despots constantly scheme both to strengthen their positions and to ban the idea of being deposed. According to La Perrière, this fear is the reason tyrants are always "in the midst of armed forces" (La Perrière, 1598, p. 20r). Thus, the tyrant's fear of others is just a misplaced fear of his subjects as he "feareth nothing more than them" (Bodin, 1606, p. 212); knowing that without subservient subjects, he is powerless. So, to avoid defectors, tyrants remove every choice and freedom. However, the net woven by tyrants is assailable, and "someone always manages to slip through and make it to safety" (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 138). Fleeing detractors threaten the dream of tyrannical untouchability, as the desire of full unassailability is one of the deluded wishes tyrants will never fulfil. Their imperfect claim to the throne and their unstable identity make them vulnerable, as there will always be something threatening them. All tyrants are similar in the realisation that they will never be whole and unassailable, sharing Macbeth's embittered statement: "I had else been perfect"(MAC, 3.4.19).

Thus, the role of the tyrant is multifaceted. A despot is a beast, an effeminate ruler, and an actor. Yet, he is never really a king. For centuries, tyrants and kings were distinguished by the exercise of power, reinforcing the binary opposition between "good king-bad tyrant." Bushnell studied the ancient Greek discourse on tyranny while putting it into resonance with Early Modern political thought, concluding that:

there might be 'good' kings and 'evil' kings who commit so-called tyrannical acts, but only tyrants, properly defined as usurpers good or bad, may be deposed by their subjects. (Bushnell, 1990, p. 49)

Thus, the moral conundrum further complicates the issue of good rule and tyranny. Defining rulers as tyrants or good kings is not a mere matter of labels, rather it carries crucial political meaning. Indeed, labelling a political enemy a "tyrant" might advance a subversive political agenda. For instance, as tyrants forfeit their role of good rulers, subjects might forfeit "the respect due a monarch in the natural order" (Bushnell, 1990, p. 46). Eventually, if a tyrant can be disobeyed, he or she can also be removed from office.

The violent ends of tyrants are consistent with the way they lived. Violent deaths turned into semi-sensational spectacles indicate the sensational end of tyranny both in real life and on stage. For instance. Shakespearean tyrants exit the scene with their heads cut off or murdered on the battlefield by the representatives of legitimate rule. Their violent deaths seem to be the necessary punishment for all the evil done, as their spilt blood becomes the cleansing fluid for a new world. Instances of this can be found in theatrical tragedies of tyrants as well as in historical facts. For example, the beheading of Charles I (1649) was initially believed to be the necessary act against tyranny and the establishment of a superior political order. Yet, Cromwell's regime turned soon enough into a despotic government. Remarkably, killing despots is not a prerogative of the past nor the stage. From the French Revolution (1789) through the Russian Revolution

(1918), the killing of Saddam Hussein (2006) and Ghedaffi (2011) the assassinations of tyrants only led the way to an arguably even bloodier dictatorial regime and civil turmoil. Eventually, the potential for tyranny and tyrannical violence seems to slowly smoulder in every new order of things. Possibly, history will repeat itself once more.

2. Violent rule and violent rulers: the issue of violence in tyrannical regimes on Shakespeare's stage

According to the Renaissance political thinker Buchanan: "a king rules over willing subjects, a tyrant over unwilling" (Buchanan, 2004, p. 85). Dictators exploit violence since, having no legitimate power over subjects, they need to rule with force and fear over them. Nonetheless, oppressors are assiduous perpetrators of violence even before reaching power, as violence provides them with the means to reach their goals while perversely enjoying it. Firstly, violence needs to be smouldered in the mind of the tyrant, as Gloucester states: "Dive, thoughts, down to my soul" (R3,1.1.51), only to be released later on in the play. Dialogues of premeditated violence provide the audience with a clear insight into the mechanism of violence playing inside the mind of the tyrant. As the tyrant reaches his goal, violence becomes the mean for the enforcement of power. Killing and torturing become the only method of securing his precarious position while generating fear among subjects. Interestingly enough, once in power,

tyrants change their way of resorting to violence. While being personally resolved to use violence in the beginning, after their coronation tyrants seem to cowardly delegate their bloody plans to rascals and crooks. Arguably, this change in the dispatching of violence can be seen as an attempt to ease their compromised consciences, while remaining virtually "innocent" in the eyes of the world. Eventually, only scoundrels seem to obey tyrants at all. Differently from other tyrants, the Duke of Gloucester is the perfect representative of the tyrant who turns to murderers even before reaching the crown. Having handed over the killing of Clarence, it is not Richard who has to confront his conscience, rather the second murderer. Thus, delegating physical murders grants tyrants a delusionary (as well as temporary) relief from guilt. In contrast with Richard III, Macbeth physically conducts the first act of violence in the killing of Duncan, personally creating the starting point for future violence. Yet, after Duncan's regicide, Macbeth seems incapable of conducting his murders. This contrast in Macbeth is apparent as he is initially presented in the play as a valiant slayer of enemies, accustomed to violent killings to the point of being labelled as: "Bellona's bridegroom" (MAC, 1.2.55). His final successful act of violence is the killing of young Siward, a slaughter done in a frenzy of fearful madness and boisterous rage. Left without murderers to conduct assassinations, Macbeth seems to regress to his previous identity of a soldier; however, there is no military honour left in him, as he is just a mad murderer.

Additionally, in *Hamlet*, the issue of the transforming of tyrannical violence has a clear representative in King Claudius. The initial act of violence, the killing of King Hamlet, is physically accomplished by Claudius. Yet, at the end of the play, he chooses Laertes as his champion for the killing of Hamlet. Claudius tells the archetypal lies of the tyrant to ensnare Laertes in his plan, knowing that Polonius' son will not renounce the opportunity to avenge his family:

My lord, I will be ruled

The rather if you could devise it so

That I might be the organ. (HAM, 4.7.67-69)

By trusting Laertes to take revenge, Claudius slyly relinquishes the moral and legal consequences of killing the legitimate heir to the throne.

Tyrannical violence, just like the tyrant himself, might have many shapes, and murderous violence is its ultimate display. However, there might be different means for the enforcement of tyranny. For instance, control over speech and censorship are devious usages of tyrannical power to control people and condemn detractors. In *Julius Ceasar*, an instance of repressive censorship is exemplified in Marullus and Flavius' punishment. The two Romans dared to remove the garlands around Caesar's statues, questioning his visual and ideological power. In Casca's own words:

[…] Marullus and Flavius, for pulling scarfs

off Caesar's images, are put to silence. (JC,2.284-285)

Eventually, tyrannical power does not only rule over the physical body but also freedom and free speech, ominously putting to silence whoever threatened the current ruler. Still nowadays, in some parts of the world, practices of censorship do not differ greatly from what Marullus and Flavius had to suffer.

As tyrannical rule approaches an end, bloodshed becomes frequent and assassinations common. According to Greenblatt: "tyrants are drawn irresistibly to normalize what is not normal" (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 67) as they wish for their rule of violence not only to be obeyed but to be unquestionably accepted. When their realm starts to crumble and subjects desert them, violence reaches its pinnacle with war. Indeed, violent physical confrontation becomes tyrants' last resort, as they will turn to massacre once more. For instance, Macbeth's violence finds release in his frantic preparation for war:

Hang out our banners on the outward walls;

The cry is still 'They come:' our castle's strength

Will laugh a siege to scorn: here let them lie

Till famine and the ague eat them up:

Were they not forced with those that should be ours,

We might have met them dareful, beard to beard,

And beat them backward home. (MAC, 5.5.1-7)

The violence of war becomes " the locus of ideological struggle" (Bushnell, 1990, p. 78) between good and evil, legitimate versus illegitimate. As the two armies deploy, the battle ultimately turns into an allegorical confrontation between God

and Satan. The anticipation of such violence leaves the tyrant tormented by prophetic apparitions of doom, arguably embodying long pent-up guilt. For instance, both Richard III and Brutus hear their impending doom through the ominous prophecies of ghosts:

GHOST OF HASTINGS

Bloody and guilty, guiltily awake,

And in a bloody battle end thy days! (R3,5.3.154-155)

BRUTUS

Why, this, Volumnius:

The ghost of Caesar hath appear'd to me

[…] I know my hour is come. (JC5.5.15-19)

Debatably, even Banquo's final apparition as a ghost brings an ominous message to Macbeth, as the show of kings hints at his impending failure. The final confrontation sees the violent end of the tyrant. No matter how cunningly he has tried to avert it, fate cannot be overruled as "all unavoided is the doom of destiny" (R3,4.4.218). Eventually, violence turns out to be the final death blow to tyrants, rather than their prerogative.

3. *"Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end"*: **the question of tyrannicide and the backfiring of tyrannical violence**

According to Fraser, the double eclipses in autumn 1605 were seen as menacing and "portent to no good" (Fraser, 1997, p. 143). This coincidence becomes uncanny as one considers the historic event of the Gunpowder Plot (1605). Devised by Robert Catesby, Guy Fawkes, and other Catholic nobles, the plot had the aim to overthrow the current political order and establish a new one. This callous operation would have not only involved the death of a monarch, but also the deaths of royal courtiers and innocents. The magnitude of the enterprise seemed to be justified by the fact that James I was perceived as a liar and a religious tyrant by Catholics. The plotters did not see this act of brutality as "tyrannicide", but rather as a necessary evil to be committed in light of a better future. They aimed at violently erasing the ruling party in a fashion that can be labelled as "terroristic" in today's words. The extent of this averted catastrophe had repercussions on the dramatic production of the time, generating "nervous dramas that, like Macbeth, are directly concerned with the complex problem of the enemy within" (Hadfield, 2016, p. 573). However, the Scottish play is not the only Shakespearean play dealing with the problem of tyrannicide and the chaos ensuing from killing rulers. Penned five years before *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's *Julius Ceasar* revolves around the issue of killing a tyrant, completing the act, and dealing with its consequences. When put in contrast, the moral and political stances of *Julius Caesar's* characters seem somehow different from Macbeth's

vaulting ambition. Up until the moment of his slaughter in Act 3 scene 1, Ceasar embodies all the characteristics of possible tyranny, as "Shakespeare's Caesar not only looks and sounds like a tyrant, he acts like one" (Miola, 1985, p. 280). Ceasar takes pride in his accomplishments and suffers from what Bushnell defines as "tyrannical superbia" (Bushnell, 1990, p. 148). For instance, Caesar's equates himself to images of greatness and majesty, as he describes himself as follows:

[…] But I am constant as the northern star,

Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality

There is no fellow in the firmament. (JC,3.1.60-63)

After having brutally murdered Ceasar, one of the senators famously cries "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!" (JC, 3.1.78), backing the notion that Caesar is indeed perceived as a tyrant until the very end. Having associated Ceasar with the ideological signifier of tyranny, his assassination can be seen as the assassination of tyranny itself. Yet, as Ceasar is killed, the question of tyrannicide and tyranny becomes more complicated. Suddenly, the tyrant-slayers seem to become tyrants themselves. Their bloodlust and thirst for power superimpose on their ideological motivations; exposing how personal ambition might be the real motivation of Caesar's murder. According to Miola:

It is no small irony that the conspirators, not Caesar, shock the audience with bloody butchery. And it is the new triumvirate, not Caesar, who exhibits tyrannical ruthlessness and cruelty in the Proscription. (Miola, 1985, p. 284)

Thus, the boundaries between the tyrant and tyrant-slayer get blurred. Brutus becomes increasingly mercurial and unwilling to listen to other people's opinions, uncannily adopting Caesar's authoritarianism. Additionally, even his relationship with Cassius suffers the blow of Brutus' change, downgrading Cassius' position to a subordinate, rather than an equal. Only when captured, Brutus' composure abandons him, triggering bitter disenchantment and his resolutive act of violence. Unlike other tyrants, Brutus' final act of violence culminates with suicide. Posed before the reality of being taken captive to Rome, Brutus decides to free himself from ignominy by killing himself. Contrarily to other tyrants, Brutus' death has so great a significance that only Brutus himself could perform it, since "Brutus only overcame himself" (JC, 5.5.57). As Brutus and Cassius' deaths lead the way for new political order in Rome, the effort of killing Ceasar seems superfluous and gratuitous; not a preventive action against tyranny, but rather a manifestation of "private griefs" (JC, 3.2.206). Additionally, the assassination of Ceasar creates mixed feelings in the Romans. At first, Caesar's death seems like fair retribution for his wicked tyranny. Yet after Anthony's speech, Romans' opinion is forever changed. Plebeians believe that Ceasar was no longer an unjust tyrant, rather a man unjustly killed by ambitious men. The tyrant-slayers initially thought of as heroes are now held in contempt by the plebeians who erupt in an act of boundless violence. Eventually, what was believed to be an act done to save the republic completely backfires on the senators. Caesar's death throws Rome in a state of chaos and violence, leaving

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citizens to fear for what, and most importantly who, will come next; as one of the plebians mourns: "I fear there will a worse come in his place." (JC,3.2.114). Eventually, as the play ends, one is left to wonder whether it is possible to effectively eliminate tyranny by killing tyrants.

Unlike Caesar's, Macbeth's death seems easier to process. Macbeth is a callous and illegitimate ruler who needs to be removed for good. His death is not a preventive act from tyranny like Caesar's was, but rather the ultimate solution. As Macbeth is slaughtered on the battlefield, tyranny seems dead once again. Contrarily to Ceasar, nobody mourns Macbeth, insomuch as other tyrants: "he dies alone and unlamented" (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 54) as his death offers temporary peace. Like Macbeth, Richard III dies on the battlefield surrounded by the violence he started, while his death guarantees the consecration of the tyrant-slayer to hero and legitimate ruler. Thus, both Macbeth and Richard III's deaths are embedded with the moral and political conundrum of legitimacy and legitimate violence. As the violence used on tyrants is always perceived as legitimate, the violence used by tyrants is vice versa always illegitimate. For instance, neither Richmond nor Malcolm responds to their use of violence in the same way as Macbeth and Richard have to. Eventually, both Richard III and Macbeth's deaths are neither heroic nor glorious, yet they provide tragic closure to their respective plays. Equally necessary for closure, Claudius' death in *Hamlet* allows the final reconciliation between Laertes and Hamlet. Claudius's death is

thereof perceived as just and appropriate since he dies due to a backfired plot, resonating with his original act of violence, as Laertes affirms:

He is justly served;

It is a poison temper'd by himself. (HAM,5.2.311-312)

His death seems unremarkable compared to Hamlet's, who instead dies in a chivalric way. For this reason, it is Hamlet who receives a military send-off, not the former king of Denmark. The dramatic sense of Hamlet's death is heightened when put in contrast with Claudius' unheroic demise; as Hamlet's chivalric end seems to finally redeem the disgraceful end of his father. Ultimately, both Hamlet and Claudius' deaths purify Denmark of its rottenness, displaying Fortinbras' claim to the throne as a hopeful conclusion. In contrast with *Hamlet's* sombre yet hopeful closure, *King Lear* offers no such relief. As Cordelia dies, the potential for hope is dispelled. Edmund's death provides no satisfactory closure, as Albany dismissively comments: "That's but a trifle here." (KL,5.3.293-294). Just like other tyrants, potential or actual, Edmund's death deserves no recognition as it fades to nothing compared to the lives he took.

Ultimately, tyranny ends on the same note it started, with violence and bloodshed. However, as the tyrant is slain, tyrannical violence shifts from the former tyrant to the new one. Thus, there seems to be no way out, as tyrannicide and tyrannical violence will always be intermingled as ambivalent characteristics of the never-ending cycle of the bloody enforcement of rule.

4. "O piteous spectacle!": public executions, stage violence, and the bloody entertainment of violence in Shakespeare's time

According to Foakes, "our fascination with violence has much more to do with the beast inside of us" (Foakes, 2002, p. 6) than one might genuinely admit. Surely, violence has always been a compelling element to audiences across history. In the past, staging and writing about violence released deep pent-up urges of violence that would otherwise remain buried. Brutality was easy to spot in Renaissance London since many spaces across the city were built for the special purpose of violent entertainment. Stage violence thereof resonates with the Early Modern period "in terms of Renaissance aesthetics" (Diehl, 1980, p. 33). Not only did Renaissance Londoners enjoy violence, but they also sought it and were willing to pay for it. Such obsession with violence led theatrical companies to capitalise "on a public fascination with the representation of violence." (Foakes, 2002, p. 36). Thus, every performance held on a stage or a scaffold could be easily turned into an entertaining spectacle of violence. In addition, Renaissance inclinations towards gruesome scenes paved the way for a new genre of gory drama known as Revenge Tragedy. Finally, violence had to be enjoyable, but "most of all, spectacular" (Crawforth, et al., 2015, p. 30), whether performed on a stage or a scaffold.

Indeed, little distinction passed between public executions and gory stage performances in the eyes of Early Modern Londoners. Public executions were a

common reality in the Early Modern period. Although they were considered as sinisterly festive occasions, those moments were careful enforcement of the ideology of monarchical power. Such executions aimed at reminding people of the monarch's unassailable power and the merciless end of those who threatened it. In Foucault's opinion, public executions had to carry the same significance of a display of royal grandeur through a terrible display of spilt blood. Hence, executions were meant to scare and control subjects. Indeed, as they watched the king's justice being conducted on the scaffold, subjects were supposed to feel frightened by the punishment they were witnessing. In addition, the violence used during public executions was excessive and purposefully dramatic, as "the very excess of violence employed is one of the elements of [their] glory" (Foucault, 2020, p. 34), emphasising the dramatic effect of such physical punishment. In fact, public executions were the peak of a more private form of judicial redressing which initially started with torture.

The common reality of torture went alongside the practice of public executions. Nonetheless, the exercise of torture was a well-balanced technique with a clear aim, rather than a mere expression of "lawless rage" (Foucault, 2020, p. 33). Although the practice of torture remained hidden behind closed doors, the result of it had to be visible to the public eye. The results of torture had a very precise purpose, as torture marks were not used simply "as sensational stage violence but as symbolic icons which express widely understood moral and ethical concepts" (Diehl, 1980, p. 30) of power and justice. Both executions and torture

had the aim to expose the monarch's approved version of the truth as well as to show the imbalance of power between the offender and the monarch. The body of the condemned man was one of the principal aspects of such display of power, as it became the stage where torture and executions were enforced. The lacerated body of the tortured man therefore became a visual reminder to the audience of the crimes committed. Eventually, the visual power imbalance between the brutalized body of the condemned man and the invulnerable body politic of the monarch was the central continuum at the heart of torture and capital punishment.

