

An Evaluation of the Evil Characters in Shakespeare's Four Main Tragedies in terms of Machiavellian Principles

Shakespeare'in Dört Temel Tragedyasındaki Kötü Karakterlerin Machiavelli Prensipleri Açısından Değerlendirilmesi

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Abstract

Deriving from Italian political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, the term 'Machiavellian' refers to a ruler type, whose features are described in his work *The Prince* (1513). In the work, Machiavelli mentions the principles a ruler should follow to obtain and hold power by disregarding all main rules of morality such as faithfulness, honesty. In this context, Machiavelli provided a new type of villain for the Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy. The study claims that Shakespearean tragedies including *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* regarded as his "four principle tragedies" (Hazlitt, 2009, p. 21) also contain Machiavellian characters. It aims at examining villains in the plays in terms of Machiavellian principles and discuss to what extent they are Machiavellian throughout the plays. Machiavelli's *The Prince* is taken as a guide to analyse the Machiavellian features of the characters in question. It reveals that Iago and Edmund are Machiavellian because of their capabilities of responding to unexpected events and manipulating conditions ignoring any moral values due to their perspicacity throughout the plays. However, compared to Edmund, Iago falls short of Machiavellianism because of his groundless malignancy. On the other hand, it is revealed that the other examined characters, Regan, Goneril, Claudius, and the Macbeth couple fail in the way of Machiavellianism at last even though they are also evil in nature. The study asserts that in contrast to Machiavellian's remarks, Shakespeare was of the opinion that a Machiavellian, whether or not successful, does both himself/herself and the society harm.

Keywords: Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Machiavellian character, Shakespearean tragedy, evil characters.

Öz

İtalyan siyasal filozof Niccolò Machiavelli'den türeyen 'Machiavellici' terimi; özellikleri, Machiavelli'nin eseri olan *Prens* (1513)'te tarif edilen bir yönetici türüne karşılık gelmektedir. Machiavelli, sözü geçen eserde, güç elde etmek ve gücünü sürdürmek için yöneticinin izlemesi gereken ilkelere değinir. Bunlar doğruluk, dürüstlük gibi temel ahlak kurallarını göz ardı eder niteliktedir. Bu bağlamda, bu yönetici türüyle, Machiavelli, Elizabeth ve Jacobean öç trajedisine yeni bir kötü karakter türü kazandırmıştır. Bu çalışma, William Shakespeare'in "dört temel tragedyası" olarak değerlendirilen *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* ve *Macbeth* adlı oyunlarının (Hazlitt, 2009, s. 21) da Makyavelci karakterler içerdiğini ileri sürmektedir. Çalışmada bu oyunlardaki kötü karakterlerin Makyavelyen prensipleri açısından inceleyip oyun boyunca ne derece Makyavelyen olduğunu tartışmak amaçlanmaktadır. Söz konusu kötü karakterlerdeki Makyavelyen özellikleri incelemek için Machiavelli'nin *Prens* eseri kılavuz alınmaktadır. Çalışma, Iago ve Edmund'un oyunların başından sonuna kadar keskin zekâları sayesinde ani gelişen durumlara cevap verebilme ve her türlü ahlaki değeri göz ardı edip şartları kendi çıkarları doğrultusunda değerlendirebilme kabiliyetleriyle Makyavelci karakter olduklarını gösterir. Fakat, Iago'nun tüm kötülükleri asılsız nedenler yüzünden yaptığı için Makyavelyenlik konusunda Edmund'un gerisinde kaldığı görülür. Diğer taraftan, Regan, Goneril, Claudius ve Macbeth çifti gibi diğer incelenen karakterlerin ise, özlerinde yine kötü olmalarına rağmen, Makyavelyenlik açısından sonunda başarısız oldukları ortaya koyulur. Çalışma, incelenen oyunlarla, Machiavelli'nin belirttiğinin aksine, Shakespeare'in, başarılı olsun ya da olmasın, Makyavelci bir karakterin kendisine ve topluma zarar getireceğinin kanısında olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Machiavelli, *Prens*, Makyavelci karakter, Shakespeare tragedyası, kötü karakterler.

Introduction

Italian Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) was the Florentine statesman and a political philosopher. He was best known for his work, *The Prince*, which was written in 1513; however, published in 1532. He wrote the work addressing Lorenzo de' Medici, the ruler of Florence, when Florence was undergoing a political turbulence. Through the work, Machiavelli intended to guide the ruler to stay in power. Although it has been more than 500 years that he died, Machiavelli's name is a byword for "the exercise of bad faith in political affairs" (Skinner, 1981, p. 1).

