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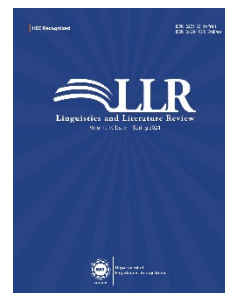|	
Title:	**Tragedizing the Villain: Shakespearean Perspective on Iago as a Tragic Character**
Author (s):	Shafaat Yar Khan[1], and Nabiya Khan[2]
Affiliation (s):	[1]University of Central Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan [2]Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan
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Tragedizing the Villain: Shakespearean Perspective on Iago as a Tragic Character

Shafaat Yar Khan[1*], and Nabiya Khan[2]

[1]University of Central Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
[2]Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract

Through a critical analysis of Shakespeare's Othello, this study reveals how certain dramatic techniques contribute to the creation of tragic characters, particularly in the case of Iago as a villain. An examination of these techniques shows how Shakespeare blurred the distinction between hero and villain, not only in characters such as Macbeth and Richard III, but also in Iago. The critical analysis demonstrates how Shakespeare affected a moral ambiguity in creating Iago and crafted him as a tragic villain, calling for a sympathetic understanding of his motives and evoking sympathy. Based on the findings, this research supports the use of the term "tragic" for a criminal character like Iago. The study allows for the discussion of the complex relevance of justice to tragedy and tragic characters, as well as its implications for contemporary culture and pedagogy, in which popular culture figures, such as the Joker of Marvel Comics, are discussed as tragic only because they are given sad backstories.

Keywords: Elizabethan tragedy, Iago, Othello, tragic villain, Shakespearean tragedy, Shakespearean villain

Introduction

Comparisons between Shakespeare's characters and characters in popular culture products are becoming common in literary discussions. This trend is concerning, as such comparisons are often based on superficial applications of literary techniques. This trend has also infiltrated the academia where students are tasked with finding similarities and contrasts between villains in literature and those in history or Marvel Comics (Bartleby, n.d.; Comics in Education, n.d.). Online guidance is available on crafting compelling or tragic villains and artificial intelligence has made this task easier. This article seeks to bring the discussion of tragedy back to the literary arena. It identifies tragic characteristics in Iago to establish that

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*Corresponding Author: shafaatyk@yahoo.com

Shakespeare crafted Iago as a tragic character deserving audience pity and understanding. Contrary to its uses in popular culture, this research employs the term *tragedise* in its old meaning of dramatising in the form of a tragedy, that is, to create a character as having characteristics of a tragic person (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This term is similar to the term *villainize* which means to vilify or to present as a villain (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). The article seeks to find in Shakespeare's creation of the character of Iago such dramatic techniques as he used for crafting his tragic heroes. It argues that Iago is neither a "demi-devil" (5.2.299 - 300) nor a psychopath with some mysterious motivations for evil, who can be compared to Goethe's Mephistopheles (Bradley, 1991. p. 208). Instead, it contends that Iago's nature and actions should be understood in the context of the dramatic form Shakespeare employed in Othello.

In his works like Julius Caesar, Richard III, Hamlet, and Macbeth, Shakespeare did not adhere to the conventional form of flaw and fall. The protagonists in these dramas, owing to the moral ambiguity surrounding their actions, become hero-villains requiring the audience to undergo the moral dilemmas of these characters. This paper argues that Iago is another such character who should be studied as a morally ambiguous person similar to these. The study contributes to the debates about morally ambiguous characters in literature and popular culture, who are often valorised as tragic characters by giving them some back story as justification for their crimes. A comparison of techniques discussed in this research helps to clarify how the term tragic can be used for criminal characters with psychological depth and complexity of motives.

Research Query

Many research questions arise to find evidence for Iago's tragic status as Shakespeare conceived it. The query starts with an examination of the differences between Shakespeare's concept of "tragedy" and the uses of the term in Renaissance and contemporary popular culture. This requires identification of Shakespearean techniques used to create tragic characters, with particular emphasis on the use of soliloquies and asides. The next step is to explore the key differences distinguishing Shakespeare's tragic heroes and villains, and how this distinction determines his principles of tragedy. This makes it possible to identify the character traits and techniques Shakespeare used to make his villains like Macbeth and Richard III as tragic characters evoking sympathy with a seminal impact on the paradigms of

Shakespearean tragedy. The evidence from the play *Othello* can then be sought to establish that Shakespeare crafted Iago as a complex character based on the dramatic techniques he used for the creation of tragic characters. This research traces the ways these techniques craft Iago's character as a tragic character in *Othello.*

Research Methodology

This research studies the dramatic techniques used to create the character of Iago as a tragic villain in Shakespeare's drama *Othello*. It employs close reading of the play focusing on Shakespearean techniques of tragedy and then confirming their interpretation with insights from critical experts. With a primary focus on the text of *Othello*:2003, this research seeks to support its analysis from the explanations of the text in existing researches.