Capital death also carried a double implication in itself. Such double meaning relied on the fact that public executions fused both public retribution as well as the monarch's private retaliation. For instance, the incredible spectacles of the executions of Guy Fawkes and his fellow plotters are clear examples of that, since these executions had to carry a resonant form of monarchical vengeance. On the day of their executions, the Catholic plotters "were displayed on a scaffold which had been specially devised and subjected to the fascinated scrutiny of spectators" (Fraser, 1997, p. 219), turning their deaths into a sensational show. Nonetheless, the spectacular violence and the brutalized flesh might have carried a subversive message, as the condemned man on the scaffold could evoke the figure of a religious martyr, rather than a callous criminal. Such an unstable association might have caused civil upheaval, turning scared witnesses into an enraged mob. Thus, the spectacle of rule and death was never safe, as it could have unpredicted

consequences. Eventually, as Foucault states: "the great spectacle of punishment ran the risk of being rejected by the very people to whom it was addressed" (Foucault, 2020, p. 63).

In conclusion, it was among these gory spectacles of violence and rule that Shakespeare lived and penned his works. His setting of stage violence and brutal performances thus resounded with Early Modern cultural surroundings. Even in recent times, dynamics of political violence seem to have remained the same as the fashion of judicial and political executions never really ended. Capital penalty as the maximum degree of accusation is still enforced in twenty-seven American states. Despite not being conducted in public anymore, the death penalty follows the same principle of Early Modern public executions; as the offence committed is unforgivable, the punishment has to be merciless. Like in the past, in today's world, some governments still yield the power to take the lives of convicted citizens. Eventually, it can be argued that the only progress reached since the Renaissance was the transformation from public to private executions. Instead of a scaffold, today's world relies on mass media for "the task of recounting the grey, unheroic details of everyday crime and punishment" (Foucault, 2020, p. 69). Thus, it is the never-ending lust of men for the portrayal of violence and gore, as well as its atavistic power, the characteristic that makes Shakespearean violence still actual in today's world.

4.1 From the Vice to the Machiavellian villain: a dramatic evolution in the representation of wickedness on the Early Modern stage

The representation of wickedness and wicked characters has a long-standing theatrical tradition. Since the Middle Ages, wicked characters mounted the stage to create mischief and misrule. Medieval drama relied on the figure of the Vice for staging malice and wickedness. The role of the Vice was firstly encountered in the religious-bound drama of the morality plays. Morality plays had the aims of entertaining and instructing the audience against the treacherous nature of evil and its corrupting power. The Vice entered the scene as a malicious character whose aim was the moral corruption of the good characters in order to win them over to the wicked side. Interestingly enough, such wicked enterprise often resulted in comical and satirical moments which were enjoyed by the audience.

One of the most famous medieval Vices is Mischief, appearing in *Mankind* (1471), who works supported by three other minor vices – Newguise, Nowadays, and Nought. Mischief aims at the moral corruption of Mankind, the main character who personifies humanity. At first, Mischief succeeds in his plan, just to be eventually defeated through Mankind's redemption.

The Vices were never simply the "villains" who created chaos on stage. On the contrary, the Vices performed multifaceted roles in medieval drama, as they were not only villainous characters, but they also functioned as "the playmakers, the chorus, the comedians, the satirical moralists, and the agents of destruction of every play in which they appeared" (Spivack, 1958, p. 126). Thus, they were

crucial elements of the play, rather than just antagonists to the main characters. Additionally, they were well-liked by the audience, who amused themselves with their sardonic mockeries of the other characters, as well as their witty remarks and banter. Thus, one might argue that the Vice was "the villain, whom the audience learnt to shun, and the welcome game-maker who ma[de] the play possible" (Wiles, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, the Vice proved to be a role of challenging classification not only because of his multifaceted role but also because of his ever-shifting relationship with the audience.

According to Spivack, the role of the Vice relied on two major abilities: seduction and deceit. Seduction was a central aspect of the role since it enabled the Vice to subdue characters, making them part of his intrigue. Additionally, the Vice seemed always engaged in orchestrating mischief at the expense of others, while involving the public in his machinations. Thus, one may argue that the audience's involvement in the Vice's plots is just another form of the Vice's seduction played on his audience, rather than on other characters. The audience is therefore beguiled by the Vice's oratory without realising its shifting stance, moving between "the polar positions of the observer and participant" (Wiles, 2009, p. 3).

As well as his ability to seduce and subdue, the Vice showed an innate ability in deceiving people. He did not only deceive people; he was proud of it as well. Still, the Vice's pride in his deception was not only a self-accomplishment to be individually enjoyed. In fact, the Vice often "invite[d] the audience to admire his

talent" (Spivack, 1958, p. 155), arguably addressing the audience to find a sort of acknowledgement of his prowess in the audience.

The bond between the audience and the Vice went beyond the mere entertaining and reached a deeper level of "intimacy" as "between the Vice and his audience understanding [was] perfect" (Spivack, 1958, p. 184). In opposition to the other characters, the audience is never fooled by the Vice's mischiefs, instead, the audience functioned as a witness to his misdeeds. Indeed, one might argue that such an intimate relationship with the audience further complicated the audience's moral stance toward the Vice.

Ultimately, the Vice's abilities as an entertainer and mischievous character made him "a favourite with the audience" (Mares, 1958, p. 13) who eventually saw themselves mirrored in the mischievous vice or the cozened main character.

Despite his success on stage, the role of the Vice underwent a significant transformation as the taste for drama evolved. The Vice thereof started to become less of a personification of mischief to become more of a mischievous man. Such transition implied some crucial changes in the role, as Spivack comments:

> his original status as personification becomes compromised by the inevitable tendency to dramatize him – that is, to invest him with human traits and to subject him to human experiences and emotions (Spivack, 1958, p. 198).

Thus, the Vice left a legacy for the villains that would mount the stage after him. For instance, Shakespeare's Richard III shares great similarities with the Vice of

the morality plays. For example, he is a capable seducer and the wicked mastermind of plots resulting in several fatalities. Gloucester already shows instances of vice-like qualities in *Henry VI part III* (1592) where he confesses that:

> I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
>
> And cry "Content" to that which grieves my heart,
>
> And wet my cheeks with artificial tears. (3HVI, 165-167).

Like the medieval Vice, Gloucester fully encapsulates "the vice's trick of tears" (Spivack, 1958, p. 161) to beguile the other characters and continue with his machinations. Further along in his monologue, Gloucester also admits that he will "deceive more slyly than Ulysses could" (3HVI, 3.2.173) to get the crown, therefore showing how vice-like deceit is crucial to Richard. In addition to his skilful deceits, Richard is also a skilled seducer. Despite his flawed exterior, Richard charms people with his flawless speech. The finest evidence of such ability can be found in *Richard III*, as Gloucester woos Lady Anne (R3, Act 1 Scene 2). Indeed, as Lady Anne leaves the scene, Richard seems almost surprised by his triumph, as he utters:

> What! I, that kill'd her husband and his father,
>
> To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
>
> [...] Having God, her conscience, and these bars
>
> against me,
>
> And I nothing to back my suit at all,
>
> But the plain devil and dissembling looks,

And yet to win her, all the world to nothing! (R3, 1.2.233-240)

Gloucester is so pleased with his accomplishment to the point that he asks the audience to acknowledge his enterprise, just like the Vice used to do with his audience. Hence, Gloucester's monologues in *Henry VI part III* Act 3 scene 2 and *Richard III* Act 1 Scene 2 highlight the abilities that Richard III shares with the medieval Vice, which is to say, seduction and deceit. Eventually, Richard compares himself to the theatrical Vice, as he confesses:

Thus, like the formal vice, Iniquity,

I moralize two meanings in one word. (R3,3.1.82-83)

Thus, it can be argued that Gloucester seems proud of sharing such similarities with the villain of medieval theatre. As the play moves towards its end, the vice-like qualities seem to abandon Gloucester, arguably in favour of a deeper psychological representation of guilt. So, Richard's final transformation resonates with the later humanisation of the Vice, as commented by Spivack. Thus, one might argue that the medieval Vices' legacy to the dramatic tradition of the English theatre significantly influenced the villains of the Elizabethan stage.

Another crucial figure who intersected with the Vice in the dramatic representation of wickedness was Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). In the early modern period, the Italian diplomat and philosopher was known in Britain for his political treaties *Discourses on Livy* (1517) and *The Prince* (1532), although both works received a harsh response. Nonetheless, "while Machiavelli was abused in

public, […] he was studied in private for his effectual truth" (Salingar, 1991, p. 21) and his skewed influences reached many aspects of the Renaissance life.

The question of "the knowledge of Machiavelli's works in England remains a controversial one" (Petrina, 2009, p. 14) even in recent days. Virtually unknown in English until 1640, Machiavelli's works reached England in their original versions or through translations. In the past, scholars followed Meyer's assumption which considered Gentillet's pamphlet *Discours sur les Moyens de Bien Gouverner* (1576) as the starting point of Machiavelli's entrance into England. Such stance was later proved incorrect, as Pratz finds that Machiavelli's name was already known and "mentioned with a sinister connotation in the Sempill Ballads referring to Scottish political events, even before Gentillet's work was published in French" (Pratz, 1966, p. 96) as the *Sempill Ballads* were firstly written around 1567.

Whether read in their original forms or through translations, Machiavelli's political stances were largely misinterpreted. Machiavelli's "extreme statement of political realism" (Anglo, 1966, p. 131) and his sharp political insights were completely lost on his contemporaries who found in him the embodiment of a public enemy, rather than a political visionary. Machiavelli turned out to be "a label for all sorts of political crimes" (Pratz, 1966, p. 98) as well as "a rallying-point for whatever was most loathsome in statecraft, and indeed in human nature at large" (Pratz, 1966, p. 95). The Elizabethans' hate for Machiavelli reverberated in several instances of demonisation and attempts to turn the dreadful Italian into

a laughing-stock. One of the most striking attempts focused on the distortion of his name which had to show his inherent malignity. Thus, Machiavelli's name was conveniently mangled, as "he was called *Match a villain, 'Machevill* that evill none can match', [and] Hatch-evil" (Pratz, 1966, p. 130) Later on, Machiavelli's demonisation climaxed with the association to Satan itself, as the Florentine was also known as "Old Nick" – which used to be a nickname for Satan. Eventually, as Pratz comments:

> the terms Machiavelli and Satan become interchangeable that, whereas at first the tricks attributed to Machiavelli were called devilish, later on the Devil's own tricks were styled 'Machiavellian' (Pratz, 1966, p. 130).

However bad was Machiavelli's reputation in England, he occasionally had some supporters among those few who understood his political theories. For example, the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626) in his *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) stated:

> we are much beholden to Machiavel and others, that write what men do, and not what they ought to do. For it is not possible to join serpentine wisdom with the columbine innocency, except men know exactly all the conditions of the serpent (Bacon, 2019, p. 151).

Thus, Bacon highlighted how Machiavelli's axioms could be read not as lectures in ambition and violence, but as lectures on the nature of men.

Machiavelli did not only influence the political landscape of Early Modern England but he also unintentionally influenced the theatrical tradition of the

time. The theatrical villain inspired to the Florentine was known as the Machiavel, found in characters such as Lorenzo and Hieronimo in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587), Barabas in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1590), Richard of Gloucester in Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1597) and Iago in *Othello* (1603). All these characters embody the Machiavellian villain as they all rely on their diabolical minds to satisfy their vaulting ambition and to cause mishaps. Such role however seems to "bear more relation to the Vice of medieval drama than to the actual writer" (Petrina, 2009, p. 2). Machiavelli's caricatural role is not the only instance of his presence on stage, as his name is also uttered on stage in relation to wicked or cunning characters and their vicious actions. For instance, Shakespeare uses Machiavelli's name in *Henry VI part III*, when Richard of Gloucester comments on his malicious plan of usurping the throne by stating that his wickedness will "set the murderous Machiavel to school" (3HVI,3.2.177). By stating his superiority to Machiavelli, Richard suggests to his audience that his wickedness is far greater than the infamous Machiavelli's. Additionally, as Richard remains faithful to his promise to "set murderous Machiavel to school", he contextually generates a sense of dread in his audience. In Grady's words:

> the sense in which Richard III is Machiavellian is a sense that implies a condemnation of the doctrine with which the character is associated, inasmuch as the play is constructed to generate successive *frissons* of horror in an audience privileged to be aware of Richard's hypocritical exterior and diabolic interior. (Grady, 2000, p. 124)

Certainly, Richard III is one of the greatest Machiavels of the Early Modern stage,

yet it would be inaccurate to assume that he is the only one to mount the stage.

Indeed, early modern playwrights penned a wide array of Machiavellian

characters, all sharing murderous intelligence and ruthless ambition as common

traits. Additionally to the Machiavel aforementioned, Watson studied the

Machiavellian villains to perform on the Early Modern stage, identifying some

shared traits in Shakespearean characters such as "Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*,

Richard III, Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, his son Prince John in *Henry IV*, King

Claudius in *Hamlet*, Iago in *Othello*, Edmund in *Lear*, and Octavius in *Antony and

Cleopatra"* (Watson, 1976, p. 644).

Arguably, such a long list of characters highlights how the Machiavellian villains

were central figures on stage over a considerable amount of time. Thus, one

might argue that both the Vice and the Machiavellian villain share some

similarities in the representation of wickedness on stage. One may further argue

that the Machiavellian villain might be considered as a sublimated version of the

Vice, as his intrigues, plots and violence reach a further level of complexity on

stage.

The Machiavellian villain might be thereof defined as a cunning character,

without morality or ethics. His mind is as sharp as his tongue and he often relies

on rhetoric to further his schemes. More often than not, the Machiavellian villain

is concerned with politics, as his ruthless ambition pushes him towards new and

higher positions of power. Hence, one can interpret that the Machiavellian villain

performs as "an unscrupulous rascal, a harsh calculator" (Ceramella, 2019, p. 108) dedicated to acquiring political power through ruthless mind-games and plots. The Machiavellian villain is not afraid to recur to violence, as he seems well versed in its administering. Indeed, there is "a sense of artistry in violence" (Watson, 1976, p. 633) which leads the Machiavellian villain "to be romanticized into an aesthete of death" (Watson, 1976, p. 634). Such a deep connection between Machiavelli's theories and violence was reinforced in *The Prince* as well as in *The Art of War* (1521). Once again, Machiavelli's intentions were misinterpreted, as the Florentine was not a man of violence, yet he acknowledged its importance, lecturing princes to judiciously yield violence in political affairs.

In opposition to Machiavelli's true message, Shakespeare's Machiavels seem constantly occupied in orchestrating ruthless and overambitious political moves and deceptions, often resulting in multiple deaths. The Machiavels play the game of politics without any respect for other people's lives, as they only care about their ambitious goals. Once again, Richard III perfectly adheres to such notion, as "politics to him wasn't anything else but a practical affair, an amoral art, as it were" (Ceramella, 2019, p. 115). Similarly to Gloucester, Edmund weaves a net of intrigues at the court of Lear, fully unbothered by the moral implications of his actions – since reaching power is everything that matters to him. Furthermore, he proves himself a skilled deceiver, as he deceives his father and both Goneril and Regan. Likewise, Malcolm seems well-versed in the art of tricky deceit, as he creates two opposite versions of himself. Malcolm's deceit does not only trick

Banquo, but it also leaves the audience and Malcolm's followers to wonder which version is the real one. Ultimately, Shakespeare's deceivers seem to rely on Machiavelli's axiom that "he who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived" (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 92)

Inversely, Brutus seems to embody a different sort of Machiavel, as he is the only one who takes into consideration the moral implications of his schemes and deceits. One might argue that Cassius, instead of Brutus, seems to be the Machiavel of the play, since he is the initial orchestrator of Caesar's death. However, clear instances of Machiavellism are displayed "in the opposing figures of Brutus and Antony" (Friedman, 1955, p. 33). Ultimately, as Brutus is defeated, Antony proves to be the undisputed Machiavel. Interestingly, both Antony and Malcolm embody the strongest instances of Machiavellism, still they are perceived as good characters, not as the villainous Machiavels Richard III or Edmund. Lastly, *Hamlet* poses an interesting stance in terms of Machiavels, as the play sees two of them mounting the stage in the roles of King Claudius and Prince Hamlet. King Claudius displays many traits of the Machiavel as he poisons his brother to seize the crown. Interestingly enough, Claudius' poisoning of Old Hamlet adds a further connotation to the ideas linked to Machiavelli's twisted morals. As Pratz points out, Machiavellism suggested "a treacherous way of killing, generally by poison" (Pratz, 1966, p. 128) which resonates with the notion that Italy held a primate in the art of poisoning. Additionally, Claudius hardly shares any remorse for having killed his brother and king, and he seems ready to

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remove Hamlet as well from the political scene of Denmark. His resolution in Hamlet's death can be accounted as another instance of Machiavellism, as Machiavelli suggested "to kill the sons of Brutus" (Machiavelli, 1996, p. 210) – which is to say the lineage of the former ruler – if one were to lead a newly acquired reign.

Nevertheless, the play sees the rise of Hamlet as a potential Machiavel. Indeed, "Hamlet turns Machiavel twice" (Watson, 1976, p. 645) in the play, as he orchestrates the deaths of both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern through a shrewd plan, and through switching weapons with Laertes in the final combat. One might argue that both Claudius and Hamlet represents different stances of Machiavellism – arguably, the former instance being more explicit than the latter, yet both stances are equally cunning and deadly.

Most of Shakespeare's Machiavels also share the tragic realisation that there will be no peace for them. Thus, they will always need to scheme and plot to protect what they reached, and most importantly, to protect themselves for as long as possible. Machiavels realise that "in the complexities of politics one cannot commit one deed, or perform one crime, and then stop" (Watson, 1976, p. 647) as politics requires constant bloodshed. Thereof, one might argue that the Machiavels' gradual psychological deterioration springs from the notion of an unreachable peace of mind, as well as an inescapable sense of guilt and punishment. Therefore, paranoia and belated guilt eventually signal the downfall of the Machiavels' mental prowess. One might further argue that

eventually their best assets – which is to say their minds – turn evil on them, showing the audience the real consequences of acting like a Machiavel.

