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Shakespeare's Evil: From Vice to Villain

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis serves as an investigation of the Elizabethan villain and the ways this character contributes to the ongoing dialogue concerning morality. Through the examination of the evolution of evil, villainy, and morality via Shakespeare's villains Richard and Iago, one can conclude that Shakespeare's contribution to the discussion of evil, which still goes on today, is that evil is a part of human nature. Not only are his villains humorous and entertaining, but Richard and Iago are relatable, pitiful, and raise questions about the evil inherent in human nature. These characters challenge the way Renaissance audiences habitually thought about right and wrong because Richard and Iago represent the best and worst of society. They are intelligent, brave, and demonstrate rhetorical sophistication unparalleled, but they are also ruthless, violent, and manipulative. Because Shakespeare's villains embody both good and evil, they are a contradiction, an oxymoron, a reflective pool by which we can see our true selves. These characters reflect the past medieval vice and prepare drama for the hero-villains of the Romantics. It is because of their complexity that Richard and Iago are able to pose some important questions: is it ever morally justifiable to use evil to accomplish a goal? What happens to a person when he pretends to be something he is not? And finally, why is evil so attractive? This last question is arguably the most important question as it serves as the fuel for this study. What is it about the villain, the character who chooses to enact evil, which makes him not only attractive to the other characters in the play but to the audience as well?

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During the Renaissance, characterized as a time of great change, England's notions of good, evil, morality, spirituality, politics, and humanity's place in the universe were challenged by many events ranging from the religious unrest of the Protestant Reformation to the political implications of Machiavelli's *The Prince* and were portrayed and staged effectively by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. Bernard Spivack supports the assertion that their villains are "political and social," as they reflect "the ideological conflict of the Reformation" and embody the turbulence of the Elizabethan age as outlined by E.M.W. Tillyard (47). Arnold Kettle adds that "the nature and value of Shakespeare's work is inseparable from the myriad human developments— social, artistic, political, religious, scientific—of this time, and that it was they that made Shakespeare possible" (12). When studying Shakespeare's works, it is impossible to separate the context in which these plays were written from the plays themselves. One cannot take a single perspective to Shakespeare's works and expect to reveal the depth of his art. Analyzing Shakespeare through either the lens of the literature alone or the history alone is shallow. The literature and the history inform each other and through the analysis of both, one can perceive a fuller picture of Elizabethan theater and its implications and impact on future works. Without the context, Shakespeare's preoccupations could potentially go unnoticed. One such preoccupation was with "the darker side of the human psyche" (Smith 11).

In the course of this time of great change is the emergence of a new concept of evil. Through their villains, Shakespeare and Marlowe explore the nature of evil, and question the medieval perspective of morality. This played a vital role in the evil's evolution that would turn the vice into a villain, and the villain into a hero and inspire such Romantic Rebels as Milton's Satan, Byron's Manfred, and Shelley's Prometheus. E. M. W. Tillyard, in "The Elizabethan World Picture," notes a similar relationship between these literary eras: "Indeed from Augustine

himself through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, through the Elizabethans to Donne and Milton, the old arguments persisted” (5). These arguments continue as each era grapples with similar questions, volunteering possible perspectives that challenge previous notions and continue the evolution of evil.

These arguments emerge through the villains as they “deconstruct all morality as they raise rather than answer questions” (Smith 62). Through the exploration and investigation of the villain’s development spanning from the medieval morality plays through the Elizabethan stage to Early Modern and Romantic poetry, one can perceive the evolution of evil from being an external force to an internal battle within man’s own heart. Not only does evil’s location and habitation change as it evolves, but its essence also changes. During the medieval period, good and evil were clearly defined and humanity accepted a definite and distinct set of boundaries. However, as times changed and evil evolved, what was once clear, rigid, and definite became relative. Shakespeare’s Richard III and Iago are two representatives of this change because they challenge the traditional social mores and inspire a new kind of villain, the hero-villain. Through the analysis of these characters, readers can gain a perspective on the way Renaissance England came to define evil and used evil to question the world they lived in. Without these Elizabethan villains as the root, the Romantic Hero would not have grown and gained the popularity it did.

Throughout history, humanity’s concept of evil has been a moral imperative that constantly shifts and evolves. It is for this reason that the literary villain, specifically the Elizabethan villain, is worthy of critical attention and scholarly note, for scholars, students, and critics alike can gain a broad understanding of the way any literary time period perceives such topics as evil, good, morality, divine order, and fate simply by noting the actions of this distinct

character on the stage. In order to appreciate fully the way this character has evolved it is necessary to identify the ways in which the villain differs from the antagonist.

The antagonist is generally understood to be a character, a human being or a personification that is opposed to the protagonist, causing the conflict that the story expresses. This character is one-dimensional, without emotional depth, or, as the Oxford English Dictionary states, the antagonist is simply “an impersonal agent acting in opposition.” The villain, on the other hand, is perhaps the antagonist of the antagonist. This character has the emotional depth that the antagonist lacks. In no way is the villain impersonal. Rather, the villain is more approachable, for he is a human being, reflecting the good and the evil in human nature, not merely a personification of an abstract idea. Fostering an intimate relationship with the audience, the villain is able to manipulate other characters and the audience alike. This charismatic power of manipulation is perhaps the key characteristic difference between the mere antagonist and the villain. Even Shakespeare’s villains themselves understood that there were certain traits and characteristics that were distinctly “villainish” which distinguished them from antagonists.

Molly Smith, author of The Darker World Within, dedicates much of her introduction to the dramatic fascination with evil and attempts to define evil using the OED but finds that it is “an obsolete word, no longer used in its strong sense to indicate intense villainy” and adds that the term lost its meaning and “went into obscurity sometime in the seventeenth century” (14). She suggests “that the very elimination of evil...indicates the potency of the phenomenon of evil in post-seventeenth century society” because Shakespeare, one of the more prominent writers of that time “concerned [himself] overtly and almost exclusively with exploring the phenomenon of evil among men” (14). It is for this reason that it is vital to critically consider Shakespeare’s villains, who tackle these obscurities of human evil in a way no other play writer had yet to do.

Though Marlowe suggests that evil and hell are mental states, Shakespeare thoroughly explores the presence of evil within man's nature through the villain, an entirely new character.

Because they were free of the chains of religious and social expectations, the villains were able to pose questions about which society was concerned. For the purpose of this study, the main concerns involve the attractive and enticing nature of evil and the implications this has on human nature. Is the audience seduced and ensnared by the villain in the same way other characters are and for the same reason? What does Shakespeare contribute to the discussion of morality through his villains? Finally, how do Shakespeare's villains inspire future artists and poets to present their villains as heroes?

On the medieval stage, evil existed as the Vice, a one-dimensional character who represents an array of sins and is easily identifiable as the antagonist. Bernard Spivack speaks to the structure of a medieval plays and considers it a formula "of allegory, and especially that central type of Christian allegory known as the Psychomachia, in which personified forces of good and evil contend for possession of the human soul" (56). A simple example would be the play *Mankind*. In this play, the character Mankind, an empty vessel waiting to be filled by good or evil, represents the human race. In these plays, the Vices are clearly and obviously evil, sometimes hilariously so. These Vices often personified one of the seven deadly sins: pride, gluttony, greed, lust, sloth, wrath, and envy. Spicack explains that it "was out of medieval allegory came the morality play, which for two centuries provided a type of drama whose purpose and method were homiletic, whose structure was schematic and rigid, whose characters for the most part were personified abstractions with names that expressed the motive and predetermined the nature of their actions" (56). As is characteristic of the morality play, the personified Virtue gives the sermon to call Mankind back to Christ and to turn away from Vice.

As Spivack notes, these medieval plays followed the same structure: the Virtue would warn Mankind about the Vices and the Vice would tempt Mankind away from the godly path. Then, Mankind would stray from God's grace and the Virtues would have to find him and bring him back, chasing away the Vices forever. Once Mankind is saved, the Virtues would call the audience back to God's grace.

Though these plays must have been wildly entertaining, as the Vice characters tend to be very humorous, the way they represent mankind is hollow. Never does the representation of humankind experience a true internal, soulful conflict, and it is for this reason that the character loses the audience's interests and does not teach any lesson other than "be good." In fact, these morality plays become repetitive and as the times begin to shift, the Vice, though still entertaining and more memorable than the Virtue and the representation of man, lost its ability to relate to the audience and no longer effectively represented the issues of the time. Specifically, one doctrinal belief that was held by the Medieval society that lost its ability to connect with audiences was mankind's emotional connection to physical actions. In "The Elizabethan World Picture," Tillyard explains the belief, being that a good man who did good deeds would be happy, but a bad man, who did bad deeds, even if he were successful in his bad deeds, would be unhappy. This belief dictated the themes in the medieval morality plays, but there are people in the world who succeed in doing evil and are happy. This connection between the physical and the emotional is not accurate. In order to challenge his audience intellectually and morally, the Vice character and the medieval morality play itself needed to evolve.