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In *The Prince*, Machiavelli introduced some striking tactics for the prevailing prince. For instance, he insisted that as a significant political rule, the ruler may disregard all his virtuous and moral values and that a ruler should be concerned just with ensuring his own survival through the use of power. In this context, the book is not a traditional guide underlining the importance of a ruler's good nature as a must to achieve happiness, order and peace for his state because Machiavelli does not regard virtue as a necessity and draws a path of pragmatic authority in a rule. He warns:

A man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous. Therefore, if a prince wants to maintain his rule, he must be prepared not to be virtuous and to make use of this or not according to need. (2009, p. 65)

Accordingly, to maintain rule, a ruler needs to lie, cheat, deceive, or even kill, that is, he breaks all his ties with morality. According to Machiavelli, for this, one needs to have a set of practical abilities which he calls 'virtu'. In this respect, virtu is regarded as the key to success in Machiavellianism which may be applied pointblank whenever necessary. It is significantly different from the concept 'virtue', as it excludes traditional Christian values such as honesty. In other words, for Machiavelli, there is no virtue in virtu. Machiavelli strips virtue of its traditional associations with actions in accordance with correct principles; however, he simply identifies virtu with success. He advocates that the pursuit of what is good for the individual or the state may involve actions such as deception, lying and murder rejected by conventional Christian standards. The most important thing is not that the ruler is actually virtuous but appears to be so. Therefore, he advises a prince not to do anything that would make him become a hated ruler and notes: "It makes him hated above all things, as I have said, to be rapacious, and to be a violator of the property and women of his subjects" (Machiavelli, 2009, p. 65). Accordingly, in the Machiavellian approach, keeping his subjects "united and loyal" is essential for the ruler to let them "mind the reproach of cruelty" (Machiavelli, 2009, p. 59). Therefore, for Machiavelli, "it is necessary to know well how to disguise this characteristic [cruelty], and to be a great pretender and dissembler" (Machiavelli, 2009, p. 63). In this respect, a Machiavellian ruler is, above all, an exact hypocrite, who can easily adjust his behaviours, his talk, and even his looks for any particular situation. In this sense, he is like an actor in-born. He manipulates people around him to achieve his ends. He has a really efficient practical intelligence, as he can evaluate people and situations for his own benefits, by using people's weaknesses to his advantage. If necessary, he triggers discord and takes advantage of chaotic times by leading his way out for his own advantage.

The notion that "the end justifies the means" is significant for a Machiavellian ruler. At this point if one takes "the end" the ruler has in mind as the political survival of the ruler, it becomes acceptable in Machiavellian perspective. To achieve this end, a prince should not interfere his perception of virtue with statecraft, which may cause his failure (Machiavelli, 2009, p. 75). In fact, Machiavelli does not support the use of cruelty just for its own sake; however, for him, if it is inevitable to maintain the ruler's authority or prevent cruelty, he can utilise it (Osborne, 2017, p. 77). He states:

Cruelty can be described as well used (if it is permissible to say good words about something evil in itself) when it is performed all at once, for reasons of self-preservation; and when the acts are not repeated after that, but rather are turned as much as possible to the advantage of the subjects. (2009, p. 27)

Evaluating Machiavellian approach to cruelty, Roe notes, "Machiavelli at no point advocates the practice of evil as acceptable in itself – despite what his many detractors then and now

have said; he concedes, rather, that evil sometimes has to be used" (2002, p. 15). Accordingly, evil is inevitably applied in the rule from Machiavellian perspective.

Machiavelli's pragmatic approach to politics disseminated in the Elizabethan England and "created a storm of controversy" on the debate of what makes an effective ruler (Wells, 2005, pp. 79-80). Some Elizabethans considered the Machiavellian pragmatic approach to be dishonourable as opposite to the Christian thinking and virtues. "Machiavelli's assertion that religion is just a device for princes to keep their populations in awe and so promote civil obedience" (Egan, 2007, p. 73) was of such a nature that it could have provoked oppositions of the Christian Elizabethans. They associated Machiavelli with Satan because, at those times, the church claimed that the ends of political power were divine, not human, in contrast to Machiavelli's notion (Raab, 1964, p. 31). As there was no separation in sixteenth-century England between religion and politics, the general reaction to Machiavelli associated him with total evil and Satan.

Dealing with Machiavellianism apart from policy, it may be claimed that it provided a new insight into human nature to reflect on the Elizabethan stage with the notion of "a harshly competitive world where man's aggressive instincts [...are evoked without] natural bounds" (Wells, 2005, p. 30). Therefore, when the Machiavellian tenets mentioned in *The Prince* were applied to the characters in the Elizabethan drama, we can regard the sinister villain who is often the embodiment of evil as an aristocratic power-monger or a deceitful betrayal in the Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy as a Machiavellian. Accordingly, "Machiavellian," known as a cunning character type, derives from Machiavelli's uncommon pragmatic approach to political affairs. As Watson (1976) states, the use of Machiavellian characters started in England in the 1590s corresponding the time when Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* was performed (p. 637). The protagonist character of the play, Barabas, is regarded as one of the first Machiavellian villains.