The role of the Machiavel was also constituted by a subtle degree of comicality. According to Pratz, the Machiavel's comical quality relies on the evidence that "his tricks were bound to recoil inevitably on his own head" (Pratz, 1966, p. 142), as the Machiavel becomes his own victim. However, as the taste in drama changed, so did Machiavel's fascination with the audiences, since they "could no longer be affected by his terrors, but became increasingly aware of his ridiculousness" (Pratz, 1966, p. 142). Ultimately, the Machiavel returned to his original attributes during the Romantic period, since Romanticism leaned on "a taste for horrors very akin to that of the Elizabethans" (Pratz, 1966, p. 143). The sublime influence of the early modern Machiavel pushed beyond the Early Modern period, giving way to the creation of a new type of Machiavel, such as Goethe's Mephistopheles, who shares "many of the characteristics the Elizabethans comprehended under the description of 'Machiavellian'" (Pratz, 1966, p. 144). In conclusion, the Machiavel proved to be a multifaceted character, sinking its roots in the medieval Vice, and becoming one of the most unforgettable villains on the English stage.

4.2"Enters Macduff with Macbeth's head": Shakespeare's dramatic representations of violence and victims on the Early Modern Stage.

Shakespeare responded to the tastes of his audience by flooding the stage with violence, blood, and gore. Although sensational, Shakespeare's violence was never just staged for the sake of spectacle. Shakespeare deeply investigated the reasons behind violence, if there were any, to begin with. Frequently, characters on stage try to justify their actions by attributing their violent behaviours to ambition, revenge or jealousy. Yet, all their explanations eventually become inadequate justifications**.** Although being a constant element in Shakespeare's plays, violence followed the playwright's maturity. Indeed**,** Shakespeare's trajectory for violence started from a sensationalistic use of gory images to a later-achieved conscious way of portraying human nature. In other words, Shakespeare provided:

> a continuing development in his treatment of violence from an early delight in sensational stage violence for its theatrical excitement to his work in which violence is represented as an inescapable aspect of human experience that can only be comprehended in the long perspective of time. (Foakes, 2002, p. 8)

Shakespearean violence changed over time, while its futile motives remained unaltered. Indeed, faulty reasons behind violence are one of the most interesting aspects of Shakespeare's violence, as he staged a kind of violence that "seem[s] to have no motive, or no adequate motive" (Foakes, 2002, p. 15). Pointless

violence turned out to be a compelling element, as its crude representation shocked the minds of audiences for centuries. At the same time, acts of gratuitous violence encapsulate human fascination for violence, troubling the consciences of spectators while making it impossible for them to turn their eyes away from the gory scene.

Stage violence can also take the form of violent speech. Hamlet's words: "I will speak daggers" (HAM,3.2.386) clearly describe the powerful malice behind violent words, as they turn from speech to weapons. Frequently used by female characters, violent speech can be defined as an oblique form of violence. Although not creating physical damage, this feminine and oblique violence was still envisioned as potential aggression. In *Richard III* two different versions of spoken violence are staged and spoken by women against Richard. The first one is spoken by Queen Margaret, one of Gloucester's fiercer detractors, cursing him with words of violence:

> And leave out thee? stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me.
>
> If heaven have any grievous plague in store
>
> Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,
>
> O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,
>
> And then hurl down their indignation
>
> […]
>
> No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine,
>
> Unless it be whilst some tormenting dream

Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils! (R3,1.3 215-232)

Richard's reaction to this spoke violence is a witty response, capable of neutralising both violence and his enemy. This type of violence sees Richard unbothered and somehow bemused by Margaret's effort. On the contrary, when it is Richard's mother uttering words of violence, his reaction is completely different. After being cornered by his mother to be questioned about his misdeeds, Richard tries indeed to drown her voice with a trumpet. Eventually, his mother's verbal violence against him is the only type of violence he cannot tolerate. Differently from *Richard III*, women in *Macbeth* reach a deeper degree of violence and violent speech. For instance, both Lady Macbeth and the witches refuse stable gender connotations of female submissiveness and estrangement from violence. Their violence haunts the stage as well as the minds of the spectators in a disturbing way, causing arguably the same amount of anguish as male physical violence. Nonetheless, female violence is not perceived as equal to male violence, as the concept of violence itself is linked to the patriarchal scheme of gender roles. As Foakes points out, Shakespearean violence "fulfils the imperatives of the political and ideological structure" (Foakes, 2002, p. 15) of a patriarchal society. Consequently, male violence seems to be staged to show the boundlessness of ambition men, whereas female violence is just a series of wicked actions done for their own sake. All the same, although perceived as two diverse kinds of violence, female and male violence share the hectic result of spreading havoc and death.

Indeed, staging violence also means dealing with the consequences of bloody actions. For instance, when regicide is conducted mayhem infiltrates into the political life, as well as in the consciences of characters and spectators. As scenes of regicide carried dangerous potential, their performance on stage had to be carefully delivered. Possibly done to avoid monarchical outrage, Shakespeare stages the assassinations of good rulers off-scene. On the contrary, the assassinations of tyrants and villains are portrayed on centre stage, as such deaths are the ultimate spectacles of violence. For instance, in *Macbeth*, the violent assassination of Duncan is never staged but recounted afterwards. Although instances of such violence stain Macbeth both literally and metaphorically, the real act of violence is left to the imagination of the audience. On the contrary, the violent slaughter of Macbeth is performed on stage for everyone to see. Similarly, the violent assassination of tyrannical Ceasar is staged in all its brutality as the act concludes with Caesar's infamous last words "Et tu, Brute! Then fall, Caesar." (JC, 3.1.77). Since Ceasar embodies the risk of tyranny, he is denied the sympathy of a private off-stage death, while his body is kept on stage as a visual representation of butchering violence. Indeed, in the minds of Caesar's butchers, his blood becomes the delusionary symbol of victory over tyranny, a token of righteousness to be displayed with pride, as Cassius incites:

Stoop, Romans, stoop,

And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood

Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords (JC,3.1.105-107)

The role of blood and gore is central in the representation of violence. The presence of blood both on stage and on the characters indicates that the body is eventually the only repository of the display of violence. Blood sends a powerful message to the audience regarding the product of violence while anticipating future violence. For instance, after smearing swords with Caesar's blood, the conspirators face the violence of the mob, the war at Philippi and their violent ends. Similarly, in *Macbeth*, the entrance on the stage of the bloody captain is equally ominous. Macbeth is sinisterly introduced to the audience by a man covered in blood and nearly about to die, recounting Macbeth's violent prowess. Indeed, Macbeth's potential for violence is already on display, as the bloody captain reports:

> For brave Macbeth--well he deserves that name--
>
> Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
>
> Which smoked with bloody execution,
>
> Like valour's minion carved out his passage
>
> Till he faced the slave;
>
> Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
>
> Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,
>
> And fix'd his head upon our battlements. (MAC.1.2.16-23)

Thus, even before Duncan's murder, Macbeth is a man "in blood/Stepp'd in so far" (MAC,3.4.134-135) insomuch as further violence seems consistent with his nature. Eventually, the sensationalism of violence thus works on the material

presence of the body and vital fluids on stage. The flesh is the repository of the power relationships displayed on stage, since power is enforced "by controlling bodies, by inflicting pain or punishment or by fighting and warfare" (Foakes, 2002, p. 29).

Warfare is another example of large-scale violence displayed on stage as an idealisation of the ultimate war of good against evil. The act of waging war against a political opponent is a trope commonly found in Shakespeare's tragedies, as it yields emotional and ideological power on the audience. Commonly enough, theatrical warfare produces innocent victims, just like real-life warfare does. Frequently those innocent victims are young people, not yet corrupted by the world surrounding them. As innocents sacrifice themselves to the tyrant, they subconsciously precipitate the end of the play towards the final act of violence. Additionally, the violent deaths of innocents heighten the notion that a sort of sacrificial violence is required to move onto the new regime. Eventually, fallen soldiers and innocents killed by the tyrant's violence are raised to the rank of martyrs, as just as real-life martyrs, innocents suffer:

> a very particular kind of death, not only in their extreme violence but –
> more importantly – in the fact that they have symbolic value. They are
> deaths that give meaning to the life that preceded them. (Crawforth, et al.,
> 2015, p. 35)

Death is therefore the glorification force of these lives, as well as the pinnacle of their glory. For instance, the loss of young Siward is a shared grief, yet even grief

is mollified by his heroic death and the honour of such manly demise; as uttered by old Siward:

> Why then, God's soldier be he!
>
> Had I as many sons as I have hairs,
>
> I would not wish them to a fairer death (MAC,5.9.13-15)

Nonetheless, the deaths of "martyrs" in Shakespeare's plays do not always lead to a poignant closure. Sometimes the loss is so tragic and overwhelming that all hope is lost. For instance, Cordelia's death in *King Lear* provides no hope for the future. The sacrificial violence of her death seems to suggest that there might not always be redemption through innocent deaths.

Nonetheless, Shakespeare's play offers unexpected glimpses of heroic behaviour in unforeseen places. The confrontation between the servant and Kent sees the rising of "one of Shakespeare's great heroes" (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 146). This nameless character stands up against the ruthless violence of a tyrant with shocking bravery. His supplication "Hold your hand, my lord" (KL, 3.7.72) has the emphatic power of temporarily halting the blinding of Gloucester. Although his remark will be punished with death, the servant's "rebellion" against brutality brings a deeper significance to the play. Indeed, it is the wound the nameless servant causes in combat to Kent that will eventually kill him. Eventually, the brave servant's death enhances the potential of heroic value of innocents who die at the hands of villains. Furthermore, the assassinations of innocents remind the audience that there is nothing sacred to the tyrant, not even

children. Indeed, the violence used against children has a different value compared to the one used on adults. As children represent the hope for the future, tyrants represent the ultimate "enemies of the future" (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 106). This binary opposition between the role of children and the role of tyrants will be violently resolved with infanticide. In *Richard III,* the princes in the tower pose a fundamental problem to their vicious uncle. For as long as they live, Richard knows that is ruling on borrowed time. Thus, double-infanticide seems to be the resolutive act of violence to Richard's problems. Eventually, as the princes cease being children and become political adversaries, their fates are sealed. They are no longer the embodiment of hope, rather political enemies to be dealt with, as Richard describes:

> Why, there thou hast it: two deep enemies,
>
> Foes to my rest and my sweet sleep's disturbers
>
> Are they that I would have thee deal upon:
>
> Tyrrel, I mean those bastards in the Tower. (R3, 4.2.71-74)

Yet, the threat posed by children is not only a political one. In *Macbeth*, the stage sets another callous murder of children. Unlike, the murders in *Richard III*, the murders of Macduff's children are even more callous and unjustifiable than Richard's homicides of the princes. Macbeth is not scared that Macduff's children will threaten his position as ruler, rather he is punishing them for the "faults" of their father. By killing children, Macbeth is sending out a clear message to his subjects; his fury will be merciless for those who will follow Macduff's steps and

not even children will be spared. His malicious violence is fully disclosed in his words, as he announces:

> The castle of Macduff I will surprise;
>
> Seize upon Fife; give to the edge o' the sword
>
> His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
>
> That trace him in his line (MAC,4.2.149-152)

As Scotland reaches the pinnacle of violence and chaos, children are not freed from monstrous deaths. Instead, their massacre turns into a vile spectacle of tyrannical brutality. In addition, Macbeth does not only kill children out of tyrannical fear, he also murders them to strip others of the prospects of the continuity he lacks. The assassination of the Macduffs is Macbeth's first murder of children that ends successfully, yet it is not his first attempt, nor his last. Since the witches' first prophecy in Act 1 Scene 3, Macbeth harbours ill-conceived jealousy towards Banquo for being a father, and most importantly a father of kings. Thus, only the killing of Fleance would seemingly bring peace to Macbeth, as Banquo will have no more heir to dethrone him with. Additionally, Macbeth feels troubled by the idea that Fleance will ultimately inherit the crown, without having to give up "the eternal jewel" (MAC, 3.1.67) as he did. It can be thereof argued that Macbeth perceives Fleance's promised ascension to power as undeserved, as he will not have to kill his way up to the throne. Nonetheless, despite his urge to eliminate Fleance, Macbeth delegates such crime to a gang of murderers.

Indeed, infanticides seem to require external interventions. Similarly to King Richard, Macbeth hires murderers for killing children. Although he has committed regicide, he cannot bring himself to commit another unspeakable murder. He will not cease his attempts at killing children, yet he will not be the one physically performing such violence. Eventually, the only "child" Macbeth actively slaughters is young Siward. However, the killing of young Siward creates a paradoxical situation, as young Siward becomes a full man only when he is slaughtered. This co-existence of childhood and adulthood creates troubling duplicity in the character since he has to die to break the bonds of childhood. Eventually, his bloody end as evidence of manliness signals how the cultural landscape of Scotland is embedded in violence, even before Macbeth's rise to power. However, Macbeth is not the only character harbouring murderous thoughts about children. His wife, Lady Macbeth, in one of her most famous speeches announces her ability to kill infants; making her "bloody babe" the repository of unspeakable violence performed by a wayward mother. Indeed, she sinisterly utters:

> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
>
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
>
> And dash'd the brains out. (MAC,1.7.56-58)

Although Lady Macbeth's violence on children is never realised, the implications of such violent words equate her to a monster rather than to a mother. Eventually,

her violent speech is the ultimate instance of Adelman's notion of "maternal malevolence" (Adelman, 2010, p. 38).

Nonetheless, some children survive violence and make it to adulthood. *King Lear* sees children as products of the violence their parents bestowed on them. Indeed, King Lear's inability to restrain himself is the central issue precipitating all the events in the play. Indeed, it is his violent reaction that causes Cordelia's banishment and allows Goneril and Regan to seize power. According to their words, Lear has always been a prey to his own emotions to the point of violently lashing out in choleric raptures. Apparently, ageing has caused his temper to worsen, making him unstable and dangerous, as Goneril comments:

The best and soundest of his time hath been but

Rash; then must we look to receive from his age,

not alone the imperfections of long-engraffed

condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness

that infirm and choleric years bring with them. (KL, 1.2.296-300)

Therefore, violence is Lear's legacy to his daughters. His brutality "empowered them to use violence" (Foakes, 2002, p. 145) in the same way he used to. Eventually, notions of violence and power intermingle in Lear's vision of rule. This notion of violent rule returns in Goneril and Regan's ruling style, as both sisters effortlessly commit acts of brutal violence during their reign. For instance, it is Regan who physically blinds Gloucester, yet Goneril is not innocent in the function as she suggests to "Pluck out his eyes" (KL,3.7.5) in the first place.

Further displays of violence continue between the sisters, as they eventually die one at the hand of the other. Remarkably, not even Cordelia can be saved from the toll of violence. Although Cordelia is the exemplification of goodness and filial love, she re-enters the stage at the head of a foreign army, leading an invasion of her land. Indeed, Cordelia: "returns to England as an enemy of the state" (Foakes, 2002, p. 143). Labelling Cordelia as a political enemy seems to provide some arguably believable grounds for a legitimate political murder. Still, Cordelia's death cannot be defined as a political move, as it does not alter the social positions of the remaining characters. Her death is therefore pointless and troubling both for the audience and the characters, who cannot benefit from a justification for such violence. It can be therefore argued that the real cause behind the deaths of Lear's daughters is the violence their father was never able to restrain. Eventually, Cordelia and her sisters are exemplifications of the notion that violence always takes a toll on the lives it touches.

Like Lear, Kent is another man prone to violent outbursts. Similarly to Lear, he has a violent and unrestrained progeny. Edmund is not only physically violent but also a violent plotter. Violence comes naturally to Edmund to the point of winning him the title of " a shrunken Iago" (Foakes, 2002, p. 143). Like Goneril and Regan, Edmund exemplifies the violence he has inherited from his father. Nonetheless, Edmund's violence is also an attempt at self-definition. Just like Richard III, Edmund is "determined to prove a villain" (R3, 1.1.30) in an attempt to escape the fact that he is not the legitimate heir. It is the violent pain behind

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the self-questioning of "Why a bastard? Wherefore base?" (KL, 1.2.6) that springs the lust for violence. Eventually, violence becomes Edmund's means for redefinition and retaliation against society and his father who always labelled him as a bastard. It will be ruthless violence the way in which " Edmund the base/Shall top the legitimate" (KL, 1.2.21).

Thus, violence in Shakespeare might take many shapes and forms. A unique kind of violence can be witnessed when a rioting mob conducts violence. In the past, the term "riot" embodied the notion of civil disorder and trouble leading to violent actions conducted by angry people. As such phenomena had an enormous impact on people's lives, riots were seen as problematic events. Differently from the past, today's world is experiencing a time "marked by a series of high profile and heavily mediatized riots across the globe" (Moran & Waddington, 2016, p. 1) which have numbed our sensibility to such phenomena. Instead, rioting had a very different meaning in Renaissance England as well as grave consequences, as they were moments of hectic predisposition for confusion. The violence encapsulated in rioting was not the same impromptu violence found for instance in *Hamlet*, as Renaissance rioting violence needed time to ripen. For instance, Lear's "knights grow riotous" (KL, 1.3.7) as the system of values dismantles around them. However, *Julius Ceasar* stages a scene of political upheaval hardly comparable to any other scene of civil turmoil. According to Lamb, turmoil started by civilians in *Julius Caesar's* is closer to a "modern concept of a riot in its combination of politicised impetus and crowd

action against perceived tyranny or injustice" (Flaherty & Lamb, 2018, p. 200) rather than a Renaissance idea of riot. Indeed, the action of the plebeians is not referred to as "riot," but rather as "mutiny." Thus, it is the distinction between Lear's riotous knights and the mob violence of *Julius Ceasar* that marks the bounds between the idea of riot and mutiny.

Additionally, the mob violence in *Julius Ceasar* presents problematic stances about the power of an angry crowd. The violence used by the mob resembled bestial violence, far from the human capacity of restrain. The mob does not discriminate nor think, it only creates mayhem out of madness. Eventually, pent-up feelings of rage, contempt, and frenzy-like violence climax in the massacre of Cinna the poet. This act of unnecessary violence complicates the position of the plebeians as they become "the exact counterpart of the feckless Senate, the conspiring patricians, and, most important, the ambitious Caesar" (Miola, 1985, p. 288). This civil mutiny thereof leads Rome to further violence and bloodshed, as neither the ruling class nor the lower class can refrain from using senseless violence. Staging scenes of violent mutiny had therefore a clear message for the audience, as riots only brought up further violence, mayhem, and death.