As the theater began to change, mankind's preoccupation and morbid fascination with evil and its sublime nature did not. Tillyard notes that even in the Middle Ages, "the part of Christianity that was paramount" and continued into the Renaissance was "the revolt of the bad

angels, ...[and] the temptation and fall of man” (18). In the Middle Ages, mankind had a fixation on evil and it was important that the theaters represented this topic in an accessible way. Though few other elements of the medieval theatre bled into the Elizabethan Era, these elements changed and became “precarious” as Tillyard calls it because of the influence of Niccolo Machiavelli. In his philosophy, Machiavelli was repulsed by “the idea of a universe divinely ordered throughout,” which implies a rejection of England’s traditional notion of kingship and the divine right to rule (Tillyard 8). Instead, humanity ought to take their futures into their own hands. In his book The English Face of Machiavelli, Felix Raab explains that Machiavelli perceived politics in “a purely secular context... something to be deigned and judged in a sphere separate from that of theology” (41). However, this belief was in complete opposition to the Elizabethan belief in cosmic order and was therefore shocking. Raab suggests that Machiavelli was accessible and read by Elizabethans. He claims “Machiavelli was being quite widely read in England and was no longer the sole preserve of ‘Italianate’ Englishmen and their personal contacts, as had been the case earlier” (53). It follows that the audience would have noted the Machiavellian influence in Shakespeare’s play even if they had not read Machiavelli’s works themselves.

Raab explains that the stage Machiavel not only horrified audiences but also “instructed them, entertained them— in fact he affected them over the whole attraction/ repulsion spectrum through which new concepts are often seen in times of rapid social change” (67). Shakespeare’s time period was one such period and England was experiencing a shift in the way men perceived the world. *Richard III*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* all share an undercurrent of the Machiavellian philosophy as each villain is birthed in a time of sudden social change. These characters become stage Machiavels. Richard proves himself ruthless, unyielding, cunning, and a breathing danger

to the state and divine order. Macbeth, though unsure of himself, abides by the phrase “The ends justify the means,” and commits himself to any action that will guarantee him the crown. Much like Satan from Christian tradition, Claudius will “lie, cheat, kill, and destroy” and justify his behavior to the audience (John 10:10). In Act Two, Scene One, Lines 1-25 of *Hamlet*, Claudius opens with a Machiavellian explanation. He explains that he mourns his brother while still thinking about himself, which explains his reasons for marrying the Queen, so that he can ensure the power of King. His actions are purely for political gain, not rooted in revenge, and Claudius will continue to take action that will protect his throne. Smith explains that Claudius is “indefatigable in the exercise of his wits, as his repeated plans to be rid of Hamlet reveal, but he functions as a purely Machiavellian melancholic, seeking not to avenge a wrong done against him but to preserve his state and reputation” (61). According to Machiavelli, this behavior is not only acceptable, it is praiseworthy and essential in a good leader. This is a political danger, but it is also a spiritual threat, for Machiavelli’s vision “was fundamentally irreconcilable with the traditional theological view of the universe” and therefore could not prove to be successful on the Elizabethan stage (Raab 69).

Bent on political gain, these Machiavels inherited the characteristics of the medieval Vice and ultimately destroyed themselves. The complexities of these characters, however, related to the social, spiritual, and political unrest in England and left audiences with more questions than answers. Raab closes his study by explaining that “the story of Machiavelli... is the story of an emerging consciousness of politics as a self-sufficient area of human activity, with the corollary of political aims defined in exclusively human terms,” even though it stood in stark contrast to Christian ideals (257). Shakespeare’s villains, like Machiavelli, portray a self-sufficient consciousness that promotes evil actions that conflict with good, Christian beliefs. Just as many

rejected the ideas of Machiavelli, Shakespeare's audience rejected the villains for they neglected and abused the divine order that Tillyard describes. Shakespeare's villains challenge all previous notions of the Elizabethan audience in much the same way Machiavelli did, even if the audience never read Machiavelli themselves.

Picking up where the medieval morality playwrights left off, Shakespeare took the Vice character and breathed new life into him, human life, that is, in order to relate to contemporary audiences. It is probable that Shakespeare could have seen such plays in his Stratford youth for it is clear that he employs some medieval methods in his writing. Through the investigation of Shakespeare's plays, one can observe that Shakespeare routinely employs his villains to explore what humanity can know about evil in much the same way the Vice character did; however, Shakespeare adds to the complexity of this character by endowing him with conscience and other virtues, blurring the line between good and evil. These characters are no longer one-dimensional vice figures that are obviously evil. Instead, Shakespeare bestows vice-like qualities within a human, thus adding to the evolution of evil as Shakespeare portrays the villain as having potential for both good and evil because that is the state of mankind: somewhere between good and evil. Molly Smith quotes Carl G. Jung, noting that "the work of the poet comes to meet the spiritual need of the society in which he lives" (171). Shakespeare represents the world he lives in by creating a new, dramatic space to stage the battle between good and evil in man's soul and to discuss what happens should evil prevail.

Shakespeare's villains captivated the Elizabethan audience and still captivate audiences today. These characters are irresistible to the audience because they are a reflection of the human audience, an embodiment of every human characteristic and entirely relatable. However, Shakespeare had to be very careful about how accessible his villains could be; otherwise, they

would cease to be villains and would not have the same effect on the audience. As he created his villains to be something more than the antagonist and the vice, Shakespeare had to have the right balance of redeemable and irredeemable qualities. The characters had to be morally and emotionally accessible, but they also could not be forgivable nor their actions permissible. If the audience sympathized too much with the character, he would cease to be a villain and become the unintended hero. Ironically, this is exactly what occurs in the next step of the villain's evolution— he becomes a heroic character rather than an evil character. In the same sense, Shakespeare could not make his villain too evil because audiences would immediately write him off and not give the character the attention Shakespeare wanted. Attending and noting the Shakespearean villain is an experience that challenges all viewers to evaluate their moral sympathies and their human natures. It speaks to Shakespeare's genius that readers and viewers can experience this phenomenon today.

In order to explore fully the evolution of the Villain from Medieval to Renaissance times, and to illustrate how Shakespeare effectively constructs his villains to address the changes in morality, it is important to complete a close critical reading of his plays and understand some key beliefs that Elizabethans held. Through this, one might have a better understanding of the impact Shakespeare's villains have on the Elizabethan audience and the way in which Shakespeare's plays influence and were influenced by the social current of the age. The difficulty that such a project entails is that though one can attempt "to define [Elizabethan's] attitudes and explain their reactions to specific plays" using a historical lens, one cannot "pretend to recreate and share their experience of Shakespeare. We cannot critically approach Shakespeare from the same point of view as that of the Elizabethans," and Richard Weimann suggests that one should not attempt to for "the experience of works of art is so essential and so organic a part of a man's human

needs and social nature, that we cannot and ought not to attempt to become a different being when watching Shakespeare's dramas" (19). Such is the battle between a historical reading of Shakespeare and a literary one. Neither perspective singularly captures what makes Shakespeare timeless, rather both are needed to conclude, as Ben Jonson did, "that Shakespeare was not of an age, but for all time" (Kettle 19).

Though it is arguable that Christopher Marlowe can be credited as the first playwright to construct a character who was fully human and fully evil, William Shakespeare took Marlowe's technique and perfected it on stage. Irving Ribner, author of "*Richard III as an English History Play*," notes that Shakespeare's Richard "continues in the line of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, for the theme...is that of the steady rise of a dominant personality. In Marlowe's play the expanding hero embodies a philosophy of life of which the author approves; in Shakespeare's it is a force of evil which he allows the audience to view with a horrified fascination" (Richmond 59). The only difference is that Shakespeare writes destruction into the life of his hero-villain whereas Marlowe allows his hero-villain to triumph. Ribner calls Richard "a symbol of Renaissance aspiring will" that stands "in opposition to the mediaeval world of order" and for this reason Richard must catch himself in his own web and be destroyed (Richmond 59). It is precisely because Shakespeare's villains do not represent abstract ideologies and instead represent the everyday man, his plays are staged, attended, read, and discussed today.

In his preface, E.M.W. Tillyard explains that there were certain characteristic beliefs of the Elizabethan Age that affected the way an Elizabethan audience would receive Shakespeare's plays. One of these beliefs was in divine and cosmic order. Tillyard explains that "this idea of cosmic order was one of the genuine ruling ideas of the age, and perhaps the most characteristic" because Elizabethans believed that God placed an order among his creation and it was because of

this order that stability was maintained socially, politically, economically, and spiritually (vii.) Without order, nothing remained. This order was “common to all Elizabethans of even modest intelligence” (Tillyard 12). In his essay “Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise,” Siegel adds to Tillyard’s discussion of the Elizabethan social structure that “an integrated hierarchy which reflected the cosmological order and the psychological state of man” was the source of the world’s harmony (45). Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* provides an illustration of a healthy, orderly kingdom that follows divine order. During a truce with the French, Talbot receives a reward from Henry and his response is in accordance with the Elizabethan preoccupation with order. First, Talbot glorifies God and then he glorifies his King. If he were to glorify his King first, then Talbot would be responsible for introducing disorder into the kingdom.

Disorder and the cosmic constitution of order was not only deeply examined by Shakespeare in his tragedies, but was a topic that all Elizabethans would have understood. Specifically, Shakespeare’s audience feared disorder, or anything that threatened order, greatly. Who caused this disorder? The villains, of course, and Spivack explains that all of Shakespeare’s villains, ranging from Aaron, Richard, Don John, Iago, and Shylock are artists in their villainy and their “purpose on the stage is to display [their] talent triumphantly at work against the affections, duties, and pieties which create the order and harmony of human society” (47). Each villain in the tragedies works to upset the established harmony, for the audience would have believed that “human behavior on every level of life and in every kind of relationship receives its moral definition from its adherence or lack of adherence to the spiritual harmony and order of the universe” (Spivack 48). The villain’s objective, then, was to “violate the nature of man, the nature of society, the nature of the universe” which, as Tillyard would agree, was immensely

important to Elizabethan England (49). Such is the crime of Richard and Iago. Richard violates the natural laws that governed England and maintained cosmic order by deposing his brother which “destroys the harmony of the social order” (Siegel 50).