Queen Elizabeth who was fluent in Italian as much as she was in French, Greek, and Latin read *The Prince* and applauded it years before it was translated into English. The work could be read in English around the late 1600s, corresponding about 17 years after Shakespeare's death (Forrester, 1995, p. 3). The consideration of this fact in addition to that Shakespeare was a prominent Elizabethan dramatist leads the question of whether Shakespeare had read *The Prince* directly to remain unanswered. Nevertheless, he might have been familiar with Machiavelli's concept of the ruler. Furthermore, considering the rich literary exchange between Shakespeare and Marlowe, who is the pioneer of Machiavellianism in the Elizabethan drama, Shakespeare may be claimed to have also been interfered with Machiavellianism in his plays. Some critics such as Grady (2002) who traces Machiavellianism in Shakespearean works claims him to be "a man on theatre" with the knowledge of *The Prince* (p. 45) because many characters in his plays involve in various ambitious crusades, thus, embody Machiavellian political ideology. Skinner (1981) also notes that Shakespeare was familiar with and the user of Machiavellianism in his tragedies, and he even called him "[t]he murderous Machiavel" (p. 1) with the claim that there is enough evidence to prove the argument that his evil characters were products of Machiavellianism. Therefore, the study aims at analysing some evil characters in Shakespeare's four tragedies through the lens of Machiavellianism. The reason for choosing the *Othello* (1604), *King Lear* (1606), *Macbeth* (1606) and *Hamlet* (1609) is that they are regarded as Shakespeare's four well-known great tragedies, as Hazlitt asserts (2009, p. 21). Furthermore, the characters to be examined are Iago in *Othello*, Edmund, Regan, and Goneril in *King Lear*, King Claudius in *Hamlet*, the title character and his wife Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth* all of whom are villains. The study intends to discuss to what extent they are Machiavellian within the context of the plays. It aims at demonstrating that although all the examined characters are evil in nature,

Regan, Goneril, Claudius, and the Macbeth couple cannot make the best of Machiavellianism, thus, cannot be regarded as perfect examples of Machiavellian characters. It also reveals how Iago falls behind Edmund because of his baseless malignancy even though both are better than the others as they are capable of dealing with any circumstances in a cunning way till the end without any repentance.

Discussion of Shakespearean Machiavellianism in the Selected Plays

Iago is the antagonist of the play *Othello*, who seeks to usurp the title character's power through his deadly cunning means. He hatches a plan, involving Othello, Desdemona, Roderigo and Cassio to make Othello jealous of Cassio. He executes his play in accordance with Machiavellian principles so well that he succeeds to the extent that Othello orders Iago to murder Cassio even though Roderigo is killed instead of him, Othello also strangles Desdemona, and when Iago's wife, Emilia, reveals the truth about Iago's plot, Othello commits suicide. For Iago, he has three main motives for his murderous plan, but they seem to be pseudomotives because there is nothing to support his accusations throughout the play. He hates Othello for passing him over in promoting Cassio, for supposedly cuckolding him with his wife, and he is obviously greedy for money. However, none of these mentioned motives can really explain his actions throughout the play. His expression of hatred to Othello is falsely justified by such accusations (Heilman, 1956, pp. 25-30). Therefore, indeed, he hunts for a motive constantly that would move him into action. Accordingly, as Raatzch notes, "[i]f there is any unconditional evil in the world, then 'Iago' is its name" (2009, p. 2). Following the Machiavellian tradition of villains, Shakespeare depicts Iago as a rational human being who is pragmatic and is neither emotional nor prone to believe in religious ideas. Iago considers that the world is "moved by egotism, appetite, and personal advantage" (Spivack, 1964, p. 87). He is indifferent to moral good and evil, even though he prefers the latter one decisively. He remains ignorant to the end he causes (Hazlitt, 2009, p. 49). For instance, Othello seems to regret and suffer when Desdemona dies because of his fault whereas Iago never shows a sign of repentance. He prefers silence as he does not have anything reasonable to explain. Thus, he never attempts to justify his actions or apologise for them. He embodies the concept of evil from the beginning to the end of the play. On the other hand, Othello is a failure as a ruler from the Machiavellian perspective because, for Machiavelli, "a ruler who does not recognise evils in the very early stages cannot be considered wise; this ability is given only to few" (2009, p. 170). Accordingly, Othello cannot discern Iago's evil nature which he hides behind his mask of honesty and trustworthiness and foresee the events, so he falls in Iago's traps. He realises Iago's identity of "a demi-devil, that is half fallen angel, but above all sense also half superhuman" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 200), but it becomes too late for Othello, Desdemona, Roderigo, and Emilia.