Eventually, Shakespeare's violence proved to be a recurring theme in many plays. All the same, although entertaining Shakespeare's stage violence demonstrates the inadequacy of the motives behind it. Thereof, staged violence has been intriguing audiences for centuries, while at the same time continuing to look into the dark sides of the human condition.

4.3 *"A deed without a name"*: the issue of political violence featured in terrorism and political assassinations in Shakespeare's tragedies.

Terrorism might be considered as a recent phenomenon, a situation of violence "that go[es] back only so far as the French Revolution" (Appelbaum, 2015, p. 25). However, instances of terrorism or attempted terrorism can be found even before 1789. For instance, Britain had to face one of the deadliest threats to the political order in 1605, with the failed Gunpowder Plot. Terrorism as a form of political violence persists even in today's world, producing tragedies such as 9/11 (2001) and the attack at Charlie Hebdo (2015). Terrorism as a political form of violence has not changed much over history, as its aim remains the same. Indeed, terrorism had, and still has, the clear and subversive aim of using violence to overthrow political agendas through a display of violence and death. The ultimate idea behind terrorism is therefore that only through death and destruction a new world can arise, with arguably "new fears and perhaps new hopes" (Appelbaum, 2015, p. 37). Such destruction has to take place both on physical bodies, as well as on symbolic places. Similarly to later acts of terrorism, the Gunpowder plotters tried to blow up the House of Parliament in a clear terroristic fashion. Such organised violence might indeed "satisfy a modern definition of terrorism" (Fraser, 1997, p. 103) in terms of means and expected results. For instance, both the Gunpowder Plot and 9/11 aimed at "the same primary symbols of economic, political and military power" (Holderness, 2018, p. 3), as wiping out such symbols equated to destroying their power. Thus, all

acts of terrorism are united under the same usage of performative violence both on bodies and buildings.

Although Shakespeare's contemporaries did not have a word such as terrorism, they recurred to different labels for what the Gunpowder Plot signified to them. The malice behind it and the results it could have caused were unfathomable, turning such an act into a true "deed without a name" (MAC,4.1.49). As a result, the contemporary play of *Macbeth* encapsulates the political anxieties of the time, creating a set of cross-references between 11th century Scotland and 17th century England, as well as today's world. The first important cross-reference is thereof the notion of coup d'état, as both the Gunpowder plotters and Macbeth chose to overthrow an established political agenda through political assassinations. Unlike the Gunpowder Plot, Macbeth's coup d'état is successful. His illegitimate rule eventually calls for retribution, finding a fleeting hope in the characters of Malcolm and Macduff. However, it can be argued that Macduff's elimination of Macbeth does not greatly differ from Macbeth's murder of Duncan, as both political murders lead to a new regime through the assassination of a previous ruler. Once again legitimacy is the one thing tipping the balance between right and wrong. On one hand, there is the legitimate ruler who uses violence legitimately. On the other, there is illegitimate violence used by tyrants. The former is never questioned since it is legitimate, whereas the latter is always questioned and despised. In other words:

> violence is good [...] when it is in the service of the prevailing dispositions
>
> of power; when it disrupts them, it is evil. (Sinfield, 1992, p. 94).

Thus, Macbeth's violence is wicked not only because it is ruthless but because he

is never in a "prevailing disposition of power" due to his illegitimate claim to the

throne. Consequently, Malcolm's legitimacy turns him into a warrior-hero,

whereas Macbeth ends up being a "dead butcher" (MAC, 5.9.35).

Another interesting aspect shared by past and modern acts of terror and

violence is the troubling character of the terrorist. What makes "Renaissance

terrorists" similar to today's terrorists is their vision of an apocalyptical

landscape and a deluded sense of "irrational hope" (Holderness, 2018, p. 6). For

instance, *Julius Caesar*'s plotters killed Caesar to establish a new order of things,

as the senators' murder intends "to shatter reverence" (Appelbaum, 2015, p. 37)

and submission to a single man. Nonetheless, their deluded hope is eventually

flawed by personal gain, making their violence somehow terroristic.

Remarkably, pseudo-terroristic violence differs from any other type of political

violence, as such acts are "open to no future" (Derrida, 2003, p. 167). Both *Macbeth*

and *Julius Caesar* seem to adhere to such notion of "no future". Indeed, time seems

to collapse after the staging of violent political assassinations, preventing a

consistent passage of time in the perpetrators of violence's minds. For instance,

Macbeth's murder alters the temporal order of his life, ominously fusing his

future and present in a paranoid overlapping of moments and scenes. As the play

progresses, Macbeth becomes increasingly lost in a temporal limbo which

enhances his frenzy-like behaviour. In addition to the impossibility of a future, Macbeth is rarely seen ruling. Such failure corroborates the notion that he might be a violent murderer as well as a disastrous ruler. Likewise, Caesar's killers are well-versed in the assassination of their leader still they show few clear ideas on what to do after Caesar's homicide. Rome's future therefore seems to be vaguely planned after Caesar's death, as this confusion eventually leads to disaster and chaos. Every possibility of a grand future evaporates with murderous political violence – be it the murder of Caesar or Duncan. Ultimately, Shakespeare's political murderers are revealed to be inadequate rulers, as they fail to move away from the roles of the violent political assassins to the role of monarchs.

Shakespeare's representations of pseudo-terroristic violence and political assassinations are still consistent in today's world, as "terrorism is only one of many forms of violence in the political world" (Appelbaum, 2015, p. 41) as much in the past as nowadays. Thus, it is impossible to represent Shakespeare's works without their natural violence – be it terroristic or not. As Applebaum comments:

> to represent the political world, in Shakespeare's works, is inevitably to represent violence, to represent both the violence that constitutes it and the violence that defies it. (Appelbaum, 2015, p. 41)

Shakespeare's efforts thereof show how violence comes naturally to men, and most importantly, how the core of human violence rarely changes. As the world evolves, new threats come from new forms of violence. Although terroristic violence and political murders might take many shapes, their ultimate aim

remains that of dismantling pre-existing political agendas. Thus, terrorism and political assassinations are intermingled treads that outline the complexity behind situations of power and violence.

5. *"Look like the innocent flower/But be the serpent under't"*: violent confrontations between genders through the use and repercussions of violence

Insofar violence has been studied as a male prerogative. Indeed, men are the ones mounting the stage as murderers and plotters. Nonetheless, Feminist criticism has widely studied the role of women in dramatic acts of violence and their repercussions, debunking stereotypes and biases linked to gender and violence. Such efforts provide new readings of Shakespeare's female characters and new reasons behind their actions. Nonetheless, despite modern endeavours, womanhood and violence have carried stigmatizing associations for centuries. In the past, violent women were labelled as "evil" and "monstrous" when their behaviours defied the boundaries of gender roles. Similarly to power, violence was an unnatural attribute for women to show. Shakespeare's contemporaries a notion of womanhood was closer to the meek image of the maternal Lady Macduff, rather than to the malicious Lady Macbeth or Lear's callous daughters. According to Léon Alfar, Shakespeare's violent female characters ban female attributes as "they reject 'natural' forms of femininity, such as sympathy, nurturance, and obedience" (Léon Alfar, 2003, p. xxiii). Eventually, such perverse

behaviours even alter their biological functions. As a result, the bodies of wicked women become the repositories of their deviation, as most violent women are neither mothers nor do they seem able to conceive. Finally, their maliciousness estranges them from femininity to the point of rejecting their ability to procreate, as this failure becomes the definitive evidence of their perverse natures.

Indeed, Lady Macbeth is one of the most violent female characters in Shakespeare's tragedies. Her violence begins as soon as she threads the stage for the first time. Her famous monologue "Unsex me here" (MAC,1.5.48) already contains subversive images of the stripping of femininity in favour of male characteristics. She knows that the violence already shaping in her mind will need the resolution of a man, rather than the weaknesses of a woman. She wishes to become a man, as masculine attributes will "Stop up the access and passage to remorse" (MAC,1.5.44), making it possible for her to bear regicide. She aggressively instigates her husband to commit murder, making such a demand problematic and subversive. Her sly attacks on Macbeth's masculinity are thereof instances of her violent conduct and her defiance towards her gender role. However, her instigations can also be seen as a twisted representation of gender duties. According to Léon Alfar's vision of Lady Macbeth, the Lady's violent words are just "Shakespeare's parodic depiction of wifely duty" (Léon Alfar, 2003, p. 85). As a result, Lady Macbeth's urge towards murder transforms from the wicked spurring of an ambitious woman to the supporting statement of a dutiful

wife. Unlike Macbeth's frail masculinity, Duncan's father-like features seem to contain the Lady's gender disturbance. Indeed, as she distraughtly comments:

> Had he not resembled
>
> My father as he slept, I had done't. (MAC,2.2.12-13)

Duncan's resemblance to Lady Macbeth's father seems to chastise her ruthless ambition and bloodthirst. Thus, it can be argued that in today's psychological terms, the subconscious associations between the role of the Father and the enforcement of Law returns Lady Macbeth to some sort of gender-appropriate behaviour. However, this violent return to gender-appropriate behaviour is not peaceful, as Lady Macbeth becomes increasingly psychotic as the play progresses. Eventually, Lady Macbeth's taunted mind leads her to inaction, exclusion, and madness. Nevertheless, Lady Macbeth's violence remains "a fantasy with no substance" (Léon Alfar, 2003, p. 96), a malicious thought never realised on stage. Thus, it can be argued that Lady Macbeth is a woman of violent fantasy rather than a practical violent woman, as her violent actions barely leave her mind. Similar to Lady Macbeth's fantasy of violence, the three witches stage troubling instances of violence, as well as troubled gender identification. Although they are frequently associated with Lady Macbeth, the witches belong to a different realm of things, as Léon Alfar comments:

> while Lady Macbeth mimics their language, her actions cannot be read in
>
> the same light as those of the witches because she must function within

the cultural and ideological limitations of her society. The witches, on the

other hand, function within no such limits. (Léon Alfar, 2003, p. 89)

The witches defy everything humane, going beyond gender roles and

expectations. Since no rule applies to them, their violence seems boundless. Their

violence is represented on stage through their vile acts of "killing swine"(MAC,

1.3.2), in their malevolent plan to kill the sailor "to Aleppo gone" (MAC,1.3.7)

and in their veiled allusion to infanticide and murder. For instance, in Act 4 scene

1, violence takes centre stage as the witches concoct "a hell-broth" (MAC, 4.1.19).

In the witches' twisted ritual, violence has a crucial role, as they mix bloody

ingredients in the cauldron, as the Third Witch sinisterly utters:

> […] Liver of blaspheming Jew,
>
> Gall of goat, and slips of yew
>
> Silver'd in the moon's eclipse,
>
> Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips,
>
> Finger of birth-strangled babe
>
> Ditch-deliver'd by a drab. (MAC, 4.1.26-31)

Assertive masculinity seems ineffective on the witches' violence. Neither Duncan

nor Macbeth seems able to stop their power and dispel their malevolence. Unlike

Lady Macbeth's case, no father figure can chastise the witches' violent behaviour.

As a result, witches are free to roam in Scotland or to brew evil potions in

subterranean caverns. Finally, only with Malcolm's reign, they seem to

disappear. Nonetheless, the witches' presence is heard through Macduff's sinister

words at the end of the play. Even the other characters on stage eventually echo Macduff's words, as they utter:

Hail, king! for so thou art.

[…] Hail, King of Scotland!

ALL

Hail, King of Scotland! (MAC, 5.9.20-25)

The uncanny and spell-like repetition of the witches' words seems to further the notion that their violence and malevolence will never leave Scotland for good. Thus, it can be argued that the witches' violence is endemic and it will never be fully dispelled from the world, as no man can resist them.

Similarly to *Macbeth*'s wicked women, *King Lear*'s Goneril and Regan are the embodiments of despicable womanhood. Both sisters are constantly set in contrast with the kind Cordelia, who embodies filial love and submission. Indeed, such binary opposition between sisters serves the purpose of heightening the difference between good and bad femininity. Nonetheless, Goneril and Regan's actions find resonance in the context of violence produced at the court of their father, where violence is natural. Furthermore, Goneril and Regan seem to enforce violence on men. Such display of female violence on men is highly problematic since it oversteps genders' hierarchy, suggesting a sort of male vulnerability to women's violence. Eventually, it can be argued that *King Lear* is a play that precludes the realisation of healthy womanhood, as the only way for women to survive is to adhere to masculine standards of violence. Similarly to

the witches in *Macbeth*, Goneril and Regan have no assertive male who can stop their malevolence. Surely, neither Lear nor Gloucester can provide control over Goneril and Regan, as both men seem hardly able to control themselves. Indeed, it can be argued that in the lack of assertive men, both Goneril and Regan turn themselves into displays of assertive masculinity. Additionally, one might also argue that Goneril and Regan's appropriation of assertive masculinity is the realisation of Lady Macbeth's failed attempt at unsexing herself in order to become more man-like.

The utmost act of violence in *King Lear* is the blinding of Gloucester. Remarkably, such an act involves both sisters. Despite traditional readings, this act of violence might carry further political meaning if one changes the perspective on the characters. Indeed, in the eyes of both Goneril and Regan, Gloucester is a traitor working alongside an invading force that threatens the stability of their kingdoms. Since the punishment for traitors is torture, Gloucester's eyes are squeezed out. Thus, in the light of his betrayal, Gloucester's torture is not a pointless act of violence, but rather the legitimate means of two monarchs who want to protect their kingdoms. As Regan blinds Gloucester, her violence is not a rejection of female attributes nor a defining act in a violent world but rather the resolute action of a monarch. Indeed, as Léon Alfar points out regarding Regan's action:

> the requirements of her role as ruler in a kingdom under attack by
> invaders include – under Renaissance notions of rule – the methods by

which the stability of the nation must be preserved. (Léon Alfar, 2003, p. 68)

Thus, Regan might be acting violently out of a political urge to preserve her rule and kingdom from warfare. Similarly to her younger sister, Goneril is a female ruler who tries to find a definition in a world dominated by male violence. Her assertiveness resonates with the masculine attributes of a king, rather than those of a queen. Both Goneril and Regan therefore try to fit into a patriarchal world, discarding their femininity "in favour of the brutality and the violence of masculinist structures of domination" (Léon Alfar, 2003, p. 69) in order to be seen as rulers.

The murder-suicide of the two sisters is their ultimate act of inflicted and suffered violence. For instance, Goneril's suicide is the most compelling statement of power she makes in the play. Goneril takes control over her death as the ultimate demonstration of power. Resonating with her rule, she dies while being the only perpetrator of violence on herself. Additionally, Goneril's suicide might have further political meaning. Indeed, by choosing suicide, Goneril avoids imprisonment in her kingdom at the hands of the people she used to control. In opposition to Goneril's suicide, Regan's death belongs to a different ideological realm. Regan dies at the hand of her sister, guilty of loving the same wicked man. Nonetheless, Goneril's murder of her sister takes a different connotation if one considers that such murder prevents Regan's political downfall, as she dies before the bitter triumphing of her enemies. Thus, it can be argued that both

deaths are deliverances in extremis from a society that would have never accepted neither Goneril nor Regan as violent rulers because of their gender. Ultimately, what seems unbearable is the perpetrator's gender, rather than the act of violence in itself. Remarkably, when women reproduce patriarchal schemes of violence they are held in deep contempt by society. Portraying these distinctions between female violence and male violence on the Renaissance stage resonated with contemporary notions of female and male power, furthering the belief that women in power were unnatural and unnecessarily violent. These anxieties behind female violence shed some light on deep-rooted male fears that might be consistent even in today's world. Fortunately, over the span of four hundred years, gender stigmatisations and anxieties seem to have gradually subsided. Nonetheless, even nowadays when women are in power and use assertive patterns of behaviour, sometimes their demeanours do not receive the same degree of acceptance as the male-equivalent do.

6. *"Revenge should have no bounds*": violence as the realisation of revenge in Shakespeare's plays

Shakespeare's stage violence has a multitude of purposes. Surely, Shakespeare's political world was drenched in violence. Yet, both political and personal interests seem to fuse in the use of violence for retaliation. Revenge is indeed one of the most compelling tropes of Renaissance drama. For instance, revenge tragedies such as Kid's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*

and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* play on violent retaliation and ruthless displays of brutality. Revenge thereof is a special kind of violence that can be defined as a bloody response to "an initial act of violence" (Foakes, 2002, p. 16). Thus, there is an originating act of violence that demands retribution through a new cycle of violence. This bloody response to a violent act creates a circle of violence that can hardly be interrupted. Indeed, as "blood will have blood" (MAC, 3.4.120), so revenge calls for further revenge. Although every revenge differs in scope and means from the others, there is a common element to the trope which is a general state of political and moral disorder surrounding the characters. Disorder allows private retaliations to prevail over lawful justice. Indeed, violent revenge takes the place of a fair trial, as the revenger becomes judge and executioner of his private vengeance. Therefore, unrestrained revenge is symptomatic of "a society at war with itself" (Hallett & Hallett, 1980, p. 104), since such a society is unable to enforce effective law and order. Remarkably, Marcellus is not wrong when he comments that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (HAM, 1.7.90) as a murderous king and a vengeful ghost roam the castle of Elsinore, enhancing chaos and murderous thoughts.

For instance. revenge for Hamlet starts thereof in a very sinister way, as it is not a living being who gives him the mission of revenge, but rather a disconcerting ghost demanding to "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder"(HAM, 1.5.25). The questionable nature of the ghost and the nature of his demand, trigger Hamlet's fixation with revenge and violence. Gradually, his

obsession with violence infects every aspect of his life. Thus, it can be argued that the encounter with the ghost incenses Hamlet's latent potential for violence, and possibly murder. As a result, Hamlet seems to speak and think violently. Eventually, Hamlet's spoken violence becomes unbearable, making it impossible for the other characters to bear him. Indeed, not even Hamlet's mother can tolerate such violence, as she pleas:

O, speak to me no more;

These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears. (HAM, 3.4.87-88)

Thus, Hamlet seems to "speak daggers" (HAM, 3.2.386) from the very beginning, yet he seems hardly capable of harming people. Arguably, one can say that Hamlet's violence belongs to the realm of the mind, at least in the first part of the play. A dramatic change occurs as violence erupts in the impromptu killing of Polonius in Act 3 scene 4. From his point onward, Hamlet's perspective on violence is dramatically altered and irreversible. As a result, Hamlet takes upon himself the new role of "scourge and minister" (HAM, 3.4.173) of God. This new self-proclaimed position allows in him "an increasing acceptance of violence" (Foakes, 2002, p. 129) which sets this "new Hamlet" in contrast with the Hamlet of the first two acts of the play. Additionally, Polonius' murder is not only the turning point for Hamlet's violence, but it also has unforeseen ramifications.