The period in which Shakespeare wrote has been called “a no-man’s-land between two historical epochs that we call the feudal and the capitalist” by V. G. Kiernan in his essay “Human Relationships in Shakespeare” (Kettle 43). He considers this time a “no-man’s-land” because England was in a transition between the neglecting of medieval habits and the forming of new ones such as the humanist mindset. Under this view, artists were free to question the value and meaning behind the chain of order as described by Tillyard. Specifically, Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus* consider “man’s capacity for self-determining action,” which in effect is what the new humanist view embodied” (Kettle 32). The humanist perspective circles around “an evolving outlook which has development with man’s increasing knowledge and control of the world he lives in and hence his own destinies” (Kettle 11). It follows, then, that Shakespeare’s villains would embody a humanist mindset for they, too, question divine order and value knowledge of the self. As the period shifted towards this view, though it should be clear that the Elizabethans were in the middle of this shift and still firmly believed in divine order as described by Tillyard, a new type of villain emerged— the Machiavel, a “self-proclaimed villain emancipated from all the bonds of conventional virtue” (Kettle 46). Inspired by Machiavelli, the dramatic Machiavel found its way on stage through Shakespeare’s Richard III and Iago, and Marlowe’s Barabas in *The Jew of Malta*.

In holding with the conflicting historical versus humanist perspective of analyzing Shakespeare, J. K. Walton, author of “*Macbeth*,” suggests that Shakespeare writes tragedies that embody the “conflict between feudal and bourgeois ideas” but more importantly “has a relevance

to the historical development of Britain as a whole” (Kettle 122). As previously noted, there was a gradual shift in perspective during Shakespeare’s time and he faced a critical obstacle when writing about contemporary issues—Shakespeare had to reflect all of the ideals of England. This meant that medieval and humanist perspectives would be on stage simultaneously. Shakespeare could not allow himself to fall into the dramaturgy of the medieval morality play, and he could not make his villains so evil that they become the vice and his heroes so good that they only serve as static examples of virtue. If the audience could easily and immediately identify the villain, then they could potentially dismiss the villain without considering the issue the villain represented. Such a vice-villain was useless to Shakespeare for he sought to portray mankind as he really was—a contradiction. In his introduction, Arnold Kettle notes that “no other literature can help us more than Shakespeare’s plays to see ourselves as we are” (9). In a similar fashion, Shakespeare demonstrates “the glory of creation and the havoc sin made of it” (Tillyard 23) through his villains and tragic heroes. Shakespeare’s genius for contradiction and duality distinguishes his writing as he effectively portrays the best and the worst in mankind and the consequence of human nature. Spivack describes Shakespeare’s villains as “dramatic portraits in imitation of the universal convention of human life” and that without these villains “history itself would be unintelligible” because even though the villains are clearly from “sixteenth-century Elizabethan” England, these characters and their “actions exist wholly within the ambit of those timeless and ubiquitous forces that shape the behavior of men on any street, or in the plot of any play” (38). Siegel adds that each Shakespearean tragedy “has features reminiscent of Elizabethan England, thus inviting the audience to think of the events of its own day as illustrating the eternal nature of man” (88). Though Shakespeare wrote purposely to satisfy “the tastes, attitudes, and expectations” of his audience based upon the Elizabethan social system, one finds that his

conflicts, themes, and characters are contemporary and current (vii). One example that is rooted in the Elizabethan time and reflects the issues of society today is *Richard III*.

It has been said that Shakespeare's *Richard III* is similar to the Medieval Morality play, for Richard resembles the Vice in many ways. It is true that Richard dominates the play as he is both the protagonist and antagonist. He is charismatic and full of anger. However, Richard has more depth than the medieval vice and reveals the psychology behind evil in a way that allegory never could. Though an audience enjoyed the Vice character, who was more of a humorous clown figure than a personification of sin, Richard provides a grotesque fascination through his emotional manipulation, charged rhetoric, and malevolent behavior. His actions captivate the audience and even makes one sympathize with his villainy in such a way that one becomes a co-villain and celebrates his victories with him. At the very least, find oneself charmed by his charisma and impressed with his rational planning. At the very most, one cheers for Richard and subconsciously aligns oneself with him in hopes that he succeeds in his endeavors, which is a truly Romantic notion.

This dynamic relationship occurs on more than one occasion in the play, but it first occurs in the opening Act where Richard delivers his first soliloquy, "Now is the winter of our discontent." Here, Richard's motivation and rhetoric not only captivate the audience but also show his evolution from the Vice. As one listens to Richard, one finds that he has laid his plots because he is bored. Since he cannot prove a lover or a fighter, he has decided that he will pass the time by winning himself a kingdom. This notion is very vice-like because it seems as though he is doing evil for the sake of evil. But Richard shows a human consciousness when he expresses a sadness that he is "not shaped for sportive tricks,/Not made to court an amorous looking glass" for he is "rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty/To strut before a wanton

ambling nymph (I.i.14-17). It is for this reason that he is at first worthy of the audience's sympathy, and one feels as though one can understand him for he says, "Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,/ Have no delight to pass away the time,/ Unless to spy my shadow in the sun/ And descant on mine own deformity" (I.i.24-27). Richard's words play at the audience's heartstrings and he manipulates one into feeling sorrow for his present state, which is one's first experience with Richard's emotional manipulation.

From this first disclosure, it is clear that Richard is not a purely allegorical figure; he has a depth and dimension that adds to the conversation about evil and morality. From his soliloquy in the preceding play, *Henry VI Part Three*, Richard "already established himself as the cynical villain-hero who would 'set the murderous Machiavel to school,' advancing through villainy after villainy until he seized the crown" (Richmond 59). Through Richard, Shakespeare demonstrates the relativity of evil, evil that can no longer be easily identified. Indeed, Richard fools many of the characters in the play for he will "seem a saint, when most [he plays] the Devil" (I.iii.339). What helps him to play the saint is his use of emotional and sympathetic rhetoric in order to manipulate a character's perspective of him. For example, he considers himself "Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,/ Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time/ Into this breathing world, scarce half made up" which stirs sympathy in the audience (I.i.19-21). It is his language, his rhetoric, that captivates the audience because one can feel his pain and anger against his God-given state in his words.

Through Richard's own emotional soliloquy, one learns that he wants what every human wants: to be loved. One also learns that he has not found love and feels alienated, so much so that dogs bark at him as he walks by. This is something no person desires for himself or herself and it is here, in his first soliloquy, less than thirty lines into the play, that audiences may feel the

beginning pangs of pity for Richard because one can relate to him; Richard's emotions are accessible to audiences because all humans have felt inadequate at one time or another. The difference is the *way* he is able to relay his feelings that wins the audience's sympathy and, in a way, the audience's understanding of why he is about to do immoral things. He explains, "Since I cannot prove a lover...I am determined to prove a villain" (I.i.28, 30). In this way, Richard serves as an example of the maturation of the medieval vice, for Richard introduces a relatable and pitiful evil. His logic, as expressed in these lines, is simple: because he is not attractive, he will be the villain. In his words, Richard shows that he is not at all like the medieval Vice because the Vice does not justify his malevolence. Richard, on the other hand, demands sympathy and has laid plots because he feels that life has wronged him. Just as the charismatic and emotional Richard captivates contemporary readers, so he would have also captivated Shakespeare's audience. But is it moral to sympathize with a villain?

This question would have challenged Shakespeare's audience; indeed, it challenges everyone, for one knows that evil should not be championed in the way the Romantics would have championed evil, yet one cannot help one's sympathetic feelings towards Richard. Thus, Shakespeare introduces an evil that is relative. Because of this shift in the perception of morality, good, and evil, Shakespeare demonstrates that the once-clear and definite line between good and evil, right and wrong, is blurred in Richard, who chooses to be evil to find revenge against nature, and prepares the literary pathway for the Romantics who would alter the perception of evil completely. Through Richard, Shakespeare presents his audience with a different side of evil that does not force itself upon humankind; rather, he teaches that evil is something already living in each human being, waiting for the will to call it into action. This idea would not have been foreign to Shakespeare's audience, as they would have noticed the undertones of another type of

evil that existed during the Renaissance through the publication of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. Even if audiences had not read Machiavelli themselves, they still would have noticed similarities between Shakespeare's Richard and Marlowe's Barabas. However, where Barabas spends his time walking abroad at night, poisoning wells, killing friends and enemies while making money, Richard demonstrates a conscience behind his villainy. Barabas commits evil actions for the sake of being a villain, making him too grotesque to be redeemable or relatable to audiences. Richard, on the other hand, wins the audience's sympathy first and then commits villainy.

