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English 322

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March 8, 2018

Political Context Within Shakespeare's Texts

Looking into two of Shakespeare's more prominent works, *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III*, both texts show how people should pay attention to others who are trying to achieve and maintain the highest power within the country – the throne. Although the common theme looks at the rise and fall of political power within both texts, this is where most similarities end. *Richard III* tells of how one should be cautious towards both the monarchy and body politics, the mystical aura that passes between each reigning king. This is because of the “Tudor Myth” that would demand civilian obedience through overthrowing the previous reign, as very few would consciously ask for a murderous ruler. The rebellion towards the monarchy within *Julius Caesar* is meant to be the biggest concern for the audience. This is due to the assassination of Caesar being in the name of Rome, with the Senators who killed him claiming that the country would have been governed by a dictator if Caesar lived.

What was considered the “Tudor Myth” is most prominently seen in *Richard III*, where Richmond (becoming Henry VII) would overthrow Richard III to bring in modern politics through overthrowing the previous reign. England allowing Richmond to take the throne after killing Richard III should describe how the country is at the end of the ropes with Richard, specifically with how he ruled as King. After having killed Richard, Richmond claims that “[t]he day is ours; the bloody dog is dead” which references how no one will miss Richard nor his cruel reign as King (*Richard III* 5.5.2). Plans for “long-usurpèd royalty” are already being made in order to unify both

Houses through the marriage of Richmond (House of Lancaster) and Elizabeth (House of York) (5.5.4). The union would also mark the transition out of the Houses of Lancaster and York and into the House of Tudor.

The assassination of the titular character within *Julius Caesar* is meant to portray the consequences of rebellion for the audience, as the Senators claim to have killed Caesar in the name of honor and country. After the assassination of Caesar, Brutus becomes the face of the rebellion when addressing the populous where he portrays the killing as being necessary in order to stop a tyrant from conquering Rome. This betrayal towards the audience in regards to Caesar, after giving a hypothetical example as to what would have happened if Caesar was left alive.

Had you rather Caesar were living,
and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free-
men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate,
I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honor him; but he was
ambitious, I slew him. (*Julius Caesar* 3.2.21-25)

Brutus is attempting to convince the populous of his reasoning for killing Caesar, in that Caesar would have become a violent dictator if given the chance at the crown. Immediately after Brutus' speech about how Caesar needed to be killed in order to prevent him from turning into a tyrant, Antony attempts to allow Caesar to be buried. During the speech, he characterizes the assailants as "honorable men" for which Antony repeats several times. After telling the populous of the noble acts that Caesar made before his death – rejecting the crown three times and left the commoners in his will – and showing the dead body in order to understand the severity of the wounds, the term "honorable men" becomes more sarcastic with each mention in passing. With

how easy it was for Antony to turn the audience against Brutus for the death of Caesar, this is the consequence for the resulting rebellion against Caesar.

With *Julius Caesar*, the rebellion that was led by Brutus was the result of wanting to protect Rome from a dictator. And, as a result, both Caesar and the rebellion had their amount of power rise and fall with either the persuasion of the populous or death by a blade. The same goes with *Richard III* with how the Tudors were able to usher in a new political age through ending the War of the Roses. This was done through overthrowing the previous reign and tying both feuding sides together through marriage. Tudors were able to get away with this due to demanding their obedience, if the current King had gotten their position through overthrowing the previous reign then it would be unlikely that civilians had the chance to overthrow the King. These are the main similarities between both of these works, as the political rise and fall of the main characters show that the reader needs to be wary of those who are trying to obtain such power.

Works Cited

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