For instance, Polonius' death generates a second revenger in the character of Laertes. Unlike Hamlet, Laertes is a person of action determined to avenge the death of his father and sister. Laertes believes Claudius' vicious lies, instead of

the ambiguous messages of Old Hamlet's ghost. Hence, the two major revengers of the play seem to be respectively spurred by the two royal brothers – one dead, the other alive – building up contrasting forces. Remarkably, Laertes' revenge recalls Claudius' assassination of Old Hamlet, as he too has concocted a lethal poison to kill the legitimate ruler of Denmark. On the contrary, Hamlet joins the duel with chivalric-like demeanour, knowing that physical violence is the only way to settle wrongs in Elsinore. Remarkably, Hamlet and Laertes seem to mirror the characteristics of their instigators as they prepare for their final duel. Nonetheless, as they face each other, both Laertes and Hamlet become equals, as both men are avenging their respective fathers while trying to obtain justice in a world that seems to provide none. Eventually, the mortal duel provides a tragic closure for both revengers. Their violence avenges each other's wrongs, even offering the possibility for mutual reconciliation. Finally, only when Laertes mortally wounds Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark kills Claudius with the poisoned dagger – a gesture not lacking dramatic irony – as the play reaches the climax of the revenge trope. Finally, revenge comes full circle as the three characters die, each avenged or punished by the one they wronged.

Additionally to Laertes and Hamlet's private retaliations, the play seems to introduce a third revenger in the character of Fortinbras. Although Fortinbras' revenge is never clearly stated in the play until Act 5, the threat posed by Fortinbras is a constant preoccupation for Denmark. Foreign invasion seems likely to happen and Denmark is on the verge of war. However, the entrance of

Fortinbras on the scene seems uncannily fortuitous. Indeed, the previous cycles of revenge conducted by Hamlet and Laertes unintentionally avenged Fortinbras as well. Consequently, as the ruling class of Denmark is dead, Fortinbras claims the throne as he rightens old grudges between his father and Hamlet's. As the Prince comments:

> For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune:
>
> I have some rights of memory in this kingdom,
>
> Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me. (HAM, 5.2.372-374)

Fortinbras does not use violence for his private retaliation, not because he is not capable of it, but rather because there are no more bodies to inflict violence upon. In conclusion, violent revenge provides little consolation to revengers, as they tend to die at the hands of other revengers. Thus, revenge becomes a vicious cycle of endless violence, impossible to break without littering the stage with bodies.

Although Hamlet is Shakespeare's greatest revenger, he is not the only one. For instance, *Macbeth* stages the rising of two different yet somehow similar revengers: Malcolm and Macduff. Interestingly, Malcolm and Macduff are looking for specular acts of revenge against the same man, indeed Macbeth. For instance, Malcolm is a son who wants to avenge his father's murder, while Macduff is a father who wants to avenge the murders of his children and wife. Both acts of revenge see the mixing of private and public interests, making it impossible to distinguish between political and private motives. Malcolm's revenge takes the form of heated resolution, as he sees revenge as the remedy

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"To cure this deadly grief" (MAC, 4.3.218). Malcolm's contempt for Macbeth's actions turns into the spurring energy for invasion and warfare, making Malcolm resolute in his demeanour. At the same time, Malcolm cannot entirely empathise with Macduff's grief, since he cannot grasp Macduff's sorrow. Unlike Malcolm's revenge, Macduff sadly realises that his private vengeance will never be fully achieved. He knows that the only way for him to be satisfied would be to kill Macbeth's heirs. Yet, this solution will be denied to him since Macbeth is childless, as Macduff miserably states: "He has no children." (MAC, 4.3.224). Thus, no revenge will ever satisfy Macduff as his grief will never be counterbalanced by Macbeth's.

Although revenge in *Macbeth* seems to be in the background, its violence can be perceived in the battle between Macduff and Macbeth. Even though Macduff will never be befittingly avenged, he will have at least the satisfaction of killing Macbeth. Thus, it can be argued that the impossibility of full revenge grants Macduff the right to kill Macbeth in Malcolm's stance. Revenge turns out to be the cure for Scotland as Macduff's revenge restored legitimacy. Similarly to *Hamlet*, violent revenge in *Macbeth* collaterally allows a new political beginning through violence, murder, and unchecked revenge.

Similarly to violence, revenge takes several shapes. For instance, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*'s depictions of revenge differ from *Julius Caesar*'s. In this specific case, impulsive revenge transforms into a cunning retaliation. For instance, Antony's reading of Caesar's testament and his speech to the citizens are precise

steps taken to produce chaos and incense the Romans. Antony cleverly uses the violence of the mob to mollify his grief, bestowing onto the Romans the task of vengeance. Antony's strategy works so well that the citizens appropriate Caesar's revenge, making his avenging the motivation behind their disruptive rage and violence. Indeed, they heatedly surge, screaming:

Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay!

Let not a traitor live! (JC,3.2.198-199).

Thus, revenge becomes a fury encompassing the city. Suddenly, "everyone seems to be boiling over potentially murderous aggression" (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 27) and the effects of murderous chaos mix with blind revenge. Nonetheless, in the chaos of violence, retaliation seems all-justifying and meaningless at the same time as an innocent poet loses his life. Cinna's death can be ultimately considered as one of Antony's mayhem collateral damages. Therefore, it is debatable whether the real culprit of Cinna's is the violent mob or its instigator since Antony relies on the violent mob although being aware of its rowdiness. Furthermore, Antony seems unbothered by the eventual casualties that his actions may create, as he states:

Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,

Take thou what course thou wilt! (JC, 3.2.251-252)

Thus, the brutal massacre of Ceasar and Antony's furious revenge precipitate Rome in spiralling violence and political mayhem. Finally, only the battle at Philippi seems to provide closure and mollification for Caesar's death.

Nonetheless, Cassius and Brutus' suicides make revenge partially unattainable, as they will not face justice.

All the same, death also brings peace to Brutus' reputation, as Antony delivers him from the infamy of having killed Ceasar out of "private griefs" (JC,3.2.206). Finally, Antony sets Brutus in contrast with the other conspirators, as he acknowledges:

> This was the noblest Roman of them all:
>
> All the conspirators save only he
>
> Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
>
> He only, in a general honest thought
>
> And common good to all, made one of them. (JC, 5.5.69-74)

Similarly to Macduff's incomplete revenge, Antony's partial vengeance allows Rome to overcome ruthless violence and return to momentarily political stability.

In conclusion, it can be argued that no matter the shape, revenge eventually leads to unsatisfactory closures and fallacious hopes for the future, since violence is bound to start all over again. Therefore, revenge relentlessly turns people from revengers into victims and vice versa, creating vicious cycles of violence which complicate the resolutions of the challenges presented in the plays. On the contrary, revenge and violence complicate the moral aspects of the characters, blurring the limits between "good" and "wicked" actions and characters.

Chapter Three: "To be, or not to be" a villain, the riddling questions posed by

Shakespeare's stage-ghosts as ambiguous villains

1. "*Art thou any thing?*": the ambiguous nature of the ghost as "*spirit of health*"

or "*goblin damned*" and its enduring influence on the early modern stage

In addition to tyrants and villains, the early modern stage seemed to be haunted

by ambiguous ghosts. The nature of such apparitions and their roles on stage

largely depended on a wide array of aspects such as religious beliefs, audience

response and theatrical purposes. To understand the multi-layered potential of

the theatrical ghost, it might be useful to consider the issue of Purgatory and the

religious discourse taking place in post-Reformation England regarding its

existence.

The concept of Purgatory was quite recent compared to the ideas of Heaven and

Hell, as "Purgatory did not exist before 1170 at the earliest" (Le Goff, 1981, p. 135).

The realm of Purgatory developed across centuries, offering a negotiation

between the eternal bliss of Heaven and the eternal damnation of Hell. Like

Heaven and Hell, Purgatory presented itself as "a realm in which time and space

[were] warped, the laws of physics [were] suspended, and the boundaries

between the living and the dead [were] blurred" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 91).

Devoted churchgoers believed that Purgatory was a temporary condition for

those souls who could still hope for redemption through penance, as their sins

were not heinous enough for Hell. Thus, Purgatory negotiated with the notion of

the afterlife and what could be expected from the "undiscover'd country"(HAM, 3.1.78). Presently, the Roman Church decided to profit from the idea of Purgatory and penance through the practice of indulgences. Such a lucrative enterprise would not have spread if there had not been the core belief that material help could soothe the dead's purgatorial pains as well as the anxieties of the living. Greenblatt traces back the reason for the pervasive success of indulgences, noting that:

> there had to be some reason to induce men and women to busy themselves and give their worldly goods to help the souls who were already imprisoned there or to abridge their own possible future prison terms. The reason was anxiety (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 20).

Thus, Purgatory functioned as a bridge between worlds, a sort of communication channel with the dead.

However, dramatic changes occurred in England as the consequences of the Reformation spread across the country. In an attempt to distance the new Church of England from the Roman Church many rituals and beliefs – including Purgatory – were discarded and virtually forgotten. The waning of Purgatory eventually "worked to sever lines of communication with the dead" (Woodbridge, 2003, p. 597), banning the possibility for the return of ghosts into the world of the living. The Reformation completely rolled out the need for a halfway location between Heaven and Hell, as the question of salvation or damnation of the soul was settled at the moment of death. Eventually, Protestants

envisioned Purgatory as "a poet's fable" (Tyndale, 1530, p. 143), an idle thought springing up from "nothing but man's imagination and phantasy" (Frith, 1831, p. 90). However, erasing Purgatory from people's minds proved to be a tough task. According to Purkiss, many scholars dealt with the spiritual issue of Purgatory without taking into consideration Renaissance folklore. Purkiss points out the tendency to "underestimate the survival of essentially Catholic ideas in the post-Reformation", as she argues that "angels and saints had not altogether vanished from imagination by the 1600s, even if they had gone from theology" (Purkiss, 2006, p. 138). Further along in her study on ghosts and Elizabethan folklore, Purkiss also counterargues what most scholars asserted in previous studies, observing that:

> most writers on ghosts, for example, take it for granted that the Reformation has an enormous impact on all representations of ghosts, but this ignores the way ghost stories are told and retold as entertainment or as negotiations of fears and desires that have little to do with theological controversies (Purkiss, 2006, pp. 141-142)

Old traditions melted with the new ones, and Purgatory became an unstable notion, complicating the nature of those spirits who allegedly returned from there. Eventually, people had to confront the idea of ghostly apparitions according to their own religious beliefs and personal superstition.

Elizabethans had two possible schools of thought regarding ghosts: the Catholic approach or the Protestant one. However different, both religions shared the

practice of the *discretio spiritum.* when dealing with apparitions. This practice can be defined as a thorough "cross-examination centred on six key questions: *Quis? Quid? Quare? Cui? Qualiter? Unde*?" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 103). The answers to such questions were meant to determine a ghost's nature as a good or evil spirit, and therefore explain the nature of its purpose.

Since Catholics believed in Purgatory, they also believed in ghosts returning from it as emissaries of God. Returning spirits followed the bidding of either God or the Virgin Mary, as their return served special purposes, such as the request for prayers and alms. Since good spirits were blessed with the grace of God, they showed Christian dispositions of mercy and charity. Furthermore, "they could not return to further any temporal end, much less any purpose violating God's commandments" (Prosser, 1967, p. 115). If an apparition violated such a condition then it was not a redeeming soul and it was most certainly not from Purgatory. In fact, it might have been an evil spirit from Hell. On the other hand, the Protestant religion was deeply suspicious when it came to ghosts. Since Purgatory did not exist for Protestants, ghosts could not be redeeming souls, but canny devils with evil purposes. An instance of Protestant disbelief is found in Archbishop Crammer's notes, as he stated that "it is not the soul of the dead that saith, I am such a man's soul, but the devil counterfeiteth the dead to deceive the living: for souls departed the body cannot walk here on earth" (Cranmer, 1846, pp. 43-44). Additionally, while Protestants tended to considered apparitions as something evil, they did not fully deny angelic intervention. However, they

understood the possibility of angelic apparitions as something extremely rare, since they felt like "the age of miracles had passed" (Prosser, 1967, p. 104).

Alongside the Protestant and Catholic stances on ghosts, Wilson in his book *What Happens in Hamlet* (1960) highlights a third approach: scepticism. According to Wilson, one of the major supporters of this school of thought was Reginald Scot, who in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) dedicated the appendix *Discourse upon Diuels and Spirits* to the enduring dilemma of the ghost's nature. To Scot's outrage, his contemporaries rejected purgatorial beliefs while still holding on to the idle narratives of ghosts and apparitions. Scot protested that "[people] still' thinke soules and spirits may come out of heauen or hell, and assume bodies, beleeuing manie absurd tales told by the schoolemen and Romish doctors" (Scot, 1584, p. 532). Scot's vision was not largely popular among his contemporaries who seemed to prefer either the Catholic or the Protestant stance. However, it might be argued that echoes of Scot's philosophy reached the stage in the figure of Horatio in *Hamlet*, whose attitude towards the ghost seems sceptical compared to the reactions of the other fellow characters on stage.

The ghost and its nature was not just a concern for theologians, as Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights conjured up ghosts to haunt both stages and narratives. Arguably, the effort of the Reformation of erasing ghosts was counterproductive for the dramatic production of the time, as "instead of doing away with ghosts, the abolition caused them to flourish, at the same time that they became theologically inexplicable, vaguer, more sinister, more demonic and

menacing" (Low, 1999, p. 455). Early Modern stage ghosts have their roots in the classical canon of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Seneca. The Senecan ghost encapsulated the revenge traits of Aeschylus' ghosts and the prologue-like role of Euripides, sublimating the role of the ghost to a bloodcurdling figure of heinous violence. Thus, Senecan ghosts became the dramatic embodiment of the human impulse to violent retaliation of unnatural wrongs, whose demands were "unambiguous, immoderate, and recognise no obligations of mercy and forgiveness" (Hallett & Hallett, 1980, p. 21). Such a violent and unforgiving legacy reached Renaissance playwrights, who took the Senecan ghost and made it a well-known figure on their stages, as "no figure was more familiar to the Elizabethan playgoer than that of the revenge-ghost whining forth his 'Vindicta' cries from underneath a white sheet" (Moorman, 1906, p. 93).

One of the most famous Senecan ghosts sauntering the early modern stage is Kyd's Andrugio from *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587). Andrugio's ghost shares a strong resemblance with the classical ghost of vengeance as he is "the embodiment of the anger that is released into the world at the moment a violent injustice is committed" (Hallett & Hallett, 1980, p. 29).After Kyd's classical stage-ghost, John Marston introduced a considerable innovation to the role of the Senecan stage-ghost. Marston in his *Antonio's Revenge* (1602) stages the vindictive ghost openly interacting with the revenger, allowing the audience to "witness the immediate and far-reaching change it effects in the revenger's mind" (Hallett & Hallett, 1980, p. 30). One might argue that Marston's innovation was vital to reach

a new level of awareness regarding the theatrical ghost. Thus, it can be disputed that such an improvement paved the way for the creation of the ultimate Renaissance ghost, namely Shakespeare's ghost of King Hamlet.

Senecan ghosts arouse from their resting place, be it classical or Catholic, following the orders of preternatural forces such as God or the Devil. However, instances of spirits' conjurations are present in Renaissance drama, finding one of the most famous stage conjurers in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1590). Faustus conjures up on stage the classical ghosts of Alexander the Great, King Darius and Helen of Troy. Such spirits, although coming from the classical tradition, do not come from a classical afterlife, as they seem to belong to Hell. The diabolical nature of Faustus' spectres is suggested by the presence of devils surrounding him, as well as through the satanic nature of Faustus' power. Unlike Marlowe in his *Doctor Faustus*, Shakespeare preferred to stage ghosts whose nature was not so well-defined and unambiguously hellish, leaving the nature of his ghosts to be assessed by his audience.

In addition to their cries for revenge, ghosts were easily identifiable on stage by their appearance. Firstly, they looked as "pale as the Vizard of [th]e ghost" (Lodge, 1596, p. 56), to reinforce the visual connection between ghosts and death. To achieve a pretended pallor, actors smeared their faces with either white powder or flour. Arguably, the role of the ghost became even more striking on stage not only because of its unmistakable theatrical purpose but also because of its visual diversity. Alongside pallor, ghosts fashioned white sheets or funeral

robes as costumes emphasizing their connection with the afterlife. However, the sheets and funeral robes were not just the ghost's insignia, they also functioned as "a cultural marker of absence, a reminder of loss" (Garber, 2010, p. 175). Thus, the ghosts' external appearance served as a primary means to express feelings of absence and grief, bolstering the idea that ghosts were "animated stories of death" (Purkiss, 2006, p. 143). Arguably, a fair portrayal of the early Renaissance ghost is rendered in the Induction of *A warning for Fair Women*'s through the words of Comedy, who utters:

Then, too, a filthy whining ghost,

Lapt in some foul sheet or a leather pilch,

Comes screaming like a pig half sticked,

And cries, 'Vindicta! Revenge, Revenge! (Induction, 48-51)

Finally, one of the most striking characteristics of the stage ghost is its liminality. The issue of the ghost's presence is problematic since its appearance on stage cannot be considered as fully corporeal. However, the ghost stands there oftentimes behaving like a living creature. The issue gets even more intricate as ghosts appeared on stage just to be visible to certain characters while remaining invisible to others. For instance, in *Hamlet* Act 3 Scene 4, the Ghost of Old Hamlet appears only to Hamlet while remaining invisible to his wife. Hamlet finishes his conversation with the Ghost before the incredulous eyes of Gertrude who has not seen nor heard anything. To his mother's aghast reaction, Hamlet utters:

Why, look you there! look, how it steals away!

My father, in his habit as he lived!