As previously noted, Richard has laid plots and his motivation is fueled by hatred and political ambition. Richard will annihilate those who make him feel inadequate, yet it is important to note that Richard, as contrasted with Barabas, is not wasteful with blood-spilling. Richard kills his only brothers, nephews, Buckingham, and Lady Anne because they all pose a threat to his plan, yet he never kills Queen Margaret who knows Richard for what he really is, evil. She warns Lord Rivers and Lord Grey that Richard is "a man that loves not me, nor none of you" and has "taunted, scorn'd, and baited" her for years (I.iii.13, 109). In conversation with Richard, who carefully plays his part, Queen Elizabeth says: "Come, come, we know your meaning, brother Gloucester;/ You envy my advancement and my friends':/ God grant we never may have need of you!" (I.iii.74-76). Queen Elizabeth's words show her distaste for Richard but also speak to her awareness of the danger Richard poses to her family, and yet Richard does not kill her. Instead, he has her people killed. One would think that Richard would be smart to rid himself of the character who can see through his façade, yet he does not touch her. Instead, he takes away her husband and her children, leaving her to watch in horror because she is powerless against him. Richard only murders when it is absolutely necessary, and when it is not necessary,

Richard spends his time manipulating the people around him, a political tactic praised by Machiavelli.

In this conversation between Queen Elizabeth and Richard, one can observe a conflict that is Elizabethan, distinct to that social structure and political atmosphere, yet has relativity to contemporary political issues. Molly Smith claims that “the devaluation of patriarchy” demonstrated in the play reflect “the radical changes in society that were taking place during this century” (101). These changes, as Siegel explains, included the shift of power that occurred in Elizabeth’s court: “In 1591 Elizabeth’s council and court were undergoing an ever-increasing change. Leicester , Sidney, and Walsingham were dead. Their successors, Essex and Raleigh, sensing an alteration of the balance of forces, oscillated politically” (36). Such is the setting of *Richard III*. Queen Elizabeth has lost all political control, and the turbulence from the shifting of political forces leaves her without the power to find stability. Without an understanding of “the relationship between drama and society,” one might miss the significance such a play as this would have on an Elizabethan audience or the reason why the character of Queen Elizabeth is beside herself in grief, anxiety, and anger (Smith 101). Richard, who continually manipulates those around him and is the source of this political turmoil, highlights this political conflict. He is the embodiment of political evil, an evil that the Shakespearean audience would have understood and feared, yet Richard puts a sympathetic face on his evil actions, making his evil relative.

If one was not already aware of Richard’s act of playing the Devil while seeming a Saint, perhaps one would have been fooled to think that Richard were greatly affected by Clarence’s arrest because he swears that “[his] imprisonment shall not be long;/ [he] will deliver [him], or else lie for [him]” (I.i.114-5). Clarence, unfortunately, firmly believes in Richard’s goodness and that “this deep disgrace in brotherhood/ Touches [Richard] deeper than you can imagine”

(I.i.111-112). Even when the murderers come to kill him, Clarence will not believe anything but the best of Richard. As Clarence is taken away, Richard turns to the audience and exclaims that Clarence is “treat[ing] the path that [he] shalt ne’er return” and that he will “shortly send [his] soul to heaven” (I.i.118-120). This event, besides showing us Richard’s violence and ruthlessness, demonstrates how effectively Richard has played his part. To ensure that we are not fooled by this mask he wears so well, Richard often turns to the audience in soliloquy to remind us that he is acting.

Here, one is reminded that Richard is acting and working to maintain a fake appearance in front of Clarence, an act that the medieval vice never committed to. After listening to a heart-felt lie, one is perhaps jolted by the cruelty of Richard’s true feelings and is reminded that evil can wear a mask to seem good. Though one may have secretly sympathized with Richard in Scene One, one’s feelings towards Richard change as he manipulates other characters from behind his mask. As previously explained, Richard does this again with Queen Elizabeth. Though she fully knows that he is a liar and is evil, Richard continues to present himself as something he is not. For instance, when Queen Elizabeth warns her family that Richard has no allegiance to them, Richard turns and bitterly claims that it is “because [he] cannot flatter and speak fair,/ Smile in men’s faces, smooth, deceive and cog,/ Duck with French nods and apish curtesy,/ [he] must be held a rancorous enemy” (I.iii.48-51). The irony is that he is an enemy specifically because he *can* do these things. He can flatter and speak fairly, smile and deceive and will continue to do so for the remainder of the play. For Richard to claim that he cannot do these things is a lie, and his way of pretending to be something he is not. Even when Queen Margaret calls him “[a] murderous villain” and warns Queen Elizabeth of treachery from Richard, he responds that not only is he not interested in the crown: “Far be it from my heart, the

thought of it!” but that political conspiracy is too mentally demanding for him: “I am too child-foolish for this world” (I.iii.134,142,150). Both declarations are lies, but the way he says those words is compelling, and one can see, as Claire McEachern says, the power of rhetoric at work, a rhetoric that might have been at work in the historical Queen Elizabeth’s court. Understanding the way the Elizabethan audience perceived the hierarchical system as outlined by E. M. W. Tillyard, one can appreciate the way Shakespeare presents his villains and representations of evil as a reflection of his audience’s current social state.

It is through this rhetoric that Richard is able to maintain his fake appearance; however, this is not his only use for the façade. Though he does use his mask to maintain his appearance, Richard also uses it to manipulate other characters and to keep his plot moving along. Specifically, Richard uses this mask to manipulate Lady Anne who throws insults at him, calling him a foul devil, unnatural, villain, and minister of hell. These names are true, but Richard responds only with sweet returns, conjuring up fake tears to persuade her of his honesty. In their conversation, Lady Anne appears to have her guard up, and she appears to have her mind made up about Richard after she spits on him, hoping that “it were mortal poison” in their conversation in Act One, Scene Two. However, one cannot help but wonder if she is aware that Richard is attempting to manipulate her, because she says that his “burning poison...[does] infect [her] eyes” (I.ii.145-149). Lady Anne here expresses the sentiment that though she knows that Richard is a villain, the very villain that deprived her of her husband, his words “infect” her ability to perceive him clearly. If she is aware that he is manipulating her, why does she remain in the room listening to Richard? The answer, if there is one, lies in the fact that she cannot see him clearly and Richard uses this to his advantage.

In his analysis of the seduction scene, Spivack explains that Richard's method of wooing Lady Anne reflects the Vice's "spiritual manipulation" of the morality plays where the Vice, "resorting to all his tricks of sophistry and dissimulation, detaches his human dupe from allegiance to virtue and subjugates him to himself and to the sway of evil" (438). In order to persuade Lady Anne to detach herself from her allegiance to her deceased family, Richard cannot win her by flattery alone, but he must place guilt on her for the death of her husband and thus sway her as Spivack describes. He explains to her that he did kill King Henry, "But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me/... 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on" (I.ii.180,283). Winning her attention, Richard makes Anne believe that she bears the responsibility for her husband's death and Richard's misery.

As she quietly listens to him, Lady Anne makes a defeated remark "I would I knew thy heart" (I.ii.202). From her words, it seems as though Lady Anne is aware that Richard may be manipulating her because she knows her value to Richard politically, and she recognizes her inability to see him clearly. When Richard, still acting, responds by saying, "'Tis figured in my tongue," meaning that all he has spoken to her reflects his heart, Lady Anne speaks a profound truth: "I fear that both are false" (I.ii. 203-4). Lady Anne knows that Richard's words and his heart may be false, though "maske[d] in visour faire" but she cannot be sure, and as Richard's manipulation works, Lady Anne covers her hate of her husband's killer with the responsibility of her husband's death. As the manipulative side of evil begins to manifest itself in Richard's rhetoric, Anne's two statements become important because one cannot identify evil or evil's motivation when it is hiding or working "to seeme like Truth"; therefore, one cannot always be on guard against it.

Richard's manipulation of Lady Anne shows his lack of conscience and the extent of his evil. In Scene II, Richard does not even allow Lady Anne to see Edward, her late husband into the ground before he attempts to manipulate her, and yet one might be bothered by her response to Richard's flattery. Though it is understandable why Lady Anne agrees to marry Richard, the real question is why do we allow ourselves to be charmed by Richard? Indeed this question is raised when Richard, again in an aside, turns to the audience and celebrates his accomplishment stating: "Was ever woman in this humor woo'd?/ Was ever woman in this humor won?/ I'll have her; but I will not keep her long" (I.ii.229-231). This is the third soliloquy in which Richard turns to the audience to remind them that his actions are a part of his façade and a part of his plan.

Shakespeare's use of soliloquy has become a dramaturgical trademark because it allows the audience to hear a character's inner thoughts and remain "on unnervingly confidential terms with him" (Bloom 70). The audience takes these soliloquies as absolute truth as the character speaks and discloses important information to form a relationship with the audience. Michael Neill notes that it was from the medieval Vice that the villain inherited the "habit of wooing the audience's sympathy is speeches," and that "formed the dramaturgical basis for the device through which Shakespeare developed his most penetrating psychological insights— the internalized soliloquy" (Neill 127). Harold Bloom would agree with Michael Neill as he states that Richard "makes us all into the Lady Anne," unable to resist the charms of Richard (71). Up to this point, Richard has only used soliloquy to remind the audience of his plots and his mask, and he is not the only Shakespearean character to do this in a historical play. Prince Hal uses soliloquy to remind the audience that he is playing a part by associating with questionable characters, like Falstaff, and that he is using them to make his "transformation" more dramatic. He warns audiences not to believe anything he said or does because he is putting on a show. So it

is with Richard, but it is important to note that Richard forgets about the audience and fails to maintain the connection for a large portion of the play. During this time, one has the opportunity to step away from one's sympathy and view Richard's actions objectively. One finds that Richard is no longer sympathetic, rather one despises him and questions how one could have perceived his desire for revenge from his first soliloquy "Now is the winter of our discontent" as permissible. It is not until Act Five, when the ghosts of all the people he has killed visit Richard, that one experiences the tormented inner life of King Richard, but this time Richard receives no pity.