Othello is in a sharp contrast to Iago in regards to his characteristics because his nature is, as Hazlitt (2009) claims:

noble, confiding, tender, and generous; but his blood is of the most inflammable kind; and being once roused by a sense of his wrongs, he is stopped by no considerations of remorse or pity till he has given a loose to all the dictates of his rage and his despair...., his smothered jealousy breaks out into open fury, and he returns to demand satisfaction of Iago like a wild beast stung with the envenomed shaft of the hunters. (pp. 42-44)

Iago, in a Machiavellian manner, makes use of his master's weaknesses and reverses his own position from service to mastery even though he appears to be still a servant. As Raatzch (2009) notes, Iago does not accept to being Othello's subordinate in reality, but merely in appearance and schemes to prove the master is the one who can "keep his own heart to himself" (p. 24). Therefore, he says as a spokesperson of Machiavellianism: "I am not what I

am” (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 58), in other words, “I am not what I seem to be.” He says to Roderigo in a highly rational mode his reasons for staying under Othello’s authority:

Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
 In following him, I follow but myself;
 Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
 But seeming so, for my peculiar end. (Shakespeare, 2005, pp. 7-8)

Iago assures that in seemingly serving Othello as an ensign, he actually serves his own goals in disguise. He desires to take the revenge from Othello because of his baseless accusations. He plans to drive him into a crisis and unhappiness leading to the death of his beloved, Desdemona. His hypocritical approach is all politics. Through Iago forcing Othello’s cruel nature out and driving him to strangle his faithful and chaste, so innocent beloved, Desdemona, Shakespeare exhibits his own account of human nature; “our [people’s] ability to transcend the limits that nature supposedly sets for us” (Moore, 2016, p. 75) because, as Harbage states, “[e]vil is somehow woven with good [in appearance] into man himself” (1964, p. 83).

Soliloquies in which the character speaks to the audience are keys to distinguish Machiavellian characters easily because, in an attempt to hide their evil from other characters, villains share it with the audience (Heilman, 1956, p. 35). He tries to align only the audience with his evil scheme through soliloquies. Iago uses the soliloquy in the first act to define his intention and to prepare us for the villainous actions he will inflict on other characters, especially Othello, whom he calls by his race, ‘the Moore’. He tells us:

I hate the Moore;
 And it is thought abroad that twixt my sheets
 He’s done my office. I know not if’t be true;
 But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
 Will do as if for surety. He holds me well;
 The better shall my purpose work on him. (Shakespeare, 2005, pp. 47-48)

It may be concluded from the quotation above that Iago’s jealousy of Othello’s status, heroism and being lover of Desdemona surpasses Othello’s jealousy of Desdemona from the other men. As pointed out by Sanders (2003) evaluating Iago’s groundless causes, “[a]ll of his [Iago’s] real life is inward”, and he is [d]riven by a Machiavellian materialism and self-interest” (p. 32). Iago does his best to achieve his end as a Machiavellian who submerged in his own ambition. In addition to French and Greek, Latin was a significant foreign language particularly in education in the Elizabethan period. As such, the ones who knew Latin was called “literature” at those times (Stallybrass and Chartier, 2007, p. 47). Shakespeare knew Latin “pretty well” (Dobson, 2001, p. 28). Besides these, considering that “ego” is used to refer to “I” in Latin, it may be claimed that Shakespeare named Iago after that name purposely because the name “Iago” reminds the word “ego” (Raatzch, 2009, p. 1) and the character is already driven merely by his ego. Maguire (2007) also associates the character’s name with “the name of Spain’s patron Saint [who was] famous for conquering the Moors” by drawing parallelism between him and Iago’s role, as destroyer of Othello, the Moor of Venice. Thus, his behaviour is also hinted by his name (p. 48). He aims to mould Othello in false beliefs in a cunning way, not by force. He behaves in accordance with the principles of Machiavelli who notes that “people are by nature changeable. It is easy to persuade them about some particular matter, but it is hard to hold them to that persuasion. Hence, it is necessary to provide that when they no longer believe, they can be forced to believe” (2009, p. 28). He uses things to

his own advantage, a very appropriate trait for a Machiavellian. For instance, he uses Desdemona's accidental loss of her handkerchief against her. Although he is already planning to steal the handkerchief, he makes the best use of the accident when Desdemona unconsciously drops it and when his wife takes it to him. He also uses and abuses stupidity and fragility of the ones around him. For instance, he uses the deceivable nature of Roderigo, a suitor to Desdemona, and Cassio's weakness as tools in his way to his end.