Look, where he goes, even now, out at the portal! (HAM, 3.4.132-134)

Hamlet's explanation regarding his invisible, at least to Gertrude, speaker is encountered with worried disbelief, as the Queen warns Hamlet that whatever he thinks he is seeing is just "the very coinage of [his] brain" (HAM,3.4.135). Possibly, what renders ghosts particularly eerie is their transgressive characteristic of defying the binary law of presence-absence, as it is "the liminal embodiment of the [g]host as neither full flesh nor merely a spirit, combining the physical potency of a lifelike body with the force of supernatural ghostliness, [what] increases its uncanny effect on its spectators (Outterson-Murphy, 2016, p. 259).

Eventually, all the theatrical characteristics of the classical and Renaissance canon as well as the religious and cultural elements of the theatrical ghost delineated the framework of references from which Shakespeare conjured his stage apparitions. Throughout his career, Shakespeare staged a variety of ghosts, different in purpose, complexity, and origins. Shakespeare juggled between religious censure and cultural folklore to create identifiable spirits haunting the borders of afterlife and reality, dramatically progressing from the nightmarish ghosts of *Richard III* and *Julius Ceasar* to the unsettling ghosts of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*.

1.2 "*Ghastly dreams and horrible sights*": instances of haunted dreams and evil spirits in *Richard III* and *Julius Ceasar*

Shakespeare's *Richard III* counts the largest number of ghosts staged by Shakespeare in a single play. Indeed, an eerie parade of eleven ghosts visits both Richard III and Richmond on the eve of the battle of Bosworth. Although impressive, the night before the decisive battle is not the only instance in the play where ghosts are conjured up on stage. Already in Act 1, the uncanny apparitions of the Duke of Warwick and King Henry enter the narrative through the recounting of Clarence's nightmare, as the Duke tells his keeper in the Tower:

> the first that there did greet my stranger soul,
>
> Was my great father-in-law, renowned Warwick;
>
> […] then came wandering by
>
> A shadow like an angel, with bright hair
>
> Dabbled in blood; and he squeak'd out aloud (R3, 1.4.48-52)

Clarence's uncanny dream-like ghosts follow the conventional representation of Senecan ghosts as they are baleful and gory. These dream-like ghosts, although classical in their outlines, do not belong to the classical afterlife. Clarence describes the location of his nightmare as a "kingdom of perpetual night" (1.4.46) and its inhabitants as " a legion of foul fiends" (1.4.58) creating an image of an afterlife much closer to the Christian idea of Hell, rather than any classical envisioning of the afterlife. It can be argued that Clarence's ghosts do not constitute an innovation in terms of performance, considering that they are not

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even on stage but just conjured up through narration. However, Clarence's dream shares some similarities with Gloucester's final nightmare, as Richard will be confronted with vengeful dream-like ghosts too.

Similarly to Clarence, ghosts come to Gloucester in his dreams, possibly foreshadowing his day of reckoning. Modern psychology tends to define dreams as windows into men's subconscious, considering nightmares as symptoms of a troubled mind. Arguably, such psychological reading could befit Richard, as he finally seems to acknowledge his crimes. However, Greenblatt provides a political interpretation of Richard's nightmare, as he notes that dreams are not only linked to psychology but also to power. Since power has the "ability to provoke nightmares" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 168), it can be argued that whoever detains power can cast ghastly images in the minds of others. Gloucester exemplifies this dual link between power and nightmares throughout the play, as his sovereignty turns his subjects' lives into nightmares. However, as soon as power starts to slip through his fingers, the ability to cast nightmares passes into the hands of the dead. Ultimately, Richard's victims re-entering the stage as Senecan ghosts might be considered as the utmost instance of Richard's collapsing power both over his subjects as well as on his mind, as he seems to fall apart under the ghosts' malevolent threats.

Unlike Clarence's ghosts, Richard's apparitions walk on stage, breaking the limits of narrative and becoming characters endowed with an uncanny message. The nature of the message does not figure ghosts as "false surmises or

colourful folk beliefs but as something else, something altogether more ominous (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 164) which can "look into the seeds of time"(MAC, 1.3.58). Ghosts become uncanny figures because of their atemporality, as they belong to the past, haunt the present while seeming to know the future and to make prophecies out of it. The uncanniness of ghosts' messages lies in their "reality claim" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 164) since these prophecies from the afterlife seem to fulfil themselves while crystallising themselves as history for the audience. Eventually, Richard's ghosts turned out to be the "principal emblems of the intertwining of psychological terror, Machiavellian politics, and metaphysics" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 179). One might further suggest that Richard's ghosts also function as mirrors projecting Richard's subconscious, while simultaneously showing the past and the future to Shakespeare's audience.

Alongside their function as theatrical mirrors, ghosts also function as "a symptom of the upset in the state" (Garrison, 2018, p. 71) of politics. In Shakespeare's histories and tragedies, ghosts saunter the stage when legitimacy is toppled and the state of affairs is in shambles. In *Julius Ceasar*, ghastly visions of death haunt Rome even before Caesar's assassination, as Calpurnia laments that "graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead" (2.2.18) and "ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets"(2.2.24). Arguably, uncanny instances of death not only hint at the current turmoil in Rome but also anticipate the problematic return of Ceasar who is later yielded up from his grave. After Caesar's assassination, political turmoil climaxes to the point that a new

apparition transgresses the borders of the afterlife in the guise of Ceasar himself. So far, the play seems to corroborate Derrida's idea that "the more the period is in crisis, the more it is "out of joint" then the more one has to convoke the old" (Derrida, 2006, p. 136).

Similarly to the ghosts of Gloucester, Caesar's ghost arrives in the middle of the night, interrupting Brutus' rest. As soon as Brutus acknowledges the preternatural presence of the ghost, he decides not to flee from it, rather he questions the ghost as follows:

Art thou any thing?

Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil,

That makest my blood cold and my hair to stare?

Speak to me what thou art (JC, 4.3.276-279)

Brutus' questioning of the Ghost represents a moment of departure from previous ghosts' visitations. Arguably, Brutus starts a new tendency that entails anxious curiosity, as "though the return of a dead person arouses terror, the collective impulse is not to flee from and not even simply to ward off the weird apparition, but rather to approach and find out what it is and what it wants" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 108). One might even consider Brutus' queries as Shakespeare's blueprint for Hamlet's question to King Hamlet's ghost "Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd" (HAM, 1.4.40)

Caesar's ghost makes the channel of communication between the living and the dead bilateral, as he ominously responds to Brutus' questioning.

However, the ghost's answer is ambiguous, as he introduces itself as "Thy evil spirit, Brutus"(4.3.280). Caesar's statement problematises the notion of its origin and purpose on stage as both Brutus and the audience wonder if the ghost might be a real spirit or a "weakness of the eyes". However, the ghost's presence seems to be confirmed by the unconscious screams of the other Romans sleeping in the tent, though they heard or saw nothing. According to Greenblatt, Shakespeare's choice of making the ghost visible only to Brutus "reinforces the odd sense not only that this haunting is for Brutus alone but also that it was somehow a part of him, his evil spirit" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 183). This identification might further be equated to "a form of possession" (Purkiss, 2006, p. 145) which confuses the identities on stage, as one is left to wonder whether the phantom is Caesar's ghost or Brutus' evil spirit. Scholars have tried to pin down the nature of the ghost, attributing to it a historical component, making it "the ghost of Ancient Rome" (Garber, 2010, p. 75) or the embodiment of the "restless spirit of this world" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 185). Such attributions reinforce the idea that Caesar's ghost is primarily the ethereal incarnation of a historical legacy, impossible to fully exorcise from the present or the future as "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (Marx, 1979, p. 103).

Similarly to Gloucester's ghosts, Caesar's spectre has an ominous message to deliver, as he repeats twice to Brutus "Thou shalt see me at Philippi"(JC, 4.3.297). Once again, ghosts bring on stage another "necromantic prophecy" (Purkiss, 2006, p. 144), emphasising the uncanny sense of imminent death in their words.

Indeed, ghosts appear when death is approaching, as both Richard and Brutus shortly die after their respective ghosts' visitations. Interestingly, the enduring link between ghosts and the proximity of death will be a recurring theme in later Shakespeare's production involving ghosts, such as either *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*.

Together with their metaphysical component, ghosts have proven to be valuable political emblems in tragedies and histories, embodying both history and politics. Thus, political power seems to be haunted by the ghosts of those who yielded it before, as their ghosts loom over posterity with an ambiguous stance. In this regard, Shakespeare's ghost is "not usually a remorseful one worrying over his sinful past, but is rather a vengeful, regal spirit, returned from the afterlife to castigate posterity" (Franssen, 2009, p. 7). The political weight of the ghost is particularly relevant for sovereigns and tyrants, as Shakespeare's works staged. It can be therefore argued that political power hardly dies with the person who used to hold it. Especially when power is unjustly stolen, ghosts seem to appear on stage as "deposed kings do not depart but rather linger for the next king" (Garrison, 2018, p. 91). Eventually, political ghosts become reminders of the inevitable reckoning day or they simply seat heavily on the chests of their murderers, joggling memory, and guilt.

Ghosts riddle their audience with a wide array of questions regarding their nature, purpose, and origin without providing any clear answer. Furthermore, the liminality of Shakespeare's ghosts survives up to today, as modern audiences and scholars struggle to define apparitions as much as the early modern

audiences used to. Finally, Shakespeare's ghosts seem to confirm the Derridean assumption that "neither the dead as such nor the living as such have ever put anyone in the ground" (Derrida, 2006, p. 143) as death and its transgression become parts of the vital tissue of theatre.

2. "*A dagger of the mind*": spectral appearances of haunted minds in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*

As Shakespeare's career progressed, so did his stage ghosts. Progressively more detailed and humanized than their predecessors, Shakespeare's ghosts were characterised by deeper unfathomable liminality and unstable definitions of power. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* revolves around the notions of uncrossable limits that are crossed, questions "that palter with us in a double sense" (MAC, 5.8.20), and problematic preternatural creatures. The tragedy starts with the eerie opening of three witches, representing the supernatural forces roaming in Scotland. To define the witches' nature, either human or preternatural, is not an easy task. One might even wonder if they are even there, to begin with.

Similarly to ghosts, the witches show some otherworldly features that puzzle Banquo, as well as the audience. The unnaturalness of their countenance is firstly suggested by his remarks which already identify them as callous beings. Furthermore, Banquo and Macbeth's reaction to the witches recalls Brutus's reaction to Caesar's ghost, as in both plays preternatural apparitions are

questioned by mortals. Although mystified, Banquo interrogates the apparitions with mixed caution and curiosity, as he utters:

> What are these
>
> So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
>
> That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
>
> And yet are on't? (MAC, 1.3.39-41)

The witches escape definition while showing some degrees of ghostly liminality, as they walk the earth yet they do not seem alive. Banquo's investigation continues as he further asks these creatures "Live you?/or are you augh that man may question?" (1.3.42-43). However, he receives no answer as they remain uncannily silent. Then, Macbeth turns to question them. He compels them to speak, questioning them once again about their nature, as he demands "Speak, if you can: what are you?"(1.3.37). In Macbeth's question, one might hear the echo of Brutus' interrogation "Speak to me what thou art" (JC, 4.3.278). Arguably, the similarity of their questions not only strengthens a set of resemblances between Brutus and Macbeth, but also creates an uncanny bond between ghosts and witches. However, *Macbeth*'s witches never answer the questions of either Banquo or Macbeth, leaving the matter of their nature even more uncertain than Caesar's identification with Brutus' evil spirit.

The identity of the witches as preternatural spirits is further complicated by their countenance, as they behave like apparitions. In their salutation to Macbeth, the first witch refers to him as Thane of Cawdor, which is Macbeth's

long-held title. Then, the second one calls him Thane of Glamis which is Macbeth's current title (although he does not know it yet). Lastly, the third witch addresses him as "Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter" (1.3.50), hinting at his future. Like the ghosts in *Richard III* and *Julius Ceasar*, *Macbeth'*s witches seem to know the past, the present and the future, while casting accursed prophecies on mortal souls. Additionally, just as uncannily as other ghosts' prophecies, the witches' predictions always come true.

The most compelling semblances that the witches share with ghosts are their abilities to vanish "through the fog and filthy air"(1.1.10) and to make themselves partially visible. As they deliver their prophecies, they seem to vanish as "what seem'd corporal melted/As breath into the wind" (1.3.82-83). Alongside their disappearing in the air, the Weird Sisters seem to be visible only to Banquo and Macbeth, as the other characters entering on stage never refer to them. Further along in the play, Macbeth seeks additional assurance of their presence by asking Lennox whether he saw the witches too, as he asks him "Saw you the weird sisters?"(4.1.134). Lennox's negation is not enough for paranoid Macbeth, who questions him for a second time "Came they not by you?" (4.1.136). Once again, Lennox responds that he did not see or hear anything. Lennox's inability to either see or hear the witches is similar to other characters' obliviousness of ghosts. Possibly, ghosts do not disclose their presence to those who have no reason to be dealing with them – namely Lennox, the Romans in Brutus' tent or Richard's attendants – as they are intended for specific characters and have individual

purposes. One cannot fully exclude the possibility that the Weird Sisters are spirits haunting both the minds of Banquo and Macbeth. Their nature is impossible fully to pin down as "it is in fact extremely difficult to specify what, if anything, they do or even what, if anything, they are" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 192). Eventually, all the characteristics that make the witches eerie and terrifying are similar to ghosts' characteristics, to the point where distinctions between witches and ghosts might get blurred.

Macbeth's witches are not the only characters dealing with spectrality. Lady Macbeth's invocation of spirits "that tend on mortal thoughts" (MAC 1.5.40-41) poses several questions on the nature of such spectres. One might wonder if the spirits she is invoking are real entities from Hell, "some physical essence deep inside of her, or her dark thought" (Garrison, 2018, p. 92). Once again, ghosts, whether conjured up from Hell or a sick mind, seem to be present and absent at the same time. The Lady's description of the spirits as "sightless substances"(1.5.49) anticipates the sightlessness of Banquo's ghost as well as her sightless sleepwalking trances, creating an array of resemblances between ghosts and ghost-like figures. Indeed, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking makes her ghost-like, since she is sightless, pale and on the brink of death. Her noctambulism puts her "physically in exactly the condition of present absence, marginal stance, and legible erasure" (Garber, 2010, p. 35) expected in ghosts. Interestingly, following her invocation, spirits seem to haunt both Lady Macbeth and her husband. For instance, Macbeth is haunted by "horrible imaginings" (1.3.140) which conjure up

ghost-like voices and objects. According to Moorman, Macbeth's ability to see and hear ghosts lies in his "peculiar constitution of the ghost-seer's mind" (Moorman, 1906, p. 195). Macbeth's ghost-seer mind seems to conjure up not only the ghostly dagger but also the menacing voices on the night of Duncan's murder, as he tells his wife:

> Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!
>
> Macbeth does murder sleep (2.2.22-23)

Remarkably, Lady Macbeth's seems to replicate her husband's ability to see ghostly objects. In her trances, she continuously rubs her hands, dirty with ghostly stains of blood uttering "out, damned spot! out, I say!" (5.1.35) to clean hands. One might argue that the Macbeths' ghosts do not spring from Hell, rather they arise from guilty consciences and sick minds. However, it can be further argued that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's Hell do not reside in the afterlife, but rather in their minds. Indeed, they are already in Hell, as hinted by the Porter. If one is to credit the words of the drunk gatekeeper, identifying himself as the porter of Hell's gate, then it follows that Macbeth's castle is Hell and those who are inside are already the ghosts of themselves.

Among all of the ghostly instances, Banquo's ghost is undoubtedly the most striking. Shakespeare stages Banquo's ghost honouring the Scottish folkloristic belief that the untimely dead returned as ghosts to "keep appointments made when living" (Purkiss, 2006, p. 144) as well as the wide-spread notion that "murdered spirits return[ed] to haunt and destroy their

murderers" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 191). The chieftain's ghost embodies all these notions while remaining unsettlingly silent. Banquo's return triggers a psychotic reaction in Macbeth who is reminded of what he did to seat on the throne, as well as that ultimately it will be Banquo's legacy to inherit it. Thus, Banquo's role in the banquet scene (Act 3, Scene 4) changes from an absent guest to a ghostly-present host, unseating the usurper from his chair. The ghost's decision to sit in Macbeth's throne reinforces the witches' prediction, as well as Macbeth's political fears. On the other hand, Banquo's ghost also serves the psychological purpose of reminding Macbeth of the cost of his crimes. The apparition increases Macbeth's sense of guilt as he tries to blame someone else for it, demanding "Which of you have done this?" taking Banquo's presence to be a distasteful joke. However, the answer to his question lies in himself, as he did this to Banquo and arguably to himself. Macbeth's psychotic mind denies Banquo the label of ghost, as he describes the apparition as a "horrible shadow!"(3.4.103) and an "unreal mockery"(3.4.104). Once more, Macbeth's words seem to echo Brutus' definition of Caesar's ghost as "the weakness of mine eyes" (JC, 4.3.274). Even though Brutus and Macbeth are both visited by ghosts, possibly embodying their flawed consciences, their reactions are opposite. Macbeth seems eager to dispel the apparition, as he tries to ban the ghost through angry words and fake bravado. Conversely, Brutus seems to accept the ghost's apparition, as he concedes "Why, I will see thee at Philippi, then" (JC, 4.3.284). Conceivably, if the ghost truly embodies fate and destiny, Macbeth and Brutus embody the opposite stances of

men when faced with the ineluctability of destiny. Macbeth is not alone in his reaction to the ghost. Confused by his countenance, the other chieftains understand that something is not right with Macbeth. Seeing Macbeth's frenzies, Ross observes "Gentlemen, rise: his highness is not well" (3.4.49). Ross's deduction anticipates Gertrude's rational response to Hamlet's vision of the Ghost. Then, one might argue that both Queen Gertrude and Ross seem to believe that only a sick mind can conjure up ghosts, as these visions are "the very coinage of the brain".

In opposition to the other chieftains who believe that Macbeth is having a fit, Lady Macbeth readily understands the situation for what it is. The Lady realizes that his husband is tormented by a "horrible shadow", yet the Lady confuses its identity. Since she is ignorant of Banquo' murder, then "she could only conclude that Macbeth believes that the ghost of Duncan" haunts him (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 190). Lady Macbeth reacts to the Banquet ghost by falling back on the same psychologically aggressive patterns, dismissing Macbeth's fear by blaming it on his lack of sleep and faltering manliness. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that Lady Macbeth's words betray her fright of ghostly visions. Interestingly, she exits the scene just to re-enter in Act 5 as a sleepwalking shadow, scared of the dark and haunted by ghostly memories. Finally, her fear seemed to crystalize as she too is haunted by spectral visions. Ultimately, Banquo's ghost embodies the utmost liminality of ghosts, as the apparition shifts identities from Banquo to Duncan, and finally to nothing at all. Similarly to other

ghosts, Banquo's spectre becomes unbearable as it "erases the limit which exists between two states, neither alive nor dead; passing through, the dead man returns in the manner of the Repressed" (Cixous, 1976, p. 543). Indeed, what the Macbeths try to dismiss as "a woman's story at a winter's fire/Authorized by her grandam"(3.4.62-63) does not stay repressed, rather it comes back to haunt them.