In Richard's final soliloquy, Shakespeare presents his audiences with a man whose evil actions have caught up with his conscience. After five acts of villainy, Richard is caught in his own evil web. As Richard reveals his true nature, his roots in the Vice and his belief in the Machiavellian philosophy, and is destroyed, audiences celebrate his downfall. On his stage, Shakespeare explores the dangers that arise when an individual consciously chooses to employ evil. Through Richard, Shakespeare portrays the ultimate downfall of the Machiavellian villain, but he also stages something more than the political dangers of such a villain; Shakespeare humanizes his villain in order to demonstrate the potential for evil that resides in every person. Richard, after wearing his mask for so long is unable to distinguish fact from fiction and begins to lose control of himself and his nation. Michael Neill explains this devolution as: "The political mask and the identity of the masque...blend so closely that eventually Richard can no longer tell which is which" and he begins to resemble a "schizophrenic criminal, trapped between his own two selves" (142). This is demonstrated in his final soliloquy before his death. As soon as the ghosts leave him, Richard seems to have a schizophrenic conversation with himself; he asks questions and answers them: "Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am./ Then fly. What, from

myself? Great reason why:/ Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?" (V.iii.184-187)., Richard admits to his immoral behavior, admitting that "Alas, I rather hate myself" (V.iii.189) and even restates that he is a villain, but in a fit of psychological turmoil, Shakespeare allows Richard to take it back: "I am a villain: yet I lie, I am not" (V.iii.191). The audience is not sure what to believe: is he a villain or is he not a villain? Reminded of Richard's actions: killing Clarence, killing King Edward, killing his nephews, killing Lady Anne, one can conclude that Richard is a villain. He himself proclaimed in Act One that he was the villain: "Thus, like the formal vice, Iniquity,/ I moralize two meanings in one word" (III.i.84-85). Yet, Richard does not resemble any one Vice. Bernard Spivack notes in his essay "*Richard III* and the Vice Tradition" that "although [Richard] appears something different from the conventional and obvious Vice" of the medieval stage, Richard "is imitating the method of that role" by evoking sympathy from the audience by seeming broken (Richmond 53). The emotional roller coaster ride the contemporary audience experiences attests to Shakespeare's great writing and understanding of the human psyche. In this way Shakespeare is able to present a new perspective of the way evil should be perceived, for Richard's "reason, while skillfully employed, has been perverted to serve" his selfish desire and therefore, in effect, Richard brings his own destruction upon himself for his "disregard for the law of nature" (86).

Through Richard, Shakespeare presents us with a human being with vice inside of him. By highlighting Richard's human qualities, and the reality that such an evil exists in the Elizabethan political venue, Shakespeare adds a new perspective to the ongoing dialogue about morality. No longer is evil an outside force that is easily recognizable; instead, evil is dwelling inside the human heart with goodness, and it is not recognizable at all. In fact, this new perspective forced Shakespeare's audience to self-reflect and become uncomfortably aware of

the people around them. For if Richard is able to portray himself as the protagonist but really be the antagonist, others could surely seem what they are not, too.

Shakespeare's Richard is not the only character to make dupes of the people around him in order to accomplish a self-serving goal. In fact, one could argue that there is one Shakespearean villain that makes Richard appear tame in comparison, for this villain is sadistic and irrational in nature, representing the danger in the passions within the human soul. By viewing his soliloquies, motivations, and deeds, one can conclude that Shakespeare's Iago from the tragedy *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* is a dangerous villain who furthers the evolution of villainy by adding to Richard's portrayal of evil. Iago is arguably the greatest Shakespearean villain who adds to the complexities of morality because he blurs the once-clear line separating good and evil. Though Shakespeare humanizes Iago, as he does all of his villains, Shakespeare also endows him with a sublime nature, making Iago incomprehensible to audiences. For this reason, Iago is not an accessible villain, nor does one find him sympathetic in the same way one could find Richard sympathetic, because Iago's actions are inarguably irredeemable.

Indeed, Iago refers to himself as a villain and warns Roderigo and audience alike when he says "I am not what I am" (I.i.71). Here, Iago juxtaposes himself against God, who refers to himself as "I am who I am" via the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. In many ways, Iago is the prototype for Milton's Satan, and many characters in the play describe Iago as a Satanic figure; however, this only occurs in the final act, when Iago's dark villainy is illuminated. Lodovico calls Iago a "hellish villain" and then Othello, who is dumfounded by Iago's immense hate, calls him a "demi-devil (V.ii.367, V.i.300). When Othello begins to understand, though not fully comprehend, the depth of Iago's evil and what evil has produced, he exclaims: "I look down

towards thy feet; but that's a fable./ If that thou be'est a devil, I cannot kill thee" (V.ii.285-286). Here, Othello refers to the medieval belief that Satan did not have feet, but hooves. Iago, if he were truly the Devil, would not have human feet, and Othello would not be able to kill him, though he does try. When Othello attacks Iago, Iago himself adds to this sublime, Satanic image by responding: "I bleed, sir, but not killed" (V.ii.339). Iago demonstrates his self-awareness and knowledge of the similarities between Satan and himself when he explains that "devils will the blackest sins put on" but will fool everyone because "they do suggest at first with heavenly shows" (II.iii.359-362). In other words, Iago suggests that he, like Richard, will use evil to accomplish his purposes but will put on the appearance of good. Both Iago and Richard share a connection with evil that is unmatched by Shakespeare's other villains, Shakespeare's tragic heroes, or any character before them. Iago, created and staged after *Richard III*, illustrates a more mature and further evolved representation of evil that is purposely disturbing, but this character still contains many traits of Richard. Knowing that evil characters find their roots in the medieval Vice, Iago, like Richard, must do three things: foster a close relationship with the audience where he shares secrets and hidden motivations, celebrate the success of his malevolence, and wear a mask to hide his villainy.

Iago's manipulation is emotional and captivates the characters around him, which is comparable to Richard's persuasive behaviors in *Richard III*. It is of value to note that both villains require the assistance of the people around them to aid them in their villainy. Neither Iago nor Richard is capable of villainy without other characters, though these characters remain unaware of their assistance. To secure his grasp of the throne, Richard needs Lady Anne to marry him, and because she agrees Richard is able to move forward as the villain and seize the power he longs for. Had Lady Anne refused, one cannot guess the next step Richard would have taken,

but the play informs us that Richard's surreal manipulation was persuasive enough to woo Lady Anne into marriage. Likewise, Iago needs the assistance of the characters around him to propel the plot and accomplish his goal. This is primarily demonstrated through Roderigo, a "silly" character "because he is weak, absurd, and because he is beyond his depth, and grotesque because he is dangled and jerked by the puppeteer" yet he serves a larger purpose for he contributes a great deal to the analysis of Iago's manipulation and role as a villain (Spivack 441). Iago uses Roderigo as a tool to build his great plot, and then turns him into one of his victims.

In order for this manipulation to be effective, Iago first has to know the essence of the characters to know how to manipulate them, and second wear a mask to hide his true self. A. C. Bradley explains, "Iago's plot is Iago's character in action; and it is built on his knowledge of Othello's character, and could not otherwise have succeeded" which the audience knows to be true (170). As previously noted, lines 359-362 demonstrate Iago's awareness of what is required of him if he is to be successful; first, he will have to be an actor and play a part to fool his victims. To accomplish this Iago is able to portray himself as "a reluctant witness against a friend, a sympathetic counselor in a time of trouble, an unhappy spectator of a woman's unhappiness, and especially a fervent ally of his injured master" (Spivack 435). The second requirement is to understand the true nature of his victims.

As one perceives Iago through the eyes of Othello, Roderigo, Cassio, and Emilia, it is clear that Iago has worked tirelessly to create his reputation of honesty and virtue. One can also conclude, just as in *Richard III*, that this reputation is a façade, but one cannot overemphasize the fact that in order to create such a firm, unshakable reputation, Iago must have worn this mask and worked at this charade for a very long time. It is for this reason that his manipulation works at all. Indeed, no character even suspects Iago of villainy, not even his own wife, which

demonstrates the careful planning, self-control, and understanding of human nature that Iago invests into maintaining this act. It is most ironic that Emilia is the only one to truly define Iago's nature as villain, but not recognize her husband as that very villain. In Act IV, Emilia swears that she "will be hanged if some eternal villain" is responsible for "this slander" in order "to get some office" (IV.ii.153-156). Emilia does not realize that the eternal villain she is describing is her husband and that she will not be hanged, but stabbed by him in Act V, and not because he wants Cassio's title but for other ambiguous reasons.

In her ignorance, Emilia aids her husband in ensnaring Othello in jealousy by taking the strawberry handkerchief and handing it over to Iago. It is not until Othello, after killing Desdemona, mentions Iago's name to Emilia that she becomes overwhelmed with the reality that her husband was the "cogging, cozening" villain she described in Act IV (IV.ii.155). Indeed, the only phrase Emilia can repeat is "My husband?" as she pieces together the magnitude of Iago's evil. As she continues to repeat her question, Othello becomes impatient and finally asserts, "He, woman./I say thy husband. Dost understand the word?/ My friend, thy husband; honest, honest Iago" (V.ii.187-189). With her new understanding, Emilia pours out the truth that her husband planted and tended the seed of jealousy in Othello's mind and duped all into playing into his "villainy, villainy, villainy!" (V.ii.227). Because his mask is torn, Iago reveals himself as the true villain he is and stabs his wife. In many ways, one can consider this ending to Iago's game ironic. Throughout the play, Iago is able to use the people around him, playing their ignorance and faults to his gain. In moments where he may be discovered, Iago manipulates his way to safety and anonymity because he remains aware of the character of his victims. He knows Othello, Roderigo, Cassio, and Desdemona and he should know Emilia, but he does not account for her or consider her a character that could threaten him. Not only does this speak to Iago's

poor opinion of women, which he openly and often states throughout the play, but it speaks to his ignorance of true loyalty between women. Emilia must speak to preserve Desdemona's honor, even if that means she cannot preserve herself. Such a sacrifice is incomprehensible to Iago and is the cause of his downfall.