Paradigms of Tragedy

In order to consider Iago as a tragic character, it is important to define what the term tragic means. Tragedy and tragic are two terms most varyingly used in academic and popular discourses. Historical investigations by Leech (1969) and Williams (2006) discuss how tragedy has suggested different ideas through history. The idea of a tragic fall as a consequence of a tragic flaw has made this artistic form a religio-moral debate about sin and punishment (Leech 1969; Williams, 2006; Young 2013). Cautionary tales of the fall of eminent people were collected as homilies as is evident from Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (Leech 1969, p. 43) and William Baldwin's *A Mirror for Magistrates* (Baldwin & Lucas, 2019). Tragedy's preoccupation with sin and punishment has also made a field of philosophical enquiry (de Beistegui & Sparks, 2000; Kaufmann, 1968). In his Introduction to Tragedy and Philosophy, Kaufmann commented, "The most influential reflections on tragedy are those of a few philosophers…" (1968, p. 15). In clarifying the term "tragic", he pointed out that for many people tragic is "what *seems* inevitable" or "could easily have been avoided" (p. 15). Moral and religious concerns with sin and punishment have been actively pursued to identify Shakespeare's religious and moral standpoint.

Efforts to define tragedy and the tragic have been contentious. Boas (1955) calls it "ancient game of trying to define the indefinable" (p. 5). Stephen Booth (1968) sums up the issue in the term 'indefinition' pointing out that the search for a definition of tragedy has been "the most persistent

and widespread of all nonreligious quests for definition" (p. 81). Historical distancing and emerging meanings of words have increasingly complicated the matters. Szondi (2002) asserts that: "There is no such thing as the tragic, at least not as an essence. Rather, the tragic is a mode, a particular manner of destruction …" (p. 55) whereas Eagleton (2003) emphasizes that the idiom of 'tragic hero' is not used by ancient Greeks or Aristotle - rather 'tragic protagonists' who were not the centre of tragic action (p. 77). He also asserts that "the celebrated tragic flaw or hamartia is more of a bungling or missing-of-the-mark in the action itself than some moral defect, an objective blunder or error more than a state of the soul" (p. 77).

The Concept of Villain

There were no heroes in Greek tragedy. Initially, Greek tragedy was sung by a chorus to which Thespis added a 'character' which was simply called the 'protagonist' meaning the first character in the agon. The term agon suggests that tragedy was initially a contest (Cuddon, 2016) in which the first character, the protagonist, answered the accusations of the chorus by giving justification of his motives. Thus, Case explains that The Oresteia is a debating contest which "... formalizes agons (contests) and the notion of winners and losers" (Case, 1985, p. 322). The antagonist was just the opponent in the agon, so that the protagonist was the antagonist in the accusation match who was accused as a villain is and had to defend himself much like an antagonist. Since he won the debate, he came to be considered the hero and spoke the last word in the contest. Bell (2008) thinks that Shakespeare's plays staged this debate (p. 36) in a "struggle *for* a selfhood ..." (p. 12).

Greek dramas do not substantiate Aristotle's idea of tragic flaw causing a fall from prosperity. There is no tragic fall in Oedipus at Colonnus where Oedipus is elevated into heaven as a prophet, and in *Medea*, the protagonist, who has murdered her two sons, escapes with her sons' bodies in the chariot sent by the Sun God. Thus, Boas (1955) concludes, "…the distinction between villain and hero is impossible to draw in the remaining Greek tragedies" (p. 12). Similar moral ambiguity dominated Renaissance tragedy that was fascinated with evil doers like Faustus and Macbeth (Waith, 1993). Rigolot highlights how Renaissance fascination with error redefined error not just as "a regrettable mistake, an unforgivable faux pas" but also as "another order of truth" (2004, p. 1219). The views of Machiavelli and Montaigne had caused a radical rethinking of political vices and virtues.