Machiavelli notes that a Machiavellian should appear on the surface as if he were undoubtedly good; however, he should also know how to respond to the evil. He should not be concerned about being considered to be mean, but, at the same time, he should be conscious of the fact that much generosity may render him poor. Furthermore, he should not seem to be cruel. Otherwise, he will be a fearful character, who fail in operating his cunning plans for his own benefits. He should not abstain from deceiving people if necessary. Maybe he will not be loved by so many people, but he should not become someone who is hated by a lot of people. (2009, pp. 63-67). Thus, it may be claimed that by avoiding being despised and hated, a Machiavellian can hide his plans and mistakes easily. In that respect, Iago achieves to gain trust and dependence by behaving as if he is good in nature and does everything for the sake of Othello's love. Thus, he blinds Othello's eyes so well that Othello addresses to him as 'honest Iago' four times and uses the word 'honest' to describe him ten times. Iago avoids being responsible for the mistakes he causes. He never accepts responsibility for his actions or never has a guilty conscience. He never regrets causing destruction in people's lives. He does not care about the deaths of Desdemona, Roderigo, Othello, and Emilia. When he is discovered to be responsible for all disasters, he remains silent and puts all the blame on the others including Bianca, Emilia, and Othello. Furthermore, he does not hesitate to kill his own wife, Emilia, as she seeks to prove Desdemona's innocence and reveal that the one who is responsible for all disasters is her husband, Iago. He is never sorry for the happenings and will never be. He leaves the last word to Othello by getting rid of responsibility. He says: "Demand me nothing. What you know, you know. / From this time forth, I never will speak a word" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 200). In a Machiavellian sense, Iago would be a great ruler in practice. However, his groundless malignancy corrupts his Machiavellianism, which urges abstaining from evil when unnecessary.

As for Shakespeare's *King Lear*, it abounds with villains who can do everything for their greedy and selfish goals. King Lear's daughters Regan and Goneril, and Edmund, Gloucester's illegitimate son, are all evil characters as they are selfish, cruel, wise and greedy. Their actions confirm the notion that any means leading to the end is just. However, among these selected villains, Edmund is a true Machiavellian as he follows many Machiavellian strategies to achieve his vicious goals, but does so in disguise as Iago in *Othello*. However, as a Machiavellian, Edmund has a difference from Iago, because, unlike Iago, he has an actual motive to do evil; 'nature' which renders him disadvantageous in every field of life in comparison to his brother called Edgar as he is illegitimate. He shows his avarice, greed, and envy towards Edgar. Just like Iago, Edmund reveals to us his thoughts and intents in his soliloquy:

Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law,
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me?

[...] Now, gods, stand up for bastards! (Shakespeare, 2007, pp. 17-18)

It is obvious that Edmund problematises the matter of unfair legitimacy because he is motivated by the fact that it has not been his choice to be born as an illegitimate child. In fact,

he is victimised by the culture he lives in, not nature. Therefore, he justifies his evil actions to achieve restoring his rightful position by climbing out of the discriminatory condition he is born into. For him, he is not born evil but made evil by the society discriminating against him as he is illegitimate. Therefore, he is full of hatred from top to feet and reveals his suppressed evil nature. According to Moore (2016), he is “the prime example of a character who subscribes to the idea that we are no different animals,...essentially governed by instinctual processes beyond our control” (p. 68). Edmund knows that he is stripped from the legal right by the man-made law. He is not allowed to have what he wants. Therefore, motivated by revenge from nature, Edmund is blinded with excess ambition, hunger for power and self-importance. He aims at disposing of the law by taking over Edgar's land. He says in his soliloquy “Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land” (Shakespeare, 2007, p. 18). Land ownership refers to a form of wealth, and wealth is a form of power. He states: “The younger rise when the old doth fall” (Shakespeare, 2007, p. 18). Therefore, it is clear that Edmund desires to take over power over his father's domain which would go to Edgar according to the law. For him, the greed in acquiring power is all right if the end justifies the means. Thus, he behaves as a Machiavellian and manipulates people around him by making use of their weaknesses just like Iago who sways Cassio and Othello. He proves that how well he knows about human nature:

A credulous father and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none - on whose foolish honesty
My practices ride easy. I see the business. (Shakespeare, 2007, p. 33)

Obviously, Edmund speaks out of both sides of his mouth in order to get rid of both his father and brother at the same time. He manipulates his father about Edgar's treachery and presents himself as a more virtuous son than his illegitimate son Edgar. Indeed, as a typical Machiavellian, similar to Iago, he does his best to achieve his ends. More specifically, he breaks traditional values severely. He puts his brother out of action cunningly in order to become the sole owner of his father's properties and rule. Furthermore, born out of wedlock, later, Edmund himself represents unlawful sexual passion, flirting with Regan and Goneril. He behaves like a Machiavellian assassin who has an evil nature under his attractive appearance. By taking the advantage of Regan and Goneril's love for him, he convinces them that he loves the one over the other, so one of them will have to die for him to rule over the entire kingdom. Thus, he aims at assuring himself of winning his authority over even King Lear. He even dares to execute the king and the Queen of France, that is, King Lear's daughter Cordelia so that he can hold the power just like Iago who targets at having a literal authority over his general Othello. In a sense, he rebels against the norms and gets power over all things oppressing him, even though he is killed by Edgar at the end of the play. Nevertheless, he whispers “Yet Edmund was loved”, as he thinks that it has been only Regan and Goneril who loved him (Shakespeare, 2007, p. 188). Just like Iago, he also does not show any traces of repentance even before his death. Similar to Iago, he is not definitely a virtuous man but pretends to be so with a great mastery. Therefore, both Iago and Edmund preserve Machiavellian requisite ‘virtu.’ However, when Iago and Edmund are compared and contrasted from Machiavelli's perspective, it may be claimed that although both Iago and Edmund lust for power; they differ; the former to come over Othello because of baseless reasons as discussed above, the latter to claim his right of inheritance. In this respect, Edmund's target has a ground, whereas Iago's malignancy derives from groundless motives. Iago is free to reinvent himself every minute as he has strong passions, however negative. On the other hand, as Bloom (2010) notes, Edmund has no passions whatsoever as “he has never

loved anyone, and he never will”, thus, he is “Shakespeare’s most original character” in that respect (p. 8). In Machiavellian sense, Edmund surpasses Iago who does evil for its own sake.