Iago is inarguably a powerful villain who advances the concept of evil and the role of the villain, while forcing audiences to reconsider the boundaries of morality. But what makes Iago powerful is the way he knows everyone's strengths and weaknesses, making it too easy for him to manipulate characters such as Othello, whom Iago knows has a "free and open nature/ That thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (I.iii.442-443). Pulling the strings of his puppets, Iago finds great pleasure in the control he has over Roderigo, Cassio, and Othello, making Iago a masochist and an artist. For example, Iago is able to control Cassio without much effort for he knows that Cassio's obsession lies in his reputation. In Act Three, Iago counsels Cassio and promises to help him make amends with Othello. He suggests that Cassio go to Desdemona and he will "devise a mean to draw the Moor/ Out of the way, that [their] converse and business/ May be more free" (III.i.39-43). As Iago leaves, Cassio thanks him for his help and to the audience praises Iago, saying, "I never knew/ A Florentine more kind and honest" (III.i.44-45). Cassio foolishly believes Iago's reputation which is comparable to the way Clarence trusts his brother, Richard, to help him. Even Othello is steadfast in his opinion of Iago who, kneeling, swears by heaven that he will aid Othello in enacting revenge on Cassio and Desdemona, promising, "I am your own forever" (III.iii.545). As noted earlier, Iago's must have been a long-standing reputation that would allow him to maneuver among his puppets and utilize chance events to his advantage.

Perhaps the greatest irony in the play is that the one word associated with Iago is the word “honest,” which truly is juxtaposition to what he really is, but it is because of his ability to seem honest that other characters assume he is so, and Iago is then able to manipulate and control them. Of course, the character who is the target of Iago’s wrath and most fooled by his “honesty” is Othello. He is the one character who most commonly refers to Iago as “honest Iago,” and describes him as “a man ... of honesty and trust” (I.ii.323, 336). It is his unwavering and misplaced trust in Iago that causes the mighty Othello to fall into the sickness of jealousy. For Iago, there is no challenge in planting seeds of doubt in Othello’s mind because he successfully fools Othello into thinking he is truly honest. Furthermore, Iago knows Othello’s weakness. Bradley furthers this notion by explaining, “The sources of danger in this character are revealed but too clearly by the story. In the first place, Othello’s mind, for all its poetry, is very simple. He is not observant. His nature tends outward. He is quite free from introspection, and is not given to reflection. Emotion excites his imagination, but it confuses and dulls his intellect” (Bradley 179). For the purpose of manipulation, Iago hones in on one key flaw —Othello’s lack of experience in marriage, specifically, his lack of experience in marrying a girl so young and from such a different culture. As he is a moor and considered exotic, Othello’s culture and background greatly differ from that of Desdemona, a girl raised in a primarily homogeneous society and still very much immature in comparison to Othello, for she is young. Iago, on the other hand, has much experience in marriage and uses the cultural and generational gap between Othello and Desdemona to instill doubt in Othello’s mind. The way he does this makes him an artist, for it demonstrates his awareness of the human psyche. His method is simple: instead of directly accusing Desdemona of infidelity and charging Cassio as her lover, Iago asks simple questions that lead Othello to come to this conclusion on his own. The greatest example of this occurs in

Act III, Scene iii, Lines 37-45 in a conversation between Iago and Othello where Iago immediately manipulates Othello's perception. One stage, all one sees is Cassio leaving Desdemona's presence, but Iago adds the guilty appearance. When Othello inquires why Iago says this of Cassio, Iago responds most honestly: "But for a satisfaction of my thought,/ No further harm" (III.iii.108-109). The way Iago leads and reacts to Othello demonstrates his artistic ability to control the people around him, much like Richard, which makes Iago a fearful villain. Perhaps the most grotesque example occurs when Iago asks Othello to let Desdemona live. At that point, Othello has not thought of harming Desdemona, but Iago is a fearful villain and is able to manipulate Othello into strangling his own wife in their marriage bed.

In order to maintain this elaborate façade and manipulate his dupes, Iago employs his innate knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the people around him, creating layers of deception that, ironically, have a foundation in truth. One such truth occurs when the villain himself raises questions about virtue, vice, and mankind's place in morality. As opposed to the Elizabethan belief in one's fate being in God's hands Iago firmly believes that "'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners" (I.iii.361-363). For the first time in drama, the villain explains mankind's place in the universe and the role of man's motivation. Iago clearly represents the secular mindset, holding that "the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills" and not in some higher power (I.iii.367-368). Therefore, good and evil are *not* outside forces compelling human beings to act in a certain way but rather human beings have within them a motivation, a will that empowers them in action. In this way, Iago, much like Richard, furthers the notion of evil existing within human nature and the theory that mankind can choose to enact this nature through the will. Iago's understanding of human nature gives revelatory meaning to Lady Anne's words from *Richard III*

when she exclaims “O wonderful, when devils tell the truth!” for it raises some important issues that had not yet been grappled with on stage (I.ii.73). The primary issue lies within Shakespeare’s psychological awareness that good and evil can exist simultaneously, a notion that was previously absent, but further investigated by Milton. In his treatise *Areopagitica*, Milton asserts that good and evil are “two twins cleaving together” that construct the tree of life (19). Milton’s words describe what Shakespeare understood, that human beings are endowed with the potential for both good and evil, a notion that Iago proves in his soliloquies and actions. Milton furthers Shakespeare’s innate understanding of the nature of human evil when he suggests that “perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evill?” (Milton 19). One could argue that Shakespeare would agree with this notion, though it will lead to the championing of evil by the Romantics. Nonetheless, Shakespeare explores the dangers of ignorance of evil through Iago.

Iago is arguably the greatest example of this phenomenon of villains speaking truth, and challenges the audience as he seems good and gives good advice, but for horribly shocking reasons. One experiences this through Iago’s treatment of Cassio. Iago suggests Cassio seek out Desdemona, and one fears for Cassio because one knows Iago’s motives are for evil. When Cassio leaves, Iago turns to the audience in soliloquy and asks, “How am I then a villain/ To counsel Cassio to this parallel course/ Directly to his good?” (II.iii.56-59, 368-370). Here lies the issue that challenges one’s moral sympathies. What does one do when the villain gives good advice? Iago knows that his advice is good, and under normal circumstances the advice would help Cassio, but these are not normal circumstances and Iago is no mere villain. It is for this

reason that Iago is arguably a more fearful villain and appalling representation of evil than Richard. Richard represents a danger to the state and a threat to social and divine order in England. His actions portray the dire consequences of choosing to employ evil for personal, political gain. Iago, however, represents a threat and a danger to humankind altogether, for Iago could be any man, and he does not solely exist in the political world. He demonstrates the danger and the reality of human evil, the evil that exists in every soul.

Aside from his surreal ability to manipulate people, what adds to the horror of Iago is his sadistic and shocking celebration of evil. Richard's humorous asides celebrate his villainous victories and ensure audiences are paying attention to his act. He does not celebrate the pain he causes; rather, Richard celebrates each step that brings him closer to his goal. Iago, on the other hand, is not simply pleased with his ability to manipulate other character's emotions and perceptions, he revels in his ability to control those characters and inflict pain. As he sets the trap for Cassio, Iago turns to the audience and states: "He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said, whisper... Ay, smile upon her, do. I will [gyve] thee thine own courtship" (II.i.182-185). These lines demonstrate Iago's similarity to Richard in that he is overjoyed his plan is succeeding, but it also speaks to Iago's criminal genius. Iago states that "with as little a web as this," referring to Cassio's simple, gentlemanly, pure action of taking Desdemona's hand in gratitude of her service, Iago will "ensnare as great a fly as Cassio" (II.i.183-184). Not only does he take pleasure in the success of his plans, he prematurely celebrates the pain that he will cause. One fears this villain because he is first cunningly manipulative, second because he delights in pain, and finally because one cannot understand why he acts this way. Everything about Iago is shrouded in mystery; he is an enigma. Try as one might to understand him, though why one would do this speaks to the attractiveness of evil's nature and prominence of evil in mankind's nature, one is

left with no answer and no reasonable motivation for such actions. In this way, Iago contrasts greatly with Richard. Richard is able to maintain a relationship with the audience, explaining events and communicating his motivations clearly, and for a time Richard has the audience's support. This is not the case with Iago because his attempt at creating any relationship is feeble, and one cannot help but wonder if the audience is simply another victim of Iago's manipulation. For this reason, the audience maintains an emotional distance from Iago as a narrator, as a character, and as a villain.