Relativism and ideological uncertainty so imbued the ideas of the Renaissance that the drama of the period staged such subversive and transgressive characters (Dollimore, 1984). The Renaissance audience looked up to blasphemous Tamburlaine and desired damned Faustus' salvation. Robert Greene blended the techniques of romance and metaphoric style "to make the criminal world look more picturesque and vibrant" (Vasylyna, 2011, p. 11). His key contributions to the creation of villains were "bright dialogues between criminals, some monologues of villains, their boastful autobiographical stories and a lot of amusing inserted texts" It was in this atmosphere that Shakespeare's Shylock and Macbeth emerged as tragic characters with human reasons for their villainy and thereby evoking audience sympathy.

Iago has been so commonly associated with evil that arguing a tragic status for him seems futile. The feelings he evokes lead to conclusions that "the anti-life forces that centre in Iago seek the annihilation of others" (Oliven & Maggio, 2019, p. 203), and that he "does evil for evil's sake" and "is probably the one most concerned with destruction for destruction's sake and the annihilation of others" (p. 203). This research contends that Iago can only be understood in the context of Shakespeare's creation of such evil characters as Shylock, Richard III, Macbeth, Richard III and Lady Macbeth.

Shakespeare's Creation of Macbeth as a Tragic Villain

In the tradition of Elizabethan experimentation with subversive characters, we may agree, "a villain is a man who, for a selfish end, wilfully and deliberately violates standards of morality sanctioned by the audience or ordinary reader" (Boyer, 1964, p. 8). Marlowe's Machiavellian villain-hero (Boyer, 1964) blossomed into Tamburlaine, Barabbas, and Faustus. Shakespeare continued Marlowe's moral relativism and experimented with the ways for creating human villains. Thus, Terry Eagleton reminds us that

> The complexity of Shakespeare's ideological dilemmas … arises from the fact that they do not take the form of 'simple' contradictions, in which each term is the polar opposite of the other; on the contrary, in 'deconstructive fashion, each term seems confusingly to inhere in its antagonist. (Eagleton, 1986, p. 101)

Though Macbeth was condemned in history, Shakespeare transformed him into a tragic character by staging his mental anguish and his final rise to meet his death. Wayne C. Booth (1951, 1968) explicated Macbeth as a

tragic hero/villain in his two articles in which he explained Shakespeare's techniques for making Macbeth a tragic character. Booth explains that Shakespeare endowed him with a noble past, and unwillingness to commit evil (Booth, 1951), but also showed his human dilemma of fear of judgement on his crimes and the desire of the prize (Booth, 1951). The "richly complex degenerative plot" showed him sinking deeper into crime and becoming increasingly aware of his guilt (Booth, 1951, p. 25). Macbeth's internal conflict expressed in soliloquies (Booth, 1951) reflects his emotional weaknesses evoking sympathy from the audience. Unknown to characters opposing him, Macbeth remains essentially human for being "really aware of the wickedness of his act". As Booth explained,

> Malcolm and Macduff do not know Macbeth and the forces that have worked on him; the spectator does know him and, knowing him, can feel great pity that a man with so much potentiality for greatness should have fallen so low. The pity is that everything was not otherwise. (Booth, 1951, p. 25)

There are no sympathetic motivations given for his crimes like the murder of Macduff's family, and yet his actions are the result of explicable desires. The anxiety born of ambition humanises him. He is neither a victim of fate nor a prey to witchcraft. Instead, it is his faulty logic and moral blindness that led to his downfall.

Heilman (1967) explained Shakespeare's techniques for making Macbeth a hero from the crime story. The play would be a "political melodrama" if it were simply "the history of good men's victory over a criminal and tyrant" (Heilman, 1967, p. 12). Shakespeare built a "poetic-dramatic plot" with contrasts and disagreements with the character's moral choices which lead to moral discomforts "on aesthetic, rational, psychological, or moral grounds" (Heilman, 1967, p. 13). Although Macbeth is a morally contracting character, we share Macbeth's experience who is not "petty scoundrel" but "an extraordinary man" with whom "we become the murderer as well as the man who can hardly tolerate, in prospect or retrospect, the idea of murder" (Heilman, 1967, p. 14). Though as a villain Macbeth repels us, there are elements in him "that tend to elicit … fellow-feeling, pity, favour, or even admiration" (Heilman, 1967, p. 20). Heilman concluded that audience side by the criminal, feel his "aggressive ambition, envy, the pleasure of getting away with it …" so that they fear or pity what Macbeth undergoes (Heilman, 1967, p. 20).