While considering Machiavellian characters, it must be noted that every villain may not be a true Machiavellian even though every Machiavellian is a villain to a great extent. For instance, in *King Lear*, Lear’s daughters, Regan and Goneril are portrayed as villains as much as Machiavellians. They do everything to achieve their ends with a great equanimity. Goneril exemplifies immoral and unvirtuous behaviour. She uses flattery to get on the good side of her father: “Sir, I do love you more than words can wield the matter, / [...] Beyond all manner of so much I love you (Shakespeare, 2007, p. 7). Because the only thing she desires is to inherit her father’s kingdom. Therefore, she has the ultimate motive for acting this way to achieve her greedy goal. After she takes advantage of her old father, she repels her father out from her castle. This displays her immoral Machiavellian treatment to her father. Goneril cheats not only his father but also her husband Albany, as she falls in love with Edmund. Albany detects Goneril’s conniving deceptive behaviour and states: “You are not worth the dust which the rude wind / Blows in your face” (Shakespeare, 2007, p. 136). Regan and Goneril join their forces against their father to be powerful enough to get the kingdom from King Lear and obtain Edmund’s love. According to Machiavelli, conspirators cannot act alone, they need to make use of anybody else for their benefits (2009, p. 89). However, when their interests are crossed, they can cheat even each other. This is undoubtedly a Machiavellian trait. Goneril’s love of Edmund results in her poisoning her own sister, Regan to eliminate her from him.

Regan is the other sister who also shows Machiavellian traits in her personality. Wearing the mask of goodness, she praises her father, just like Goneril does: “I am made of that self-mettle as my sisters, / [...] In your Highness love (Shakespeare, 2007, pp. 8-9). Just like her deceptive sister, Regan also desires the wealth and kingdom. She cooperates with Goneril to mistreat her father with disrespect. Regan defends her sister’s poor treatment of her father to him and tells him that he is old and should be ruled by others. She says to him to return to Goneril and beg her forgiveness: “O, sir, you are old, [...] / Say you have wronged her (Shakespeare, 2010, pp. 86-87). Indeed, through Machiavellianism, she aims at having authority over his king father, just like Iago does to his general Othello. Machiavelli notes that “men more quickly forget the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony” (Machiavelli, 2009, p. 60). In this sense, both Goneril and Regan are greedy enough to ignore their father and leave him to death as their main concern is their patrimony. Furthermore, just like Goneril, Regan also deceives her husband, Cornwall because she loves Edmund as her sister Goneril does. However, neither Regan nor Goneril can be Edmund’s and the owner of the kingdom. Their behaviours bring them just their own ends. Despite some Machiavellian traits of the sisters, they fail to become Machiavellians, as they cannot conceal their evil nature till the end and cannot pretend to be virtuous. Therefore, it may be claimed that they represent unsuccessful Machiavellians.

Another example of negative Machiavellianism is Claudius in *Hamlet*. He is so cruel and deceitful that he can murder his brother secretly, marry his brother’s wife without hesitation and organise conspiracy against Hamlet, his brother’s heir, to become the ruler of the kingdom. Although this ambitious action would raise protests among the public; however, he achieves handling this situation in a masterful Machiavellian practice. He declares that he has accepted the rulership with reluctance and a great sadness, thus, persuades people around him of his good intentions. It may be evaluated as a successful Machiavellian action as he can mask his evilness. He also follows a Machiavellian policy as an embodiment of “evil hovering near him [Hamlet] like a sceptre” (Hazlitt, 2009, p. 85). He is cruel as much as Hamlet is noble. Accordingly, he is what Iago is to Othello, and Edmund is to Edgar. Just like the

