



The Artistic Creation of Villain: Iago an Antagonist from Shakespeare's Othello

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate about the role of villains in the drama of William Shakespeare, and what are the factors behind a man, which are responsible for making a man villain, and what are that circumstances, which evokes a person to be a villain, some person may become villain due to will, and some person may become villain, due to reason. Although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between villains of will and villains of reason.

Let's start by asking whether there really are heroes and villains in Shakespeare's plays. These concepts suggest that someone can be all good, noble, and well-intentioned on the one hand or all bad, ill-intentioned, and downright evil on the other.

What makes Shakespeare's characters so interesting is that they are human beings, motivated by the things that motivate human beings: they react to other circumstances and to people in different ways. One man can, like Macbeth, be both 'hero' and 'villain', responding to the conditions he is faced with as they change.

As one can imagine, Shakespeare's plays raise the question of what a villain is so to present a list of villains is not a clear-cut task. For example, some lists have Shylock from The Merchant of Venice on them, but in some ways of looking at it he is very much a victim rather than a villain. For these more ambiguous characters we have put together this list of Shakespeare's most misunderstood bad guys.

The 12 Most Evil Characters in Shakespeare's Plays:

<u>Name of Villain</u>	-	<u>Name of Drama</u>
• Claudius	-	'Hamlet'
• Iago	-	'Othello'
• Don John	-	'Much Ado About Nothing'
• Lady Macbeth	-	'Macbeth'
• Caliban	-	'The Tempest'
• Macbeth	-	'Macbeth'
• Edmund	-	'King Lear'
• Richard III	-	'Richard III'
• Shylock	-	'The Merchant of Venice'
• Cassius	-	'Julius caesar'
• Tybalt	-	'Romeo and Juliet'
• Aaron the Moor/Tamora	-	'Titus Andronicus'

After having a knowledge of Shakespeare's Villains in brief, I would like to focus my research studies on Iago (the Villain), because he is the main character in the play 'Othello', without him we cannot imagine about the ample interest in the play. Because he is the only person who always indulge in some

evil activities, by which he could harm the person whom he dislike due to any reason. Iago dislikes Othello, because he thinks that, Othello is the person who is responsible for his frustration, because Othello gives the high position to Cassio, on which, Iago had eyes, and he thinks that, he deserves that position but due to Othello he could not get that position, he has been passed over for promotion to lieutenant. Cassio is a young and inexperienced soldier, whose high position is much resented by Iago. Iago dislikes Desdemona, because she does not like him as a lover, as he expects from Desdemona, Iago dislikes Cassio, because he is the person who takes his high position, on which he had right. So there are lot of ample reasons, behind Iago's evil act, which motivate him to take revenge.

Introduction

"Iago is the opposite of God, that is, he is the Devil. ... Iago is a man with an obsession for control and power over others who has let this obsession take over

his whole life. Necessity forces his hand, and, in order to destroy Othello, he must also destroy Roderigo, Emilia, Desdemona, and ultimately himself.”

More than four centuries have passed since William Shakespeare slipped off this mortal coil, yet the impact of his genius continues to shape and inspire the world. His brilliant pen and keen insight into the human condition has allowed his legendary work to boldly stand the test of time, remaining relevant and accessible across the globe.

Othello is an example of one of the masterpieces of Shakespeare’s great tragedies. The plot of *Othello* revolves around an African general in the Venetian army, who has become the victim of Iago’s tricks for suspecting his wife of adultery. *Othello* is a tragedy of dark love and sexual jealousy. The tragedy is an example of racial prejudice that leads to darker side of love. The root of negative love is connected to Othello’s complex and misunderstanding as to why a beautiful character like Desdemona could love an African soldier. The present article is based on the critical analysis of three

leading characters: Othello (tragic hero), Desdemona (heroine) and Iago (the jealous villain).

One of the purest manifestation of evil in Shakespeare’s body of work is Iago, the conniving and deceitful second lieutenant to Othello, the tragic titular character. Displaying malice and jealousy without clear reason, Iago is a force of lies and chaos, double-crossing numerous characters, and ultimately manipulating Othello into murdering his wife Desdemona.