Similar techniques are evident in the characterization of Richard III, Shylock, Hamlet, and Brutus whose actions are morally discomforting but are still pitied for their human sufferings and waste of great potential.

Iago as a Villain with Tragic Characteristics

Iago has been credited to have no understandable motivation for his crimes. Lack of such a motivation has won him accusations of being a sociopath, a demi-devil, or even a psychopath (Cagle, 2018; McGill, 2019; Sadowski, 2020; Samuels, 2001, Wangh, 1950; West, 1978). The reason is that we often forget that Iago is "a construction, a fiction, … constructed according to a scheme … of moral choice as it was analyzed in the scholastic tradition" (Cunningham, 1964, p. 125). Brooke (1918) thought, "Shakespeare imagined Iago a man of warm sympathetic qualities" (p. 49) and equated "Romantic Iago" with Hamlet, and stressed: "[…] if Iago had been a person as attractive as Hamlet, as many thousands of pages might have been written about him […]" (p. 46). He thought, "Iago is no more a born devil than Falstaff" (p. 52).

Shakespeare invested Iago with the tragic characteristics of protagonists. His villains like Shylock, Edmund, Aron, and Iago go through conflicts and sufferings much like his protagonists. Just as Baron's *Mirza* misrepresents Muslims through an Orientalist lens to reinforce Eurocentric ideals (Ghaffar & Asif, 2020), Shakespeare's Iago reflects a nuanced construction of villainy that challenges simple categorizations. These representations engage with broader ideological narratives, requiring audiences to grapple with their preconceptions (Faheem et al., 2023). Iago's subversive views are voiced in speeches and soliloquies which humanises him, as they did Macbeth, Shylock, and Richard III. Iago's career before the first scene is important because he is often referred to as "honest" because he has earned it before the first scene. It is not Shakespeare resorting to expedience that Othello loses his way in the storm and Iago captains his ship safely through the storm (2.1). This proves that he deserved to be selected Othello's ancient. With this fact, Shakespeare based Iago's sense of injured merit on a fact and went on to show the tragic waste of an intelligent person. We can see in him a man of potential, acknowledged veteran of wars, and famed for honesty, who is driven to plot the destruction of his enemies, even the destruction of what he could not achieve. Recognition of the destruction of human potential, the spoiling of the rich possibilities of success evokes pity for the traditional tragic hero, who is a

man of much potential destroyed by human weaknesses. Shakespeare bestowed Iago with an admirable potential which Iago destroys in pursuit of something too ephemeral, too intangible to be the cause of the destruction of this potential. As a villain, Iago's role is to prevent hero's ambitions not just as a thwart but as the rebuttal of an idea. In humanist terms, this battle of good and evil is an exploration of human evil in which evil dominates human potential.

Iago's heritage is in the medieval idea of evil doers properly called "natural man" by Tyndale (Kolve, 1986, p. 210). The ruling paradigm was that a person cut off from God's rules would be at cross-purposes with God and unable to control natural human energies behaving in an anarchically, desiring power without any control. This "anarchy of stored-up energy seeking a release in any direction" (Kolve, 1986, p. 210) became the prototype of the Elizabethan villain, whether Marlowe's Tamburlaine or Shakespeare's villains. This rampant energy then became the ideal of the Renaissance man. The medieval villain's sweeping energy caused a lot of chaos on stage. Kolve sees this "turbulent, undiscriminating" character as suggestive of human nature determined by the Fall. So, we see that the Elizabethans hero was a figure dominating the plot. He wielded great emotional power; his actions were stained with crime; he was cruel and calculating, who could wilfully, selfishly, and deliberately violate the moral code of the audience, and thus be at once a hero and an evil doer, but essentially, in all his actions, he remained a man. Tragedy, which moved the audience to admiration and fear and pity, was based on the fall of a villain, who possessed both courage and intellect, but which clashed with his society's moral forces causing a struggle of faith and doubt in the audience (Shylock). The subversion of the moral order resulted in a struggle causing tragic pleasure (Faustus' pangs of conscience).