The reason the audience has no connection with Iago is twofold. First, Iago makes a statement to Roderigo, his dupe, that serves as a warning to the audience. In Act I, Scene I, the play begins in media res and the audience stumbles into the middle of a conversation between Iago and Roderigo. From their conversation, it seems as though Roderigo is unsure of Iago's true motives, a notion we will find truly ironic as the play progresses. In this discussion, Iago does not use the persuasive rhetoric of Richard; rather, he discloses to Roderigo that he follows Othello "to serve [his] turn upon him..." and that by following Othello, "[he] follow[s] but himself./ Heaven is [his] judge, not [he] for love and duty,/ but seeming so for [his] peculiar end" (I.i.45, 64-66). Here, Iago explains that he is following Othello to seek revenge, and he tells Roderigo not to believe in his actions because "for necessity of present life,/ I must show out a flag and sign of love" (I.i.172-173). As one listens to this exchange, one would believe that Roderigo and Iago are friends and that Iago is working to help Roderigo in his ventures, but there is a line in the first conversation that warns the audience of Iago's unreliability, and should have been a warning to Roderigo: "I am not what I am" (I.i.71). This small phrase can easily go overlooked given the context of the exchange, for at first it seems as a warning or an explanation to Roderigo that he is putting on a show to seem as though he is faithful to Othello, and that

these actions do not reflect his true feelings. However, these words have a profound impact on audiences and readers once Iago delivers his first soliloquy, which presents an issue on its own. The issue is that the first soliloquy does not occur until the end of Act 1, and the soliloquy reveals that he is not Roderigo's friend.

This is an issue because one can assume that by this point in Shakespeare's writing career, audiences would be trained to expect a soliloquy or some introduction in the very beginning of the play to give the audience direction. In *Richard III*, the first soliloquy marks the beginning of the play; however, one does not receive any formal introduction by a character in *Othello* until after the scene is over which would have been uncharacteristic to Shakespearean audiences and readers. When the audience becomes privy to a private exchange with Iago, one is permitted to see beneath the first layer of deception as Iago explains "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse./ For I mine own gained knowledge should profane/ If I would time expend with such <a> snipe/ But for my sport and profit" (I.i.426-429). After this first aside, one cannot be sure who the real Iago is, for he begins his aside with the disclosure that he is playing Roderigo who, for the entire first Scene, seemed a friend. In the aforementioned lines, one learns that Iago is using Roderigo "as [his] purse" and is making an attempt in this soliloquy to form a bond with the audience, though what he is really creating for the audience is suspicion and distrust. One wonders who the real Iago is. Though the events of the play unfold the way Iago states they will and Iago does what he says he will do, one is never sure of what he is thinking or what his feelings are. Also, one cannot determine if Iago is aware of the morality, or lack of it, of his actions. Since he continues in his villainy and shows no sign of conscience, the audience distrusts him and refuses to align themselves with Iago. In *Richard*, one saw a conscience and a motivation. In *Iago*, one only asks questions and waits patiently for revelation.

For readers and viewers, this question is asked and discussed by critics today as well as the pivotal question; why does Iago act this way? What is his motivation? A. C. Bradley warns the audiences “not to believe a syllable that Iago utters on any subject, including himself, until one has tested his statement by comparing it with known facts and with other statements of his own or of other people, and by considering whether he had in the particular circumstances any reason for telling a lie or for telling the truth” (198). From the first soliloquy, the audience does not receive any incentive to rely on Iago as a narrator, or any notion that he is telling a lie, but one does find traces of a possible, plausible motivation. Iago hates Othello for he believes that “twixt my sheets” Othello “has done my office” (I.i.430-431). However, this is only a suspicion for Iago admits “I know not if ‘t be true,/ But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,/ Will do as if for surety” (I.i. 431-433). From his aside, and from what he previously told Roderigo about his purpose for seeming faithful to Othello, one deduces that Iago is angry for three reasons. First, he says he is angry because Othello did not appoint him to the lieutenant position. Second, he is angry because Cassio, a man who has no tangible experience of battle, a man “that never set a squandron in the field,/ Nor the division of a battle knows...unless the bookish theoretic” was appointed by Othello to be lieutenant (I.i.23-25). Angered by Othello’s choice in a man whose experience is “mere prattle without practice,” Iago may have felt betrayed and overlooked after all of the occasions he fought next to Othello (I.i.27). Finally, he believes Othello slept with his wife. Though these are the alleged reasons for Iago’s actions, they do not explain the severity of the punishment he enacts on Othello, nor does it explain why he allows other characters besides Othello to suffer. In comparison to Richard, Iago’s motivation and actions are shrouded in mystery. Richard seeks political gain and his actions are rational: he kills based upon necessity to

achieve a certain goal. The audience has no idea of Iago's goal or his true motivation; instead, all are left to piece it together as Iago's sadism unfolds on stage.

Spivack sees the discrepancy between actions and motivations as he notes: "between his provocations, as he describes them, and the actual premises of his behavior there is a profound discrepancy in logic" (16). This raises the question: What, then, is Iago's motivation? In his book *Shakespearean Tragedy*, A. C. Bradley explains one tradition of thought. In the first interpretation, Iago is turned "into an ordinary villain" (196). His motivation is founded in his belief that he has been wronged, so he "will make his enemy suffer a jealousy worse than his own; or an ambitious man determined to ruin his successful rival- one of these, or a combination of these, endowed with usual ability and cruelty. These are the more popular views" (196). Under this interpretation, Iago's motivation is hatred, and it is targeted at Othello. Often in the play Iago repeats, "I hate the Moor" and explains to Roderigo that he is simply putting on a mask. Repeatedly, one hears that he hates Othello; perhaps Iago is punishing Othello because he believes Othello slept with his wife, or because Othello did not give Iago the position he so desired. Iago seeks revenge because Othello did not choose Iago for the lieutenancy, not the fact that he did not receive the position itself. If one accepts the idea that Iago's anger grows from a feeling of rejection, Iago becomes more human than vice-like, for rejection is an emotion that the audience finds relatable. The issue is that Iago never openly discloses this information to the audience, or to another character. One can only infer it from Iago's deep hatred of Othello, but it does not explain the motivation behind his irrational, sadistic desire to hurt other characters such as Roderigo, Cassio, and Emilia. In this way, Iago's villainy is irrational and he is a danger to humanity. Shylock is comparable to Iago because Shylock is also motivated by hatred; however, Shylock has one key difference from Iago—he explains why he acts the way he does. In the trial

scene, he explains that he can “give no reason, nor [he] will not,/ More than a log’d hate and a certain loathing/ [he] bear[s] Antonio, that [he] follow[s] thus/ A losing suit against him” (IV.i.59-62). Iago simply refuses to say anything. Though Iago feels a deep hatred for Othello, he does not take the opportunity to rationalize his actions for the audience the way other Shakespearean villains do. This demonstrates the irrationality and mystery of Iago’s evil.

In the second tradition, Iago is believed to be a character “who hates good simply because it is good, and loves evil purely for itself. His action is not prompted by any plain motive like revenge, jealousy or ambition. It springs from a ‘motiveless malignity’ or a disinterested delight in the pain of others; and Othello, Cassio, and Desdemona are scarcely more than the material requisite for the full attainment of this delight” (Bradley 196-7). Under this interpretation, Iago is enacting evil for evil’s sake, using his “provocations” as Spivack calls them as an excuse for villainy, making Iago appear more Vice-like than Richard, but no less disturbing.

Though there is truth to both perspectives, neither effectively explains Iago’s actions. Bradley’s explanation of the second tradition of theory is perhaps the closest because it is the only reason that recalls the vice-roots of the Shakespearean villain. An attempt to explain Iago’s actions because of revenge is hollow, for Iago ruins the lives of uninvolved parties such as Roderigo and Cassio. Even the second explanation that Iago’s actions are rooted in a sadistic, disinterested delight in the pain of others is not complete, for Iago is compelled by something. In no way does he act because pain simply delights him. Even Richard admits that he is not acting just because he is bored; there is a hidden purpose. Pain does thrill Iago, but Iago’s roots are in the medieval vice which suggests that there must be a third line of thought that includes Iago’s roots. Spivack recalls that the vice’s “motivation is implicit in his name and nature, and does not need to grow out of any relationship with other characters, except insofar as his victims present

to him the instigation of their virtue” (129). Such is the case of Iago whose motivation is widely debated. His motivation is fueled by other character’s goodness or virtue. Iago targets virtuous characters: Desdemona, Cassio, Othello, and Emilia. His stated motivation is entirely fabricated; Iago creates reasons for his hatred, not willing to admit that he hates goodness. The only glimpse audiences receive of this truth is when Iago admits that Cassio has something about him that makes Iago ugly. This third perspective, perhaps a Romantic perspective, is perhaps the only one that accounts for Iago’s literary history and his extreme punishments.

The fact remains that there are numerous theories that attempt to explain Iago’s actions and motivations. Though all find supporting evidence in the play, one might consider the theory that Shakespeare left Iago’s motivation purposely vague. Bernard Spivack quotes Professor Stoll’s opinion of Iago’s motivation, which asks, “Shall we, therefore, discard them (Iago’s motivations), and, like the critics, get him new ones of our own? In doing so we discard Shakespeare, and, unawares, cease from criticism” (25). Spivack summarizes Stoll’s claim and suggests, “to argue for Iago’s motive-hunting is to argue, in effect, that Shakespeare is perverting the soliloquy in its most central function” which is to give information that the audience would not have been privy to otherwise (25). The conclusion that must be drawn about Iago’s motivation is simply that Shakespeare had multiple opportunities to allow Iago to reveal himself, but he chooses not to. Because of this ambiguity, Iago is able to represent a sublime evil and further the development of the villain. The Vice needed no explanation for he was an allegorical representation of something audiences understood. Iago, however, is not an adaptation of the vice, rather is a human being, relatable but not understandable, an entirely new dramatic invention representing. Bloom calls Iago “Shakespeare’s radical invention” and suggests that “Iago transcends Barabas” for he is able to allow Shakespeare to “return to the Machiavel, yet

now not to another Aaron the Moor or Richard III, both versions of Barabas, Jew of Malta, but to a character light-years beyond Marlowe” (435). The feature that allows Iago to surpass Barabas is the mystery surrounding his motivation.