merciless sisters and Edmund in *King Lear*, he is concerned with his “patrimony” as a Machiavellian (2009, p. 60) and dares to kill his brother for sake of the throne of England. However, he achieves hiding his cruel face from people around him cunningly, and he becomes a new ruler who is loved and feared. He seems to be well-protected against Hamlet as he can keep people around him loyal and convinced of his good nature. Thus, in accordance with the Machiavellian policy, just like Iago in *Othello*, he manages to keep his subjects “united and loyal” not to let them think about his “reproach of cruelty” (2009, p. 59). He also makes his subjects forget all about the old King Hamlet and try to prove that he is better than his brother. Thus, he behaves in accordance with Machiavellian ‘virtues’ because Machiavelli notes that when a new prince applies the principles he mentions prudently, he will seem well established and safer in his state and will attract men much more and bind them to him more strongly than does ancient blood (2009, p. 118). Just like Iago who makes use of Cassio’s admiring Desdemona in *Othello*, Edmund who abuses Regan and Goneril’s love for himself in *King Lear*, Claudius benefits from Polonius’ son, Laertes. He manipulates him to take his father’s revenge on Hamlet, who kills Polonius accidentally. Thus, he gains his support in the struggle against Hamlet. Considering all these actions, it may be claimed that Claudius starts and processes in the way of Machiavellianism, however, he seems to fail towards the end. Claudius is a representative of unsuccessful Machiavellianism leading to his failure just like Regan and Goneril in *King Lear* because he has some points violating ideal Machiavellianism. First of all, if he were a true Machiavellian, he should have prevented Hamlet returning home so as not to become a trouble for himself by killing him at the university or on his journey home because as the rightful heir of the kingdom, Hamlet is the biggest and the most apparent obstacle for him. Furthermore, even when he decides to act, Claudius makes a wrong choice by assigning Hamlet’s friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to prepare a pitfall for Hamlet because he wastes time before he really acts to get rid of Hamlet. Machiavelli states that a ruler should determine the wound he will need to inflict and act for it immediately. Otherwise, “either through timidity or bad advice, is always forced to have the knife ready in his hand” (2009, p. 66). Another point is that a Machiavellian does not have a guilty conscience and never regrets doing evilness. In contrast to Iago in *Othello* and Edmund in *King Lear*, who never repent even in the end of the plays, Claudius shows signs of guilty conscience when he kneels down to pray for redemption and confesses his crime:

O, 'tis true!”
 How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
 The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,
 Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
 Than is my deed to my most painted word:
 O heavy burden! (Shakespeare, 2003, p. 96)

In his soliloquy, he asks for God’s forgiveness; however, he tries to justify his murder for his crown and beloved queen Gertrude.

My fault is past. But O, what form of prayer
 Can serve my turn? Forgive me my foul murder?
 That cannot be, since I am still possess'd
 Of those effects for which I did the murder,
 My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen. (2003, p. 131)

It may be claimed that although Claudius is very conscious of his fault, he feels determined to go for his aim till the end. However, he cannot continue as he has first started according to the principles of Machiavellianism. For instance, he makes a new plan to murder Hamlet, but, as an opposition to Machiavellian acute mind, Gertrude falls into the trap he sets for Hamlet. He falls from his high state on account of his inability to managing multicomponent strategies.

He results in the death not only of Hamlet but also Gertrude and his own. Thus, he fails in the way of ideal Machiavellian from Machiavelli's perspective.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are also depicted as unsuccessful Machiavellians who cannot put virtue in practice well in *Macbeth*. In fact, Macbeth is ambitious enough even to kill the king to be able to become the owner of the kingdom. In other words, his excessive ambitious nature leads him to evil in thought and action. It may be claimed that just like Edmund and Claudius, Macbeth has also Machiavellian ambition for materialism and power as much as Duncan has good intention, but a failure as a ruler in Machiavellian sense just like King Lear and Hamlet's father who cannot predict and take preventive precautions against possible threats around them. Just like the other examined villains, Macbeth also chooses the evil side. His treasonous nature is contrasted by the "vulnerable and legitimate" ruler, Duncan, thus, the Machiavellian approach to the play seems to be illuminating (Lemon, 2008, p. 77). As a Machiavellian, Macbeth sets off with hypocrisy for his goal of taking over the reign. As noted by Lemon (2008), "he at once celebrates the king's [Duncan's] rule, acknowledging his generosity, and destroys such rule as a means of benefitting himself" (p. 77). He even seeks to get rid of his best friend Banquo and his little son and murder Macduff's family to escape from his fate. After Duncan's death, he is involved in violence, not for its own sake, but to repel the consequences. Therefore, the end which justifies his means works differently later on. Thus, it may be claimed that he fails to become a Machiavellian. He cannot hide his guilt well as much as Iago, Edmund and Claudius can. Therefore, he cannot carry the heavy weight of his guilty conscience. In this context, it may be claimed that Macbeth has the most humane side in comparison to Iago, Edmund, the Lear sisters mentioned above and Claudius, who confesses his guilt and prays for God's forgiveness by himself, but maintains his struggle to secure his authority. Macbeth is not a decisive villain like a true Machiavellian. He is not a manipulator like a Machiavellian, but he is easily manipulated by outer forces as Hazlitt notes below:

Macbeth himself- appears driven along by the violence of his fate like a vessel drifting before a storm : he reels to and fro like a drunken man; he staggers under the weight of his own purposes and the suggestions of others; he stands at bay with his situation; and from the superstitious awe and breathless suspense into which the communications of the Weird Sisters throw him, is hurried on with daring impatience to verify their predictions, and with impious and bloody hand to tear aside the veil which hides the uncertainty of the future. (2009, p. 23)

Accordingly, Macbeth is not a villain in nature but becomes one because of the three weird witches and his wife's setting his ambitious nature in motion. From the moment he murders Duncan, his heart misgives him even though he gets the position he desires. He is honest, generous, and most importantly, full of "the milk of human kindness" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 28). His uneasiness leads to his jealousy of even the dead Duncan's peace. He says: "Duncan is in his grave; after life's fitful fever he sleeps well" (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 85).