This clash of potentials, the battle of the passive, innocent good people, and the active, energetic, intelligent villains became the epitome of Elizabethan villains. To the Elizabethan audience, this active, energetic, and intelligent villain seemed more deserving of reward than did the good, foolishly innocent hero. The result was the creation of such tragic heroes as Faustus, Barabbas, Macbeth, Richard III. Their weakness was not any mistake in plotting and planning, but rather a very human weakness. In Iago's case, it was his weakness for Desdemona's handkerchief, which he had desired as a fetish.

In the stormy plot of the play, we often fail to set the events in a chronological scheme. Iago's passion for Desdemona is revealed only indirectly – in his sexual metaphors in scene 1 and his frequent use of sexual language (1.1.87-90; 97-100; 124-126). That he had wished for Desdemona's handkerchief before the plot opened is overlooked because after the events of the first night, the plot hastily progresses with a stormy voyage and arrival in Cyprus. Emilia's comments about Iago's desire to get Desdemona's handkerchief (5.2.225-227) suggest that Iago had desired to keep Desdemona's handkerchief and not to use against Othello. The reason why he wanted the handkerchief is illustrated in the sexual abuses he hurls against Othello in the opening scene. Iago's sexually charged language reflects the unbridled energy of sexual desire. In a Freudian context, Iago desired Desdemona sexually, for him the handkerchief was a fetish - a non-sexual object as an alternative for the object of his sexual desire - is perhaps the reason why he imagined Othello and Cassio of adultery with his wife. The adulterous relationship he himself desired, he imagined them of having achieved. Hamlet's many references to his mother's sexual desires hide his own Oedipal impulses (Jones, 1976). Wangh (1950) considers that Iago's jealousy may be rooted in Oedipal impulses: "Since Othello is a paternal authority, especially for Iago, the Moor's withdrawal to the marriage chamber reawakens the oedipal conflict in Iago" (p. 206).

In Shakespeare's world, villain's evil is the consequence of the breakdown of moral ideals. Shakespeare inserts subtle indicators that Iago is opposed not just to a racial outsider, but to a warrior who tells exotic after-dinner tales and wins the heart of his host's daughter (1.3.166–7) as Aeneas won Dido's (Maguire, 2014, p. 17), but is unable to navigate his ship to Cyprus as Iago successfully did. Storytelling is central to the plot as Othello falls prey to Iago's storytelling: "Iago uses the same witchcraft that Othello had used: language" (Collington, 2005, p. 73; Maguire, 2014, p. 27). Iago is no serpent devil as there is no paradisiacal Adam-and-Eve relationship between the couple. Othello elopes with Desdemona against her father's wishes and houses her in an inn on his wedding night because he has no house in Venice. Shakespeare's dramatization makes Othello no Adam, and Iago no serpent as Goddard (2009) or Alert (2011) would still want us to believe.

Shakespeare methodically created his villains with in-depth knowledge of psychology, and problematised their psychology with moral issues of

justified motivation. It is fallacious to think of Iago in black in white. For Shakespeare, it is not hero vs villain, evil vs good; rather, Iago is portrayed as a good person before the start of the play. Despite Roderigo's dialogue that Iago had been using his purse as his own (1.1.2-3), all the major characters describe Iago as 'honest' thereby creating the impression that he was praise-worthy before the time of the first scene. We think of him as a 'villain' the moment he steps on the stage. Shakespeare creates conundrums for audience judgements (Maguire 2014; Pechter 1999) who should wonder how so many could mistake Iago to be 'honest' (Abernethy, 1922; Alexander, 1969; Babcock, 1965; Draper, 1931; Jorgensen, 1950). Characters' opinions suggest that Iago enjoyed a good reputation until the opening of the play.

Iago defines himself by "I am not what I am" (1.1.66) thus inverting the phrase that the Biblical God used to define himself. Iago chooses to define himself in the context of Biblical idea of evil in which goodness is contrasted with evil. Iago's villainy seems to have no ontological reason. Although, like Shylock and Richard III, he does not suffer any conflict of identity, his resolution for evil is, much like theirs, counterbalanced by other qualities which prove him to be no moral inferior to the good characters.

