

The Tradition of the Vice and Shakespeare's Villains in His Tragedies (Summary)

In his landmark study, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, Bernard Spivack introduces the idea of the 'hybrid nature' of Shakespeare's Vice-inspired villains, who possesses both allegorical and psychological elements. As Claimed by Spivack, we cannot elucidate the mystery of Shakespeare's Vice-inspired villains through familiar naturalistic approaches because they belong to different worlds (those of allegory and psychology). For example, according to Spivack, Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* is a hybrid of two distinct personae, both the allegorical Vice and the human Moor; he similarly interprets Richard (Gloucester) in *Richard III* as a hybrid of the historical king and evil personified.

Spivack has greatly influenced subsequent critics by his thought-provoking analysis of Shakespeare's villains. Nevertheless, his conclusion, and even subsequent work refining his analysis, still seems lacking because it does not take into account the way Shakespeare's characterisation of his hybrid villains also symbolises or encapsulates the thematic motif or plot design of each play. Furthermore, although Spivack and many other critics omit Edmund in *King Lear* as a notable example of Shakespeare's hybrid villains, in my opinion, he should be treated as such. On one hand, Edmund often behaves like a Vice, inhuman malevolence unmixed with recognisably human passions; but on the other, he also confirms that there is a psychological motivation for his crimes.

As a result, this study is able to examine Shakespeare's characterisation of four hybrid villains: not only Edmund in *King Lear*, but also Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, Richard in *Richard III*, and Iago in *Othello*. By discussing how allegorical and psychological natures are conflated within each character and elucidating the dramatic effects we can expect from this assimilation, I hope to answer the question of *why* Shakespeare embodies these characters as hybrid villains and to demonstrate that these characterisations are

closely connected with either the plot design or the thematic motif of the respective plays in which they appear.

The introduction of this thesis explains the concept of the Vice as seen in the morality plays of medieval England and identifies some notable Vice-like attributes Shakespeare's villains reveal in their actions and speeches. Then, each subsequent chapter deals with one of the four Vice-inspired villains. In Chapter 1, we shall investigate how Shakespeare uses the hybrid nature of Aaron as a structural device in order to create the 'cycle of revenge', one of the chief structural and thematic features of *Titus Andronicus*. To this end, first of all, I introduce the typically Vice-like attributes Aaron displays and explain their dramatic effects in the play. In my opinion, compared to other Shakespearean villains, Aaron is the most faithful mirror of the morality Vice. Therefore, to build up our common understanding of the theatrical effects Shakespeare aims at by his hybrid characterisation of his villains, it should be helpful to analyse Aaron's Vice-like properties one by one and to deliberate upon what dramatic effects can be expected when Aaron behaves in a Vice-like manner. Next, we discuss the dramaturgic significance of Aaron's characterisation as a hybrid villain, which makes him an indispensable structural device for establishing the 'cycle of revenge' that is the key element in the tragic framework. It is apt for the protagonist of a revenge play, especially one as bloody as *Titus Andronicus*, to be a mere brutal avenger. To avoid that risk, Shakespeare restrains Tamora, who has sufficient motive to exact revenge against Titus, from taking the initiative in inflicting vengeance on Titus and instead sets up Aaron, whose Vice-like maliciousness flows freely and without motive, as the mastermind of the evil intrigues against Titus. However, Shakespeare also tries, especially through the use of the words 'vengeance' and 'revenge', to create the illusion that the evils committed against Titus and his family are Tamora's revenge for the sacrifice of her son Alarbus. Furthermore,

he represents Aaron as feeling human affection for his son in the latter half of the play in order to make a degree of separation between him and Tamora, his lover and partner in crime; it is Tamora who orders him to kill their illegitimate son, and exempt him from Titus' retribution. That enables the establishment of the 'cycle of revenge', in which the avenger (Tamora) rapidly switches places with the person to be avenged (Titus). In this way, Shakespeare's characterization of Aaron as a hybrid villain is closely connected with his overall plot design and the central thematic motif of the play.

Chapter 2 deals with *Richard III*, which was written around the same time as *Titus Andronicus*. In this play, Shakespeare tries to present an unorthodox image of Richard even while adopting the existing Tudor mythology as the framework of the play—a propagandistic historiography that depicts the historical Richard as malevolently villainous like the morality Vice. To achieve this dramaturgic purpose, Shakespeare presents his Richard in a paradoxical manner: although Richard characterised in the historiographical mould of a cruel tyrant, the playwright also allows him to insist that he is just pretending to be a Vice-like villain, contrary to his true nature. In his first soliloquy, Richard separates what he 'is' from what he pretends to be; nevertheless, near the end of the play, he realises that the accumulation of cruel deeds he has committed to 'prove [himself] a villain' does in fact make him monstrous. His villainous pretence has substantially altered his personality, and he has become what he had only pretended to be.

To really appreciate the sophistication of this dramatic device, we must recognise that Shakespeare's Richard is a hybrid character in two different ways. First, Richard is a hybrid of the historical king and the traditional stock figure of the Vice, in that the dramatist gives him Vice-like attributes based on the negative image of the historical king as presented by Tudor chroniclers. However, second, this study also enables us to view

Richard's hybrid nature through his self-awareness and his understanding that the persona of a Vice-like villain given to him by Tudor historiographers is not his real or original personality. Shakespeare's Richard plays the role of a Vice-like villain, and this performed persona exhibits the allegorical nature of the Vice. However, near the end of the play, Richard's Vice-like villain persona, which is both historiographical and allegorical, commingles with his actual human self, and he becomes a doubly hybrid character.

Chapter 3 discusses the hybrid nature of Iago in *Othello*. Iago clearly displays Vice-like attributes: tricks of dissimulation, intimate addresses to the audience, scorn for his dupes and victims, and emotional manipulation of others. Yet, critics who discuss his characterisation from the viewpoint of his theatrical lineage tend to perceive the ambiguous nature of his motives as the most notable trait he inherits from the morality Vice. Furthermore, as some critics point out, from Iago we sense an intangible emptiness, which makes him an enigmatic but fascinating character. I agree with the line of interpretation saying that jealousy is the central motif of this play and the key to understanding Shakespeare's characterisation of Iago. Thus, here, I propose my own interpretation of Iago's purported motivelessness and emotional emptiness in relation to this thematic motif, namely, that we can recognise Iago as hybrid because he displays both intense human jealousy (an emotional motive factor) and an inhuman emotional detachment reminiscent of the morality Vice as he cynically manipulates the feelings of others, and that it is this Vice-like emotional detachment which makes us feel Iago's enigmatic emptiness.

Chapter 4 explores the hybrid nature of Edmund in *King Lear*. The 'morality' structure of this play is the most ambitious dramatic device Shakespeare employs to accentuate Cordelia's heartrending death. Based on a consideration of Shakespeare's use of

the structure of the morality plays, we can say that while on the one hand Edmund's resentment at his bastardy hints at his humanity, it also, on the other, marks his position as the representative of Vice within the play as a whole. As the Vice in the morality plays personifies the faults of the human hero, Edmund embodies his father's sin of adultery. That is to say, there is an allegorical meaning in his human (psychological) motivation, and in this sense, Edmund is unquestionably a hybrid of allegorical and psychological personae.