Many scholars see Iago as the most inherently evil of all Shakespeare’s villains. He spends the course of the play relentlessly plotting Othello’s downfall and his malicious scheming drives the storyline towards its tragic finale.

All Shakespeare villains act in cruel and unpleasant ways. Some of them kill, deceive and otherwise take advantage of their fellow men and women, but they are all only human beings.

Much has been continuously written on different aspects of Shakespearean drama

in general and tragedy in particular. Othello has not been an exception.

Shakespeare has successfully depicted two sides of love in 'Othello'. Right from the portrayal of an example of strong bond between Desdemona (the heroine) and Othello (the hero) at the start of the play which leads to the culmination as a tragic hero, Othello has become victim of dark form of love, mixed with hateful jealousy throughout the play. Shakespeare has been popularly known as the playwright of tragedies. It does not mean he has not attempted comedies or sonnets. He has been a versatile writer. Othello is a wonderful example of 'romance' basically between Othello (the hero) and Desdemona (the lead heroine). They are in serious love, but Othello can't remove the root of his doubt as to why such a pretty woman would love a man like him (who is not good looking at all). The initial doubt has been increased by the poison of the villain (Iago) which the hero can't understand despite the fact that, she has done nothing wrong. In order to develop a deep understanding of the concept of Shakespearean characters and elements of

love through the characters, it is inevitable to delve deep into the socio-psychological analysis of each of the main characters.

Iago is the epitome of conniving and evil character in a play. He is sly and quick witted, untrustworthy, and sexist (which is a counterproductive characteristic). He shows no sympathy after he blackmails people that trust him, and he spends his time, entirely in the play, in planning and executing their demise. He plays a crucial role in the play as the antagonist, and without him, there would be no conflict.

First and foremost, Iago's most useful and perhaps most important attribute is his ability to think quickly and calmly. Iago's nerves of steel allow him to think quickly and delicately, without boxing himself in to his own trap. This is key to his scheming because he is frequently put on the spot by Othello, and if Iago fails to respond in a timely and witty fashion, his plan will be either foiled or, worse, revealed to Othello and others.

A fine example of Iago's quick wit is found in Act III, Scene III. Othello asks

Iago to provide proof that Desdemona is having an affair, and Iago responds,

“There are a kind of men so loose of soul that in their sleeps will mutter their affairs. One of this kind is **Cassio**. In sleep I heard him say “**Sweet Desdemona, let us be wary, let us hide our loves.**” (Act III, Scene III, 413-417).

So far, Iago’s only proof that Desdemona was cheating on Othello is the handkerchief Iago plans on planting in Cassio’s room. Iago had not yet thought of any other ideas he could use against Cassio prior to Othello asking him to prove what was going on, so Iago quickly formulated this story in order to keep Othello angered and jealous until Iago had time to plant the handkerchief. This is a fine example of how Iago thinks on his feet. Another defining example of Iago’s cunning is in Act III, when Othello and Iago enter the scene when Cassio is trying to convince Desdemona to speak in his name. Upon Othello’s entrance, Cassio quickly departs, not because he is trying to sneak away undetected, but because he doesn’t want to confront Othello just yet.

Othello asks Iago if it was Cassio who he saw leave, and Iago responds,

“Cassio, my Lord? No, sure, I cannot think it that he would steal away so guilty-like seeing you coming” (Act III, Scene III, 38-39).

Iago immediately arouses suspicion of Cassio in Othello. This is the ignition of Iago’s scheme against the other characters.

While quick critical decision making is an attribute that can be admired, although not in Iago, the trait that makes Iago a true rascalion is his untrustworthiness to those who think they have befriended him. All of the characters in the play start on great terms with Iago. They trust him, especially since he is a military man. The most obvious event that reveals how untrustworthy Iago is his plot to blackmail all of his so-called friends and colleagues. His intentions sadistic, Iago reveals his plot to extort his first victim, Cassio, in Act II. Cassio takes Desdemona’s hand to greet her, and in an aside, Iago says,

“He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said, whisper! With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile

upon her, do, I will gyve thee in thine own courtship. You say true, 'Tis so, indeed. If such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenantry, it had been better you had not kissed your three fingers so oft, which now again you are most apt to play the sir in. very good, well kissed, and excellent courtesy! 'tis so, indeed. Yet again your fingers to your lips? Would they were clyster-pipes for your sake! (Act II, Scene I, 162-170).