As the play draws to a closure, Macbeth faces the ghost of Banquo a second time. Conjured by the witches, the ghost shows Macbeth the future lineage of kings descending from his heirs. This second apparition is deeply political, although its nature is debatable. Banquo's second apparition might be a demon ascending from Hell since it is conjured up by the Weird Sisters. Even the ghost's message is to be interpreted with caution since the apparition follows the orders of three "juggling fiends" (5.8.19). Therefore, it can be argued that all Banquo's apparitions serve as psychological, political, and prophetical reminders. Nevertheless, their natures remain perversely vague and unsettling.

Ghosts do not threaten to haunt only the wicked characters in *Macbeth*. As Macduff prepares to fight Macbeth, he uncannily mentions the unspoken threat of his dead family, as he tells Macbeth:

If thou be'st slain and with no stroke of mine,

My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still (5.7.16-17)

Ghosts return as agents of retribution, bestowing on the living the task of revenge. Macduff's revenge might be considered as an attempt to redeem himself since he fled from Scotland, leaving his family to the tyrannical violence of

Macbeth. It follows that only deeds of violence – whether forced by ghosts or mortals - can repay previous misgivings. Moreover, failure in administering retribution might cause one to be haunted by disquieting ghosts.

Eventually, the repeated apparitions of ghosts affect the characters they haunt, turning them into ghost-like figures. In the final act of the play, Macbeth feels less like a man and more like the ghost of what he used to be. In his despair, Macbeth appears to lose grip on himself and reality as if "the unseeing eyes of [Banquo's] ghost had troubled the living man' sense of himself as human" (Garrison, 2018, p. 93). Macbeth's nihilism climaxes as he reaches the ultimate conclusion that "life's but a walking shadow"(5.5.23). Thus, he is a damned soul living in Hell whose existence has ghostly contours. Macbeth's final nihilistic view on life and his slow transformation into the ghost of himself equate him to another ghost-like man, namely King Lear.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* does not stage ghosts as evidently as other Shakespearean works. However, instances of ghostliness and the afterlife can be found throughout the play. Famous for its gloomy nihilism, *King Lear* seems to be staged in an otherworldly setting. Shakespeare endows his characters with a strained condition, turning their existence "into a purgatory in which demonic figures with names like Goneril, Regan, Edmond, and Cornwall are given leave to torment flawed souls" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 186). Alongside demonic figures, the purgatorial realm of *King Lear* is inhabited by living characters mistaken for ghosts. For instance, Lear and his scant retinue – that is Kent and the Fool – find

refuge in a hovel to weather out the storm raging on the heath. As they enter, they seem to stumble upon the first apparent ghost hiding inside the shack, as the Fool warns:

Come not in here, nuncle, here's a spirit

Help me, help me! (3.4.39-40)

Kent takes upon himself the task of questioning this ambiguous presence, as he demands "Who's there?"(3.4.41). Interestingly, Kent's demand creates a parallel with *Hamlet's* opening question "Who's there?" (HAM, 1.1.1) as both plays portray the anxiety of what might haunt the dark. Conversely from *Hamlet*, King Lear's spirit turns out just to be Edgard, under the alias of Poor Tom, feigning to be a madman. *King Lear* and *Hamlet* resonate with each other not only for the presence of ghosts, but also for their portrayal of feigned madness.

Like Edgar, Cordelia gets mistaken for a ghost. After being brought to the French camp, Lear awakes in the presence of his youngest daughter. Seeing her father in a state of senile confusion, Cordelia candidly asks "Sir, do you know me?"(4.7.48). Lear's response to Cordelia does not grant any sign of recognition. Instead, Lear's words are dramatically uncanny, as he states, "You are a spirit, I know: when did you die?" (4.7.49-50). Lear's grim observation not only anticipates Cordelia's premature demise, but also creates an enduring connection between Cordelia and ghostliness. Cordelia's ghostliness also bears a further layer of complexity as:

the truth is not only that Cordelia is a spirit, if by this one means an autonomous living being (something that her overbearing, narcissistic father had found difficult to grasp), but also that she has already in some sense been destroyed and made into a ghost by Lear himself (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 186).

Thus, Lear seems to yield the power of making ghosts out of people, turning himself into a ghost as well. In Act 4 Scene 7, Lear's ghostliness is signalled by his self-identification as someone who has already died and is now facing purgatorial penitence, as he remarks:

You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave:

Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound

Upon a wheel of fire (4.7.45-47).

Lear's utterance does not only suggest that he considers himself as someone already belonging to the afterlife, but it also hints at Lear's idea of punishment. Lear's mention of the "wheel of fire" might be considered as a cross-reference to the classical myth of Ixion, punished for being ungrateful towards both gods and humans. According to Garrison, this cross-reference gives the audience a glimpse into Lear's conscience, as in choosing Ixion's punishment he "deems his mistake to be ingratitude" (Garrison, 2018, p. 19). As the play draws to a close, Lear seems to see reason and to reckon his mistakes as a father as well as a monarch. However, such a tenuous recognition might have come too late to the old king, as he already resembles a ghost from the afterlife.

Lear reaches full ghostliness at the moment of death. The pain of Cordelia's demise, partly caused by his irrational behaviour, and the loss of hope become unbearable to Lear who renders his soul on stage. As Edgard tries to hopelessly revive him, Kent pleads:

> Vex not his ghost: O, let him pass! he hates him much
>
> That would upon the rack of this tough world
>
> Stretch him out longer. (5.3.313-15)

Arguably, death comes to Lear as deliverance from the purgatorial nature of his existence. In death, Lear is ultimately free to become the ghost he identified with in Act 4. Although such a vision might provide a glimpse of hope in the landscape of *King Lear*, the play closes on the king's tragic realisation that there will be no return from the dead. Lear envisions Cordelia's loss is definitive, he wails "Thou'lt come no more/Never, never, never, never, never!" (5.3.306-7). Arguably, as Cordelia's death is final and no ghost in her shape will ever return, Lear becomes a ghost and joins her in the journey to "the undiscover'd country from whose bourn/No traveller returns" (HAM, 3.1.78-79). Finally, it can be concluded that both Macbeth's ghosts and King Lear's ghosts share the characteristic of being conjured up by troubled minds and guilty consciences. Ghosts transform into eerie representatives of the inescapability of guilt, as eventually every crime is punished by spectral hauntings being either psychotic or supernatural.

Although they share some resemblances, *King Lear* and *Hamlet* are opposed in their notions of mourning and mourners. *King Lear* stages a father

dying after losing his daughter, while *Hamlet* stages a son dying in an attempt to revenge his father's death. However different, these two tragedies seem to be connected by the same lingering presence of ghosts and death, as well as by a sense of undying hopelessness.

3. "*Who's there*": King Hamlet's ghost and the riddling nature of its questions in *Hamlet*

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* features the uttermost spectacular ghost of the Early Modern period. Alongside its theatrical potential, Old Hamlet's ghost unleashes an unparalleled sense of uncertainty and doubt. Such feelings reverberate in the numerous questions asked by the characters on stage, as the play seems to be staged on the liminal potential of unanswered questions. The first question which opens the play is Bernardo's "Who's there?" (1.1.1), which already borders on anxiety and fear of who – or worse what – might come. Ready to mount the guard to Elsinore's Castle, Bernardo's question already betrays a sense of jittery uncertainty. As the play is set at night, the eerie setting kindles superstitions and a sublime-like sense of uneasiness. Arguably, one can feel the dreadful presence of the dark and its terrors, as there seems to be something lingering in the air making mortals "sick at heart"(1.1.7). As another set of characters – namely Marcellus and Horatio – enter the stage, *Hamlet*'s opening question is uncannily repeated. For a second time, the characters seem to be questioning each other's identities in an attempt to expel the fear of the unknown from their minds. The

reason for such anxiety is interestingly revealed in another question, as Horatio asks "What, has this thing appear'd again tonight?" (1.1.20). Through Horatio's question, one learns that there is something – not someone – unsettling the guards' morale. One might argue that a wilful degree of vagueness is applied to this "thing" that haunts Elsinore's battlement at night, possibly anticipating the ghost's ambiguous nature. Additionally, Horatio's question reveals that the thing has appeared more than once, creating an intense feeling of uncanny haunting. So far, the former king of Denmark's ghost has not appeared, yet he is already haunting the plot and the stage.

Throughout Act 1 Scene 1, *Hamlet* follows the structure of an eerie fireside tale, as "three seated figures are absorbed by a ghost story" (Belsey, 2010, p. 4) on a winter night. Barnardo unfolds the narrative, as his role shifts from guard to storyteller. As the story progresses, the ghost walks on stage for the first time. It can be argued that when the ghost appears on stage, it becomes the equivocal agent of tragedy. As recounted by Bernardo, the ghost shares an uncanny resemblance with "the king that's dead" (1.1.40). Such a depiction of a ghost represents a point of departure from previous stage ghosts. Instead of the traditional insignia of mourning clothes, King Hamlet's ghost fashions garments belonging to the world of the living. Furthermore, Horatio remarks that the ghost frowns and marches like the former king, adding a mortal touch to an undead thing. Considering Horatio's description and the guards' tales, King Hamlet's ghost seems dramatically unplaceable within both the world of the living and the

dead, making it even harder to label the ghost's intentions. Eventually, King

Hamlet's ghost reaches an unmatched level of ghostly liminality, as "no ghost is

more humanly real than the ghost in *Hamlet* yet no ghost is less of this world"

(Hallett & Hallett, 1980, p. 185).

Like other ghosts, King Hamlet's ghost seems reticent to speak with

mortals. Horatio is the first to question the ghost's nature and his words echo

previous ghosts' interrogations, as he demands:

What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,

Together with that fair and warlike form

In which the majesty of buried Denmark

Did sometimes march? by heaven I charge thee, speak! (1.1.45-48)

No answer comes from the ghost, which steals away apparently offended.

Although silent at first, the ghost affects the plot and its characters in ambiguous

ways. Ever since the encounter with the ghost, Horatio undergoes a remarkable

attitude shift. As argued by Low, Horatio "has heard tales about ghosts, and does

in part believe them – he must believe them on the pragmatic evidence of his own

eyes" (Low, 1999, p. 455). Horatio's sceptical attitude seems to deny the

objectiveness of the ghost, as he deems it a fantasy. However, as the ghost walks

on stage, Horatio has to re-assess his beliefs, as he concedes "[the ghost] harrows

me with fear and wonder" (1.1.53). Alongside the ability to fill Horatio with "fear

and wonder", King Hamlet's ghost appears capable of infecting others with its

ghostliness. The apparition doubly affects Horatio, since he is both

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psychologically and physically shaken, as Barnardo remarks, "you tremble and look pale" (1.1.52). Horatio's emaciated face also carries a further layer of significance, as his pallor

> not only suggests his emotional response of fear but, more importantly, replicates the Ghost standing before him on the stage, as if suggesting that ghostliness is somehow physically catching (Outterson-Murphy, 2016, p. 258).

Arguably, King Hamlet's ghost holds onto the same contagiously ghostliness as other Shakespearean ghosts, either turning the living into ghosts or making mortals look like ghosts. Conversely to other ghosts, King Hamlet's ghost has undisputed objectiveness and its spectrality is fully acknowledged. King Hamlet's ghost differs from Shakespeare's earlier ghosts as

> he is a very real spirit. Ceasar at Philippi may be a student's dream; Banquo at the feast may be a false creation proceeding from Macbeth's heat-oppressed brain; but there can be no doubt, about the objectivity of the spectre of King Hamlet (Wilson, 1951, p. 52)

When on stage, *Hamlet*'s ghost shows itself to a selected array of characters who do not doubt its existence. Indeed, it is not its existence to be doubted, but rather its nature. Conversely from the previous plays, every character who meets the ghost believes in its objectiveness, striking a clear difference from characters such as Brutus or Richard III who believed their spectres to be either hallucinations or nightmares.

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From its first apparition, the ghost seems to release pent-up anxieties and repressed fears from the characters, and possibly the audience. One might argue that this first apparition already impacts both narrative and psychological structures both on stage and in the audience. As the ghost enters a second time, its purpose shifts to a different level. Introduced by Horatio's remark, "this bodes some strange eruption to our state"(1.1.68), as the second apparition carries a political meaning. Political power is hinted at and remarked on through its appearance, as the ghost is dressed "in armour, in his public capacity as king and protector of the state, and he is so understood" (Joseph, 1961, p. 501) while sauntering in a martial stalk. Its political function seems to find further evidence as the ghost's entrance gives way to Marcellus and Horatio's political discussion on Denmark political situation. Marcellus wonders about the military preparations in Denmark, while Horatio launches in a monologue (1.1.79-106) regarding Old Hamlet's reign and the war he has brought onto his nation. Horatio's monologue seems to suggest that ghosts are not the only menace, as their country is risking invasion from Fortinbras. Thus, the second entrance of the ghost seems to expose the same problematic state of affairs as other Shakespearean ghosts did in previous plays. King Hamlet's ghost appears as Denmark is on the brink of destruction not only because of regicide and incest but also because of precedent political wrongs. Arguably, Shakespeare presents his ghosts to the audience as markers for chaos, making politics the connecting trait among all of them.

Hamlet's political ghost shares a bond with another political ghost – namely, Caesar's ghost. Horatio recalls that Rome endured ghostly visitations when turmoil roamed the streets, as he comments:

> In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
>
> A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
>
> The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
>
> Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets (1.1.112-115)

Alongside their chaos-marker role, one might argue that political ghosts embody problematic transitions of power. As the new political class seems to be ineffectual or illegitimate, ghosts return with ambiguous motivations. Commonly, ghosts' interventions complicate the scenario, causing bloodshed and further instability. Therefore, as their influence results in death and chaos, one might consider ghosts to be unforeseen villains, unleashed by ineffectual politics. *Hamlet* conceptualises this vision, as neither Claudius nor Hamlet provide a valuable political substitute for Old King Hamlet. The ghost's return sets in motion several political situations, bordering on personal revenge and political retaliation that eventually culminate with the deaths of both Hamlet and Claudius. Such a reading of the ghost's action blames a supernatural element, way out of human control. However, it can be also observed that bloodshed and violence are common attributes of politics even without supernatural factors at play. Eventually, the ghost's involvement in the political scene of Denmark

constitutes another ambiguous element in its characterisation, complicating its role and both the characters' and the audience's reaction to it.

Undoubtedly, Hamlet's reaction to the ghost is key to the play. Hamlet first learns about the ghost through Horatio's narration. Remarkably, Horatio has taken up Barnardo's role of storyteller, as he informs Hamlet of the uncanny visitations of the ghost. In learning about the ghost, Hamlet shows his naturally inquisitive disposition, as he questions Horatio on the ghost's features and countenance. Horatio's story introduces another significant detail regarding Old Hamlet. Horatio remarks that the ghost's countenance looks "more in sorrow than in anger" (1.2.230). This added information regarding the ghost enforces the Catholic idea of a soul returning from Purgatory. However, this Catholic stance might be put into question as a purgatorial soul would not appear in armour in the dead of the night. The ghost's timing is uncanny, as it appears at night, which is the time of the day linked with the forces of darkness rather than God's grace. Hamlet resolves to meet the ghost, even if he is not sure about its nature. At first, Hamlet seems to consider the possibility that the apparition might have some sinister nature, as he states, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!"(1.4.39). Still, Hamlet continues his interrogation of the ghost:

Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damn'd,

Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,

Be thy intents wicked or charitable,

Thou comest in such a questionable shape (1.4.40-43)

Hamlet voices the questions haunting the audience's minds: what this ghost is, where it comes from and most importantly what it wants. The ghost provide no answers, making ghastly ambiguity a theatrical capital. The issue of the ghost's nature is a dramaturgical device that has at its heart the "problems of Elizabethan spiritualism" (Wilson, 1951, p. 60), shifting the ghost's nature between Protestant and Catholic beliefs. King Hamlet's ghost's "questionable shape"(1.1.43) makes its demands questionable, as one is left to choose whether the ghost is either a goblin from Hell or an angel from Heaven.

Furthermore, the ghost becomes the utmost representative of death. Death covers a key role in *Hamlet*, as its characters encounter it or its emissary throughout the play. The ghost generates a discourse both on mourning and mortality in *Hamlet*. The Prince seems the only character who still wears mourning clothes. Hamlet does not only dress in mourning attire, but he also laments God's "canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (1.2.132) and the impossibility of escaping the world's pain through suicide. Hamlet's inability to return to a world deprived of his father and full of wickedness, and possibly the reason for his suicidal attitude, is due to a problematic experience of mourning. Freud defines the state of mourning as "the loss of interest in the outside world – except as it recalls the deceased – the loss of ability to choose any new love-object" (Freud, 2005, p. 204). Freud's definition befits Hamlet's disposition throughout the play. Unlike other characters, Hamlet never moves on from mourning, as he seems to adjust himself at the borders between life and death. Again, Freud elaborates that moving on from mourning

requires a person "to replace the lost objects with objects that are, where possible, equally precious, or with still more precious new ones" (Freud, 2005, p. 204). Hamlet cannot find anything, let alone anyone else, to love equally or more than his deceased father. Thus, his encounter with the ghost can only strengthen his connection with death. Eventually, Hamlet's impossibility to endure mourning climaxes in his self-identification with death, as he gives his name to the ghost by stating "I'll call thee Hamlet"(1.4.44), thus creating a scheme of references between himself, his father, and a ghost. The ghost's encounter also functions as a mirror for Hamlet who looks at it to find answers to his doubts about afterlife. The ghost provides Hamlet with a glimpse into "the undiscover'd country" (3.1.78), as the ghost:

> [It] brings the prince into a confrontation with the fact of mortality: the revenant who bears his name presents the hero with a glimpse of his future beyond the limits of what is possible. (Belsey, 2010, p. 24)

Like other ghosts, King Hamlet's ghost needs to be entreated to speak. More importantly, it lures Hamlet into a secluded space where they are alone. Such a request poses another uncanny shadow on the nature of the ghost. Once again, Horatio embodies the rational urge to distrust such an eerie creature since it may shapeshift into something terrible, as he argues;

> What if it tempts you toward the flood, my lord,
>
> […] And there assume some other horrible form,
>
> Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason

And draw you into madness? (1.4.69-74)

Horatio anticipates what could be considered Hamlet's end, as the Prince will slowly but progressively fall prey to madness. Hamlet rejects any advice, as he adamantly states "My fate cries out" (1.4.81). Thus, it can be argued that in following the ghost's ambiguous demand, Hamlet seals his fate, and starts his descent into madness.