In being evil, Iago is among the first villains who represent the evil of the world they inhabit. Sexuality is a recurring theme in *Othello*; both Cassio and Othello are defined by it. Othello elopes with Desdemona, keeps her in an inn on her wedding night and takes her along when going to war as if going on a honeymoon. Orlin (1996) lists many hints of impropriety in "Desdemona's violations of domestic prescription", her "half-wooing Othello", her elopement and consent to go with Othello to Cyprus. She also comments that Desdemona's banter with Iago at the dockside, her advice to Emilia not to learn from her husband, her vow to make Othello's bed a school, his board a shrift (3.3.24), her willow-scene speculation about Lodovico" indicate indecency. Iago is only a living manifestation of the lascivious urges of other characters. Cassio's affair with Bianca is essentially sexual. Jardine (1989) in "Still Harping on Daughters" (p. 119) considers that Desdemona's 'shrewdness' is not compatible with the innocence audience associate with her: "There is something too-knowing, too-independent about her tone and ready reply" and judges Desdemona of vulgarity in her 'hackchat' (p. 120). She interprets Iago's metaphor about the tongue as a "specifically female sexual instrument", so that "active use

of the female tongue equals female sexuality which equals female penis" (p. 121). Iago imagines sexual act with Desdemona (III. 3. 419-32) mixing hate with sexual desire.

Shakespeare makes Iago a deep study in sexual psychology. His sexual jealousy springs from the original cause of tragedy – Othello's mistrust of Desdemona. He, enigmatically, magnifies the evil that causes the tragic act. In him, Shakespeare creates a conundrum for the discerning audience, for major characters share Iago's sexual urges, as he reflects their impulses, playing a scapegoat whose slaughter atones the rest. Sexuality is paradigmatic for all the characters, and Iago only shares good characters' flaw. Sexual vocabulary may reveal Iago's own bottled-up sexuality (2.2. 112), but while his repressed sexuality is expressed, that of Othello, Cassio, and Desdemona is veiled.

Iago is not a shallow comic character, or a flat egotistical psychopath. Shakespeare crafted Iago with all the knowledge of psychology available to him to make his audience understand and experience Iago's stance. As Maguire (2014) explains, "Othello turns Theory of Mind into plot. ... The entire play is structured round Iago's ability to manipulate Theory of Mind – and Othello's inability (p. 30). "Iago's space is the liminal. He is and is not in love with Desdemona" (p. 38). In Othello's source, Cinthio story, Iago's love for Desdemona is the real reason for his villainy. Iago seems to have been "honest" and noble, with no problem before play opens. It is only when Desdemona's marriage is to be consummated on her wedding night that Iago bursts into sexual abuse create enough uproar to disturb the marital relation (Wangh, 1950, p. 204). That there is a triangle with Desdemona as the object of Iago's affection is confirmed by Iago's persistence to know if the marriage had been consummated (…). His jealousy is centred on Desdemona and not on Emilia, his own wife. Wangh thinks that Iago's jealousy in simply an instance of "competitive jealousy" is rooted in oedipal impulses with Othello being "a paternal authority" for him, therefore Desdemona's wedding night awakened the Oedipal conflict in Iago (Wangh, 1950, p. 206). Sadowski (2020), proposes that Iago did not want Desdemona's death and suggested poison or strangulation because that would have given Othello enough time to reconsider his intention or for people to stop the act. His logic is clear, "Iago not only gains nothing from her death but, through the undoing of Othello following possible domestic homicide, he stands to lose what he has achieved. For the pragmatic and

calculating Iago killing Desdemona is simply illogical and counterproductive" (Sadowski, 2020, p. 8–9).

The drama is replete with his sexually charged comments. Iago's repressed sexuality is revealed in the way he desired to have Desdemona's handkerchief, which not only symbolises her chastity and her bond to Othello, but also serves as a fetish on which sexual desires are fixated (Wangh, 1950, p. 212). Why he desired to have the handkerchief, asking his wife to get it so many times long before it actually became important for the plot is the hidden clue Shakespeare left us. Iago could be a pervert desiring the handkerchief as a substitute for what he could not possess. His voyeuristic narration of sex with Desdemona (Act III, Sc. 3, 419 -32) reveals not just his own lust and how she could be unchaste, but also his greatest fear – his own wife's unchastity. Fear of cuckoldry infects both Othello and Iago. Both suspect Desdemona of infidelity, but only Othello's torments have been foregrounded. Iago's torments that went into the making of his character are only suggested.