One might wonder how someone who is supposed to be honourable and trustworthy can really be the root of all evil. There are many examples throughout the play that only support Iago's untrustworthiness. Iago uses Emilia to take possession of Desdemona's prized handkerchief, and as if that isn't enough to send him to hell, Iago also plans to use it as blackmail against Cassio. Throughout the play, characters place their trust in him when they need it most, and they are blind to his treachery. Iago plays Cassio and Othello and they both mistakably name him an honorable man. It is important that Iago is an agile thinker in the play because without it Shakespeare wouldn't be able to

create suspense in the moments in which Iago's scheme is challenged.

In addition to these attributes, Iago also has a distinct animosity towards women. This is peculiar because Iago's entire scheme to extort his "friends" seems to be based around his goal to have Desdemona. Iago is sexist, and even displays it to Desdemona.

"Come on, come on. You are pictures out of door, bells in your parlors, wild-cats in your kitchens, saints in your injuries, devils being offended, players in your housewifery, and housewives in your beds." (Act II, Scene I, 109-111).

Desdemona is offended by Iago's sexist jokes, accordingly. Iago basically states that women are good for nothing but sex, ironically he believes that even at sex, women aren't up to par with his standards. Iago states that if a woman is attractive, she will use her looks to get what she wants, if the woman is ugly and smart, then she will be intelligent enough to find a man to sleep with, and that no "fair" woman is "foolish" because all women like this simply seems intelligent to men

blinded by the woman's looks. Again speaking of women, Iago says,

“There's none so foul and foolish thereunto, but does foul pranks which fair and wise ones do.” (Act II, Scene I, 138-139).

This is confusing because if Iago plans to have Desdemona fall for him, why would he expect her to come for a man that has absolutely no respect for females? Iago's sexist tendencies are pivotal because they press the fact that marriages didn't mean as much as they do in modern society. Iago's wife Emilia has virtually no place in Iago's heart, yet they were bound by marriage. Iago's personality is complicated because of his attraction to Desdemona combined with his hatred towards women.

Simply put, Iago is all that is considered unholy. Whatever higher power he believes in will send him straight to whatever hell he believes in upon his death. He is sly and quick-witted, untrustworthy, and sexist, and does everything within his power to manipulate the other characters in a play. In a way, Iago is the perfect villain, however odd it

may seem to call Iago perfect in any context. Shakespeare caused Iago to be the most fascinating character in the play because of his paradoxical characteristics.

Conclusion: Thus we can say that, *Othello*, is a wonderful creation of the great dramatist, William Shakespeare, and when we talk about the role of villains, in the drama, we find that, Shakespeare has done a great job in this regard, and he has made true justice with villain's role. Although there are a lot of wonderful roles of villains in the drama, but when we talk about Iago's character, we find that, his role is very effective and he almost controls and affects the life of main characters in the drama. Without Iago, (the villain) in the Drama '*Othello*', we cannot imagine about the success of this Drama, because Iago is the main antagonist who controls the life of all the main characters in this drama, whether he may be the Protagonist, Othello, Desdemona (the heroine), Emilia (Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant), Michael Cassio (Othello's lieutenant) all are suffered directly or indirectly by him.

He shows no sympathy after he blackmails people that trust him, and he spends his time, entirely in the play, in planning and executing their demise. He plays a crucial role in the play as the antagonist, and without him, there would be no conflict. Iago due to his bad nature, he plotted to destruct the life of whole person, who are responsible for his dissatisfaction due to some reasons. Actually he hitted many birds with a single stone. He used the weapon of jealousy against Othello, by twisting his deep love for Desdemona, to a great hatred, and finally she murdered by her own husband Othello due to misunderstanding. This play shows that, how a great warrior, like Othello, who cannot be defeated in battle field, can be destroyed, if he has a tragic flaw in his life. One tragic flaw is ample for destroying anybody's life.

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