The most grotesque component of Iago’s character that mesmerizes audiences is that one never receives an explanation in Act Five. Once Desdemona, Emilia, and Roderigo are dead and Iago is unveiled the villain, Shakespeare has the opportunity to explain the character of Iago, yet deliberately does not. Othello charges Iago to explain himself and one can imagine the audience leaning closer to the stage in expectation of revelation, but Iago’s last words truly speak to his entire character: “Demand me nothing: what you know, you know:/ From this time forth I never will speak word” (V.ii.341-342). One has to believe that Iago will remain silent in whatever future lies ahead of him. Because Shakespeare offers no explanation, the audience is left disturbed and purposely so for Iago is a representation of the potential evil within the human race. No human being could find Iago’s actions permissible, but each member of the audience, past and present, seek some redeeming quality in Iago because villain though he is, he is emotionally relatable because he is human. It is for this reason that one might prefer Richard’s evil over Iago’s. One does not wonder why Richard behaves the way he does. His feelings are entirely human and one can sympathize, even empathize with his feelings of inadequacy and resulting bitterness. Iago, on the other hand, is a mystery. Even when he shares his motivation, one cannot understand him or trust him because his emotions do not match his behavior. Iago ultimately destroys Othello. He kills his spirit, his reputation, and his will to live. But his deep hatred and consequent behaviors do not match Othello’s alleged crime nor does it have a source. Moreover, Iago never demonstrates a moment of conscience for his actions. When he takes pleasure in Othello’s pain chanting “Work on, my medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are

caught,” audiences are disturbed for one cannot understand his pleasure (V.i.35-36). The horror is that a character like Iago could potentially walk among us, wearing a mask, manipulating the strongest and weakest of humankind. This makes Iago a powerful tool for Shakespeare to explore the evil within mankind, to force audiences to re-evaluate their notions of evil, and to look within and amongst themselves for this evil.

Composing and staging plays at a historical, political, and moral turning point, Shakespeare effectively portrays England’s shift from the religious, medieval perspective to a secular, Early Modern perspective. As ideologies and philosophies evolved, so did England’s notion of evil, villainy, and morality. Though the medieval morality plays attempted to teach moral lessons, they did not grapple with the vagueness of morality in human nature. Evil, villainy, and morality have more depth than the Vice could portray. To address this void, Shakespeare cast evil into the heart of humanity, highlighting the internal evils that exist inside every man rather than staging evil as an external force. Through this “dramatic fascination with the darker world within,” Shakespeare is able to stage the battle of good and evil to reveal a new type of villain, one that audiences would relate to and would represent the unpredictable reality of the darker impulses of human nature (Smith 151). Moreover, this permits Shakespeare to utilize his villains in a way that would pose questions that reflects England’s immediate concerns and to challenge his audiences preconceived beliefs about morality. Such concerns connected to “the sociopolitical changes of the mid-seventeenth century” during which, “Stuart England witnessed a variety of radical upheavals, not the least among them the redefining of the state of England itself” which resulted in the theater’s subjection “to intense scrutiny as both supporters and detractors of the mode argued vehemently about its effect on society” (Smith 151). Smith argues that Shakespeare’s theater did not simply reflect England’s immediate concerns, but

encouraged the changes in society. Though it is difficult to prove this, there is a link between England's sociopolitical concerns and the major conflicts presented in *Richard III*. Richard largely functions as a representation of the political evil Shakespeare perceived in his world and Richard presents a threat to the state and divine order as outlined by E. M. W. Tillyard. As a representation, Richard holds symbolic value but does not fall into Medieval allegory, rather Shakespeare humanizes Richard and endows him with a conscience, giving his audience a new theatrical experience where one can sympathize or at the very least understand the villain's evil actions. This is in stark contrast to Iago, who does not represent an abstract evil, but the spontaneous, irrational evil that exists in every human being. With no motivation and no explanation, Iago creates a different experience for Shakespeare's audiences and forces them to look within themselves for such villainy.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare outlines what it means for a play to be effective. Hamlet outlines in Act II, Scene II, Lines 589-593: "Hum, I have heard/ That guilty creatures sitting at a play/ Have by the very cunning of the scene/ Been struck so to the soul that presently/ They have proclaimed their malefactions." According to Hamlet, the purpose of a play, and the guideline by which one can measure the play's effectiveness, is to convict the audience and "prompt a response from the spectators" (Smith 163). Shakespeare's plays not only provoke a response from audiences as Smith suggests, but forces his audiences to look within themselves and admit the potential evil within human nature. Harold Bloom adds, "For Johnson, the essence of poetry was *invention*...a process of finding, or finding out. We owe Shakespeare everything, Johnson says, and means that Shakespeare has taught us to understand human nature" (2). Through his villains, Shakespeare presents not only an example of the destructive nature of evil, but a warning to his audience about the evil inherent in human nature. This warning is embedded in

the Renaissance belief “that man’s central psychological dilemma arose from the moral necessity to control his passions, which could, if left to go berserk, lead him to destruction” (Smith 62). Shakespeare demonstrates this through his villains and tragic heroes. Ironically, the villains and tragic heroes are barely distinguishable. All are ruled by their passions, but one key difference changes their title. The difference is that the tragic hero realizes his flaw before he is destroyed whereas the villain does not see his flaw as something negative and continues on his evil way to catastrophe. The tragic heroes find redemption in Act V, though they must suffer the consequences of their choices; the villains never find redemption and they become entangled in their evil. Herein lies the warning and the lesson as outlined by Smith: “Theater shakes off material dullness, and collectively reveals their dark powers and hidden strengths to men, urging them to take a nobler, more heroic stand in the face of destiny than they would have assumed without it” (153).

In order to take a heroic stand, Tillyard holds that one must know human nature (72). As Renaissance England began to change their beliefs, the focus shifted inwards, “for the chief enemy is within ourselves and if we do not understand him we cannot be victorious” (Tillyard 72). Tillyard believes that it is not by accident that two of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes, Lear and Othello, are flawed because they do not know themselves. Goneril explains that Lear’s flaw is his “poor judgment” and Reagan unveils Lear’s fatal flaw the “he hath ever but slenderly known himself” (I.i.299-301). Othello trusts the wrong people and does not see his own weakness. Audiences pity these tragic heroes but more importantly, learn something about themselves by watching the tragic cycle. Through the investigation of Shakespeare’s Richard and Iago, one can see how good and evil shift from an external force to an internal conflict within human nature. By casting his villains as emotionally relatable human beings, as opposed to the allegorical

representation of the Middle Ages, Shakespeare provokes his audiences to question their preconceived notions of morality and to question the possibility of such villains living among them or within them. Furthermore, Shakespeare advances the evolution of the villain by suggesting that evil is a universal human characteristic. No longer do villains enact evil for the sake of doing evil; rather, they enact evil out of a feeling of being wronged by a person or by nature and desiring justice. In the case of the aforementioned villains, audiences can understand the motivation even if they do not condone the villainous act itself. For the Elizabethan audience, this would have been a new experience, but for Shakespeare, this character was the perfect vehicle to discuss evil.

Molly Smith attributes Shakespeare's "dramatic fascination with evil" to the changes that were prevalent in his time, but suggests that Shakespeare is responsible for "the social, political, and intellectual temper of the subsequent ages" (11). Specifically, Milton's representation of evil in Satan owes its success to Shakespeare's villains. Through Richard and Iago, Shakespeare explores the human potential for both good and evil, a concept Satan explores in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. There are clear connections between Shakespeare's villains and Milton's, and Bloom argues that "Satan (as Milton did not wish to know) is the legitimate son of Iago, begot by Shakespeare upon Milton's muse" (434). He argues that Iago's fall "sets the paradigm for Satan's fall" because "Milton's God, like Othello, pragmatically demotes his most ardent devotee, and the wounded Satan rebels" (435). Though there are clear similarities between Iago and Satan, Bloom's suggestion that Iago's fall precedes Satan's is unjustified. It is true that Milton concludes the age with his great hero-villain, Satan, but Shakespeare mirrors Iago's fall after Lucifer's, not vice versa. Nonetheless, Iago's worship of Othello is similar to the way angels worship God and the similarity between Iago and Satan's wound is clear. Their

motivations and tactics are shared, making it clear that Satan finds his roots in Iago, but is motivated by revenge like Richard. This evolution of evil from Shakespeare to Milton adds to the discussion of morality as Milton further investigates the limits of justifiable evil, and births the Romantic Rebels of Shelley, Byron and Keats. Without Shakespeare's villains, Iago and Richard, evil would have remained static and ineffective in representing mankind. Because Shakespeare stages the relativity of evil by creating emotionally accessible villains, audiences are able to experience the dangers of the evil within human nature and elicit a response that only theater can accommodate. Finally, it is because of Shakespeare's villains that audiences are prepared for the hero-villains of the Romantic Poets.

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