A Machiavellian, as exemplified by Iago, Edmund and to some extent Claudius, is a character of self-will and does not have a conflict of contrast feelings in his nature. He focuses on his end and never loses his self-balance until he achieves it. However, Macbeth never controls his feelings following Duncan's death and cannot keep his balance in imagination and reality. He allows Duncan's sons to leave when they learn about their father's death and becomes late for attacking Macduff. Thus, he sows the seed for his own death.

In comparison to Macbeth, Lady Macbeth is a more cunning character who makes the audience fear of her wicked potential. On the other hand, she does not make us abhor like Regan and Goneril. She is as ambitious as her husband whom she manipulates by fostering his masculine ego. Her knowledge of her husband's nature well may be understood from her words about Macbeth:

Your face, my thane, is as a book, where men
 May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
 Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
 Your hand, your tongue; look like th'innocent flower,
 But be the serpent under't. (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 32)

As understood from the quotation above, Sadowski (2010) asserts that Lady Macbeth “instructs the novice in the political game in Machiavellian tactics” (p. 163). Lady Macbeth is cunning enough to know that her husband’s self-will may only be realised through the Machiavellian principle of disguising evilness under the mask of innocence as a tool. However, she also knows that her husband is lack of it. She says:

Yet do I fear thy nature;
 It is too full of the milk of human kindness
 To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
 Art not without ambition, but without
 The illness should attend what thou wouldst highly,
 That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
 And yet wouldst wrongly win. (Shakespeare, 2005, pp. 28-29)

As noted by Hazlitt, Lady Macbeth’s stony-heartedness and masculine permanence provide her with “the ascendancy over her husband’s faltering virtue” (2009, p. 23). She soliloquises as follows:

Come all you spirits
 That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here:
 And fill me, from the crown to th' toe, top-full
 Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
 Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
 That no compunctious visitings of nature
 Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
 The effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,
 And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,... (Shakespeare, 2005, p. 31)

Unlike Macbeth, Lady Macbeth seems to be more Machiavellian in her words. She even schemes the plan to murder Duncan, which her husband cannot do, even though she cannot actualise the plan as her filial piety makes her resemble sleeping and defenseless Duncan to her own father. In this respect, Shakespeare presents “what the nature of reality would be” with the confrontation with amoral through Machiavellianism (Roe, 2002, p. xi). Accordingly, Lady Macbeth becomes unsuccessful in Machiavellianism in action. She cannot also keep her balance and oscillates between her fancy and the reality. All her gestures become mechanical, and she goes mad and dies. Her evil nature spells her and her husband’s deaths even though she enables Macbeth to become a king through her Machiavellian strategy. Thus, the couple cannot perpetuate their Machiavellianism, and they change. Their guilty consciousness invades their Machiavellian nature and drives them into failure.

Conclusion

The characters mentioned above all are villains, and they follow their own interests. They can do everything to achieve their greedy and selfish goals. Iago in *Othello* and Edmund in *King Lear* can achieve at embracing the Machiavellian principles by combining them with their high intelligence and capability of responding to unexpected developments, by manipulating truths for their own benefits until the ends of the plays. Nevertheless, in comparison to Edmund, Iago may not be regarded as a perfect Machiavellian because he sets off for baseless motives. The other examined characters, such as Regan and Goneril in *King Lear*, Claudius in *Hamlet* and the Macbeth couple in *Macbeth* fail in the way of Machiavellianism even though they are also evil in nature. Although the evil characters in question leave no stone unturned to consolidate their ill-gained positions, their Machiavellian traits and actions brought them to this point of self-destruction and even suicide at the end of the plays, regardless of being successful or not in Machiavellianism. In this context, they display the inevitable fall of Machiavellianism which Shakespeare, as the playwright of the public who were both Christians caring about the morality and governed by the monarch relying on Christianity, apparently disfavoured and exhibited his response to Machiavelli through “the larger question to the threat of amorality” in his plays (Roe, 2007, p. 361) even though some critics such as Bye (1995) argues that Shakespeare was a follower of Machiavellian doctrine (p. 6). The study of the mentioned characters indicates that any adoption of Machiavellian principles results in social chaos and self-destruction because of Machiavellian people’s complete lack of morality leading a complete ruin in the community. Therefore, it may be claimed that Machiavelli and Shakespeare had divergency in regards to the moral aspect of Machiavellianism and its outcomes in the human dimension even though both of them believe in the significance of a stable state united within a single strong ruler.

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