Context and clustering of dialogues shows a uniformity of purposes across the text. A selective clustering of Iago's lines about Desdemona and Othello's love suggest that he hoped that she would soon get bored with Othello. Iago's love for Desdemona has been clearly stated in 2.1.270-274. Just when Iago thinks of Othello's constant love for Desdemona, he reveals his own romantic feelings for her. The key phrase "Not out of absolute lust" emphasizes a platonic romantic love, which is surprising because romantic love seems so impossible for the misogynist that Iago tries to prove himself. His misogynistic comments "... you are pictures out of doors, belles in your parlours, wildcats in your kitchens, saints in your injuries, devils being offended, players in your housewifery, and housewives in your beds" (2.1.109-110) sound much like Hamlet's remarks to Ophelia in the nunnery scene (3.1). Suggestions have been made that Iago wanted the couple separated because of his homosexual love for Othello (Copas, 2006), but the fact that Shakespeare made Iago clearly state his love for Desdemona is often neglected. So is neglected the fact that Shakespeare's source for Othello was Cinthio's tale in which "the wicked Ensign... fell ardently in love with Disdemona" (Shakespeare & Sanders, 2003, p. 106). In Cinthio's story Iago is a handsome fellow whose love for Desdemona turns to hate when she pays no attention to him (Potter, 2014; Williams, 2006).

Conclusion

Shakespeare uses many techniques to elevate Iago to be a worthy antagonist. It is a part of Shakespeare's tragedizing Iago that he is not only considered honest but also worthy of frank social intercourse with upper class women. Act II, Sc. 1 shows Iago and Desdemona involved in a battle of wits at the port in Cyprus. Although audience mistake this scene as comic relief, its stress on Iago's sexual domination is obvious as in the accusation: "You rise to play and go to bed to work" (2.1.114) or "She that in wisdom never was so frail" (2.1.151). The sexual metaphors are too explicit not to be mistaken for lewdness, as in "To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail; / To suckle fools and chronicle small beer". Such innuendos become verbal expressions for sexual ability. Zender (1994) points out: "Throughout the romantic comedies, Shakespeare links the maturation of the romantic hero … toward a capacity for conjugal love with his becoming verbally fluent." (p. 328). The battle of wits can be taken as a mock sexual assault reminding Desdemona that unchastity is a norm. In this verbal battle, in which Desdemona accepted Iago's onslaughts suggests that Desdemona found Iago to be suitable for such a battle of wits which in any comedy would have suggested a sexual offering and deferment as between Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Viewed critically, lust and misogyny emerge as dominant themes in *Othello*. Contempt is what Othello and Cassio reveal in their treatment of women. If the sentiments in Iago's dialogues reveal misogyny, he only mirrors what the *good* characters suffer from. Othello's perverse sexual passions and repression are revealed in the torments that he thinks he would wreak on Desdemona.

Shakespeare's dramatic techniques prompt us to question why Iago is labelled a villain while Othello and Cassio are viewed as good characters. Shakespeare's inversion of the paradigm problematises the relative concepts of heroism and villainy, as well as of goodness and evil. Iago *villainously* reflects the evil traits Othello and Cassio present. He is the tragic scapegoat, much in the tradition of Shylock, who purifies the guilt of the society; his arrest symbolises the societal control of the unbridled energy of the renaissance man, necessary to restore order.

Iago represents the human potential that gets wasted. He is tragedized in the potential he possessed and qualities he displayed which did not bloom

to perfection. In a play where the hero's only attribute is his status as a respected general who ultimately suffers so much that he kills his wife, Iago stands as an epitome of human potential. Shakespeare gave him more soliloquies than the speeches given to Othello, giving him greater depth than Othello could ever possess. The moral and psychological dilemmas Iago stands for are alien to the hero of the play. Neither Othello nor Cassio could rise to the potential that could flower in Iago. He ends the play refusing to speak: "Demand me nothing: what you know, you know." (5. 2. 300). To truly understand him, we must consider his character before the play begins. His tragedy lies in his inability to fully know why he acts the way he does; and what he knows of his repressed sexuality is something he refuses to reveal. Looked at from this perspective, Iago represents the potential that could not flourish. A successful soldier refused promotion, an eloquent courtier denied his prize, an 'honest' person stooping to duplicity, Iago demands to be studied in the light of the principles that critics use to describe Shylock as tragic character. In conclusion, tragic villain is a tour de force of dramatic craft. No simple painful back-story, no melodramatic scenes of torture or sardonic humour can qualify a character to be tragic. Meticulous dramatic techniques involving the audience to follow the villains' lines of thought and share their experiences can make possible the tragedisation of a criminal character.

Conflict of Interest

The author of the manuscript has no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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