Like other visitations, the ghost's return in *Hamlet* "is not necessarily a happy event, but one in which the stakes are high" (Buse & Stott, 1999, p. 8), as the ghost has an ominous message to deliver. Like other Shakespearean ghosts that prophesy and cursed, the ghost in *Hamlet* brings the gift and the curse of knowledge. In its monologue "I am thy father's spirit"(1.5.9), the ghost laments about the pain of the afterlife, while also blaming Claudius for regicide, fratricide, and incest. If one is to credit the ghost's words, then the ghost "tells us that the crimes of Claudius are so insupportable that Nature itself has broken form, thrusting itself unnaturally into the human order to ensure that the crimes will not go unpunished" (Hallett & Hallett, 1980, p. 186). On the other end, the ghost's command to "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.25) seems a deplorable request from a repentant soul from Purgatory.

Alongside its cries for revenge, the ghost uncannily pleads for remembrance, as it exits the scene by uttering "remember me" (1.5.91). The call for remembrance creates further ambiguities in the play, as Hamlet is the only character at the court of Denmark who still remembers the former King through

his mourning. It can be argued that the ghost's intention is not for Hamlet to remember it through memory, but actually to remember it through revenge. As a result, both revenge and remembrance get easily confused by Hamlet and other two revengers in the play – namely Laertes and Fortinbras. However, as Greenblatt argues, "remembrance and revenge are not as perfectly coincident as either the prince or the ghost had thought" (Greenblatt, 2013, p. 224). It can be argued that the confusion arising from the distinction between the two commands of the ghost throws Hamlet into a state of confusion, making him despondent as he obsessively remembers while ineffectively avenging his father.

The nature of the ghost returns is problematic. Hamlet defines it as an "honest ghost"(1.5.137) at first, however "to do what the ghost asks is to risk damnation, to avoid it seems like cowardice, and to escape the whole problem through suicide is only to arrive back at square one – daring damnation" (Hallett & Hallett, 1980, p. 189). Eventually, Hamlet's choices seem to reduce to either madness or damnation. Further along in the play, Hamlet starts to doubt the nature of his visitation and the honesty of the ghost's message. To obviate the unrelenting doubts forming in his mind, Hamlet conceives the test of the *Mousetrap*. The play devised by Hamlet not only serves the purpose of juggling Claudius' conscience but also turns into a virtual lie detector for the ghost's words. Thus, Hamlet devises a double trap for the two possible villains in the play, as he hopes to catch at least one of them. The result of his plot seems to provide Hamlet with enough evidence enough, so that he can believe in the

ghost's words. However, the ghost's ambiguity cannot be fully resolved with the *Mousetrap* test, as it is common for evil forces to speak some truth to "Win us with honest trifles, to betray's/In deepest consequence" (MAC, 1.3.27-28).

The impact of the ghost's message on Hamlet is undeniable. Since their first encounter, Hamlet seems increasingly far removed from the world of his peers, and arguably far removed from life itself. Still, Hamlet and his fellow companions are tied together with the oath of silence they have pledged to the ghost. Once again, the nature of such a pledge is ambiguous. On one hand, if the ghost is a good soul, then the vow is of little consequence for the souls of those who swore. On the other, if the ghost has a devilish nature, Hamlet has made his friends strike a pact with diabolical forces, condemning their souls to damnation. Moreover, the oath is tinted with further degrees of uncanniness, as the ghost cries "Swear" thrice from below the stage. Possibly, the ghost crying from the Hell Pit serves as an indication of the ghost's origin and its belonging to Hell.

Eventually, the ghost in *Hamlet* can be interpreted as an anticipation of death, especially for Hamlet. At the same time, the ghost also turns people into living ghosts. Hamlet seems to turn into his father's ghost, as he asks Horatio to tell his story and therefore to remember him. Hamlet's dying wish upon Horatio confirms him as a ghost storyteller and repository of memory. Additionally, Hamlet realises the ghost's demands "Remember me"(1.5.91) and "Do not forget"(3.4.106) in his sublimation from mortal man to ghost, as he demands to haunt the play and continue both his father's memory and his own.

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*Hamlet'*s ghost is not only a notable character but also a remarkable dramatic innovation. As Symonds points out, the ghost is "no longer a phantom roaming in the cold, evoked from Erebus to hover around the actors in a tragedy, but a spirit of like intellectual substance with these actors" (Symonds, 1900, p. 193). Indeed, the ghost in Hamlet seems to benefit from objectivity which might be lacking in other ghosts. The ghost takes its objectiveness from its unparalleled humanisation and vitality which grant him unprecedented authority and dignity. All these features make the ghost in *Hamlet* the most present-absent role on stage, as its presence is more felt than seen. Remarkably, the absent-presence of Old Hamlet's ghost creates a curious bond with theatre. The ghost's ability to be and not to be on stage, as well as the ability to be seen and unseen in certain scenes and to certain characters, while being fully present and visible to playgoers, create a paradoxical reality where the actor on stage is neither "the disembodied spirit it represents nor merely the ordinary body of an actor" (Outterson-Murphy, 2016, p. 253). Such blurred contours enhance the uncanny authority of the ghost which not only affects Hamlet's reaction but also the audience's. Both the ghost's agency as a triggering force and its effects on the narrative heightens the effectiveness of its role "whether playgoers understand it as a real ghost performing a harrowing tale, a demonic illusion performing ghostliness, or an actor performing theatrical insubstantiality" (Outterson-Murphy, 2016, p. 263). Furthermore, the ghost and the actor performing as ghosts start an emotional contagion not only on stage but also in the audience. Early

Modern playgoers already believed in the notion of mirroring reactions as the audience seemed to "mirror the actions of those they watch" (McConachie, 2008, p. 72). Eventually, Shakespeare removed the antique insignia of ghostliness from the ghost in Hamlet, re-fashioning it as a more humanised visitor from the afterlife far removed from the Senecan tradition. Shakespeare therefore not only created an ambiguous character resonant with both Catholic and Protestant beliefs, but he also created a ghost that became "the epitome of the ghost-lore of his age" (Wilson, 1951, p. 53) and arguably even our own.

Ghosts never really answer the questions they are asked. Arguably, they generate further questions in the minds of both the characters and the audience. One might wonder whether they can be defined as either villains or just morally-grey characters. From *Richard III* to *Macbeth*, ghosts' malevolent influence seems to befall evil characters deserving of outward punishments. However, it can be argued whether characters who inflict pain and torture on villains are any different – let alone better – than those enduring their torments. Once more, Shakespeare's ghosts ask questions far-reaching into our morality rather than providing the audience with clear answers. All these questions seem to crystalise in *Hamlet*. Old Hamlet's ghost challenges the audience to believe its words, its origin, and its bidding while putting into question the reality it infiltrated. Thus, it can be argued that ghosts defy the classical definition of villains, as they are seldomly seen doing openly wicked actions. However, their villainy might belong to a realm of things altogether unfathomable for mortal minds, where evil

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is not only done but perpetrated endlessly throughout time and space. The impossibility to fully exorcize their influence from either narratives or minds makes them potentially more dangerous than "regular" villains as one might not escape them even in death.

Ultimately, as shown by Julius Caesar's apparition, ghosts might also function as mirrors of our evil spirits, furthering the notion that whatever we fear in ghosts is already lurking in ourselves.

Conclusions

The main aim of this dissertation is to stress the links between villains and politics. One of the main questions addressed in this dissertation is whether political power can be taken as a corrupting force that can only enhance pre-existing wickedness in Shakespeare's characters. Starting from a historical standpoint, this dissertation considers the role of stage villains and their characteristics.

The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on the political situation of England during Shakespeare's career and its problems. During Shakespeare's lifetime, as much as now, politics relied on complex power games and hidden threats. The first section explores the plots Queen Elizabeth survived while sitting on the throne, as well as the gender-based anxiety linked to her political role. Subsequently, the interest of this work focuses on James I and the Gunpowder Plot and its fundamental implications for politics, religion, and drama. In conclusion, the real-life anxiety due to hidden threats and plots is perfectly transposed on stage in political tragedies and histories. Also, stage plots could be interpreted as visual representations of the hidden evil threatening the lives of men, leaving distinct traces on the world. Thus, the following section focuses on the effects of wicked actions on the world. Relying on Tillyard's assumptions on the early modern world and its order, this dissertation highlights the correlation between chaos, wickedness, and politics. Preoccupations with chaos found representations in drama. Many Shakespearean plays include scenes of natural

upheaval in moments of political hecticness, such as the scenes in *Macbeth* during

Duncan's assassination or the natural unrest in Rome in *Julius Ceasar*. Resonating

with wicked actions, political chaos is reflected in nature revolting against men's

wayward ambitions and desires. Relying on the historical notions explored in the

previous sections, the conclusive part of the first chapter focuses on political

drama and its challenging aspects. Renaissance political drama as defined by

Heinemann as a "drama of a changing, troubled, and divided society"

(Heinemann, 2003, p. 164) proved to be a useful way of exorcising the fears of the

contemporaries while also crystallising reality. Dynamics on stage uncannily

replicate real-life, so much so that the audience could relate to the narrative

unfolding on stage. Political drama also provided the audience with a shared

sense of national identity and history through the reiterations of political schemes

and their outcomes. Eventually, political drama represented the inevitable

tragedies revolving around power, staging innocents dying at the hand of villains

and villains dying at the hands of heroes who might eventually become villains.

One can argue whether the unbreakable circles of history and "the grim realities

of the power game" (Heinemann, 2003, p. 176) will not allow a clear separation

between villains and heroes performing on stage.

Furthermore, this dissertation tries to represent how wicked characters act

on the Early modern stage. Relying on Shakespeare's characterisations, villains

deliver on stage the reasons behind their evildoings while striking a bond with

the audience. At the beginning, villains explain their reasons for evildoings

making the audience almost pity them, not quite condoning their actions but somehow finding a reason behind them. In conclusion, villains encapsulate an immense theatrical potential that has survived both censure and time, as Shakespearean villains arguably resemble modern ones.

The second chapter opens with a focus on the role of tyrants on stage and the importance of portraying such a role. "Dictators" on stage convey mixed emotions of ambiguity, fear, and hatred. Additionally, Shakespearean tyrants are united under the banner of bestiality, as they resemble an "animal masked as a human being" (Bushnell, 1990, p. 11). It can be argued that Shakespeare adds a psychological connotation to the classical notion of bestial tyranny. Shakespeare stages highly unstable individuals who defy clear classification in modern psychology. Thus, it can be concluded that tyranny is the uttermost instance of the corruption of power infiltrating the mind and twisting it to the point of madness. It is also interesting to notice how power and tyranny are parts of a vicious cycle of endless ambition and recklessness.

In addition to dehumanisation and transformation into beasts, tyrants also face the accusation of effeminacy. It can be observed how gender confusion is reflected in the binary opposition of male-legitimacy and female-illegitimacy, as to implicitly stress that female power is always misplaced. In addition, it can be further noticed how female villains instead are portrayed as male-like and lacking femininity. The role of the tyrant is widely multifaceted as he is a beast, an effeminate ruler, and a proficient liar, but never a monarch in their own right.

All these elements seem to culminate in the notion that both the role of the stage actor and the role of the despot is curiously similar. Indeed, the actor on stage plays the role of the tyrant, while the tyrant performs a multitude of roles, striking a meta-theatrical parallel with the role of the actor.

A further aspect analysed in this dissertation is the use of violence and its consequences on tyrants. Just like power, violence proves to be a changeable feature often used by tyrants, even though in the end it is responsible for the dictator's death. Similarly to power, violence relies on the notion of legitimacy. Although violence is not a villain's prerogative, there are two antithetical standpoints on its legitimacy. It can be concluded that violent acts on tyrants are, on the contrary, always perceived as legitimate, while violent acts perpetrated by tyrants are contrariwise always illegitimate. Such a conclusion complicates the roles of the characters as both heroes and villains use the same violent methods, but their actions have different consequences. Indeed, the hero's violence is heroic and somehow patriotic, while the tyrant's violence is despicable. Alongside legitimacy, one can observe the transformation of the use of violence in tyrants. At first, villains directly conduct violence, while later on, they seem to rely on others for its dispatch. It can be assumed that this change in the administering of violence might be a fallacious attempt at deflecting guilt on others. Additionally, it can be concluded that both power and violence have an intoxicating influence on villains, who always cause their recklessness to escalate. Although they try "to normalize what is not normal" (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 67) their

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effort is ruinous. Remarkably, a return to normalcy is brought by the same means which destroyed it, namely, violence and homicide.

Tyrannicide constitutes a peculiar conundrum since it removes the tyrant from his stolen position, while at the same time it hardly prompts a better political situation. The twisted influence of power on people and the cycle of history hardly provides a definitive solution to the problem of tyranny, as the following regime probably will fall back on the same patterns of the previous one. Thus, the cries in *Julius Ceasar* "Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead!" (JC, 3.1.78) seldom apply to the situations ensuing tyrannicide. Both on stage and in real life, tyranny proves hard to uproot, culminating in the multi-layered question of whether it is possible to exorcise tyranny for good.

This dissertation also tries to analyse the theatrical features of stage brutality. Early moderns proved to be well-acquainted with violence, as London offered many a "violent pastime". Both theatre and real-life offered stage violence in the forms of crude shows and public executions. The incessant proximity with violence and gore may have shaped the tastes of Early moderns, who were keen consumers of spectacles of violence. Early modern fascination with violence shares some degrees of similarity with the modern obsession with graphic violence, arguably confirming the assumption that "our fascination with violence has much more to do with the beast inside of us" (Foakes, 2002, p. 6) rather than our chronological timeline. Finally, violence had to be enjoyable, but "most of all, spectacular" (Crawforth, et al., 2015, p. 30). Alongside its entertaining-like aspect,

staging violence also carried a strong political connotation. Spectacles of violence, such as public executions and tortures, were used to send a clear message while asserting control. However, violence often revolts against its users in an endless circle, turning violent rulers into victims of even more heinous violence. In conclusion, it was among these gory spectacles of violence and rule that Shakespeare set his plays, which resounded with Early Modern cultural surroundings and imagination.

Violence is only one of the main characteristics of stage villains. To define the role of the stage villains, one has to trace back the origin of wickedness on stage. Shakespeare's villains are partly derived from the medieval figure of the Vice. The multifaceted role of the Vice cannot be relegated to the role of the stage villains, as the vices were "the playmakers, the chorus, the comedians, the satirical moralists, and the agents of destruction of every play in which they appeared" (Spivack, 1958, p. 127). Gradually, the role became a favourite for the audience, striking an unprecedented bond with theatregoers. As the taste progressed, the role of the Vice gave way to a new type of villain: the Machiavel, based on the incorrect assumptions and reception of the Italian diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli. Early modern playwrights shaped a ruthless, mind-tricking villain whose presence was dreadful and intriguing. Machiavels' minds are their best assets in power games but their minds will eventually turn evil on them and set them up for failure, as eventually, Machiavels will psychologically collapse.

Psychological detriment shows the audience the real consequences of acting like a Machiavel.

Despite their justifications, villains tend to display inadequate reasons for their ruthless violence. Eventually, pointless violence turns out to be a compelling element on stage, as its crude representation has shocked the audiences' minds for centuries. At the same time, acts of gratuitous violence encapsulate human fascination for violence, troubling the consciences of spectators while making it impossible for them to turn their eyes away from gory scenes.

The final part of this dissertation focuses on the role of ghosts as ambiguous villains. Early modern spectators reacted to ghosts in diverse ways according to their religion. For instance, Protestants considered ghosts as wicked devils coming from Hell, while Christians believed in ghosts as possible returning spirits from Purgatory. Ghosts' ambiguity arguably creates a sense of resemblance with villains, as their actions are always perceived as inherently malicious. For instance, although they allegedly bring the gift of preternatural knowledge through prophecies and revelations, such truths eventually bring chaos and death. Ghosts and villains share a passion for power. Indeed, ghosts seem to yield an unfathomable power over mortals that is capable of haunting the lives and the dreams of the living characters. Thus, just like the tyrants who haunt the lives of their disinclined subjects, ghosts haunt the lives of their victims and seem to conceptualise a troubled transition of power. The political weight of the ghost is particularly relevant for sovereigns and tyrants, as political power

hardly dies with the person who used to hold it. Especially when power is unjustly stolen, ghosts seem to appear on stage as "deposed kings do not depart but rather linger for the next king" (Garrison, 2018, p. 91). Alongside their ties with political power, villains and ghosts seem to share "preternatural" connotations that link villains with the afterlife. For instance, both ghosts and villains are labelled as devilish figures having more in common with demons rather than humans. Additionally, ghosts act like a sort of preternatural contagion, as their presence on stage seems to turn characters into ghastly figures. In conclusion, as characters encounter ghosts, they seem to transform into a ghostlike version of themselves, showing hectic temperaments and insanity. Eventually, just like a common villain, a ghost takes up major space on stage "whether playgoers understand it as a real ghost performing a harrowing tale, a demonic illusion performing ghostliness, or an actor performing theatrical insubstantiality" (Outterson-Murphy, 2016, p. 263). Finally, both villains and ghosts seem to defy clear definitions. Ghosts' actions are ambiguous, and in their ambiguity, one can see hidden malevolence. From *Richard III* to *Macbeth,* ghosts' ambiguous influence seems to befall evil characters deserving of outward punishments. However, it can be argued whether characters who inflict pain and torture villains are any different – let alone better – than the villains themselves. Finally, both villains and ghosts function as mirrors for the audience. As both roles show wickedness and its consequences, they also show the potential for wickedness. Wicked characters, whether human or preternatural, remind the

audience that the full-blown malignity on stage has a germ in every human being,

and that the limit between good and evil is blurred.

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