Chapter Five

Machiavelli’s Influence on the Selected Plays of Shakespeare

It is a fact that William Shakespeare was influenced by many great thinkers and writers who preceded him. As a result, he based some of his plays on other author’s works. Among the figures who greatly influenced Shakespeare and the mind of many Renaissance thinkers was Machiavelli. Although in Shakespeare’s time *The Prince* was known by a few of English people, for being forbidden, it seems that Shakespeare knew much about the content of Machiavelli’s book for the reason that many of Shakespearean tragedies and history plays were definitely a representation of Machiavelli’s thoughts of gaining and maintaining power. After Marlowe, “Shakespeare was the next dramatist to mention Machiavelli … in I Henry VI.”¹ Huge Grady states “we can observe Shakespeare developing political ideas which explore familiar Machiavellian themes, and taking them several digress further in complexity and sophistication than did earlier dramatists of the Machiavellian like Kyd and Marlowe.”² Concentrating on the meaning of the terms ‘Machiavellism’ and ‘Machiavellian’ it became clear that Shakespeare’s *Richard III, Hamlet, Othello* were filled with situations in which specific characters were provided with chances to act according to what had been stated in *The Prince*. These plays suggested the idea that Machiavelli, in one way or another, had advocated the bad principle that *the end justifies the means*, and corrupted the moral aspect of politics. This chapter will be devoted to shed light on Machiavellian traits of the conduct of some of Shakespeare’s characters of the mentioned plays and specially the villains Richard III, Claudius, and Iago.
5.1. Shakespeare: the Man and the Dramatist

William Shakespeare was one of the most extraordinary authors in history. His plays and poems explored the complexity of the human soul with distinguished discernment. Shakespeare was not just a poet or a dramatist of England, but of mankind. The universal appeal of Shakespeare’s plays and poems was appreciated by Ben Jonson with “Soul of the Age! The applause! delight! the wonder of our stage.” In the same poem, Jonson confirms “He was not of an age, but for all time.”³ Dryden states that Shakespeare “was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul.”⁴ Nicholas Royle describes Shakespeare as “the most complex, inspiring, challenging and elusive poet and dramatist who ever lived.”⁵ Francis Meres regards him as “the wittiest, most mellifluous poet of the age… the most excellent English dramatist for both comedy and tragedy.”⁶

In spite of all his fame and celebration, Shakespeare remained a mysterious figure in regard of his personal history for the lack of documented facts about the early years of the greatest playwright of the world. His father John Shakespeare left his father’s home in Snitterfield and settled in Stratford where he married Mary Arden. Of his marriage there were eight kids, four males and four females. William, who was the third child and the first son, was christened on 26th April 1564.⁷ Since the child should be baptized after two or three days of his birthday, it was believed that William Shakespeare was born on 23rd April 1564.⁸

His father came to Stratford on Avon in the country of Warwickshire about 1531 and started to succeed as a merchant of agricultural products and leather. His mother was the daughter of successful farmer who belonged to an old family of mixed Anglo-Saxon and Norman blood. There was a high probability that neither William’s father nor his mother could read or write.⁹

After marrying Mary Arden, John Shakespeare occupied a new social position on the ladder better than before. In 1556, he was appointed to be the responsible for the price and the quality of the bread and the beer offered to the citizens of Stratford. It was an
essential job for there was no supplement of pure drinking water, so that most of the people of this village, including kids, used to drink ale and beer which became relatively pure as a result of brewing process. In 1565, John Shakespeare was assigned as an alderman, “a leading figure in local politics.” The prime of his career came when he was appointed a Stratford’s mayor in 1568. After this post, John Shakespeare’s career declined, for unknown reason, and that is what led him into financial troubles during the 1570s. By 1576 he became no longer keen to join the council conventions, but his fellow councilors did not officially replace him as an alderman until 1587. He lost his property and fell into debt, he died in 1601, and his wife in 1608. Both of William’s eldest sisters died in infancy. The children followed William were; Gilbert (1566-1612) , Joan (1569-1646) ,Anne(1571-9), Richard(1574-1613), and Edmund (1580-1607). Edmund, who became an actor in London, was the only one among William’s brothers who tried to follow a theatrical career as a profession, but he died young when he was twenty-seven years of his age.\textsuperscript{10}

William Shakespeare attended the Stratford Grammar School when he was about seven years. He left the school at the age of thirteen as a result of the inability of his family to afford the cost of educating its eldest son and that is why Ben Jonson, his friend, mentioned that Shakespeare “had small Latin and less Greek…” He joined no other school or college subsequently.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1582, when he was about nineteen years of age, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway whom he was eight years younger than her. This marriage was achieved in a hurry, by special licence, for making his future wife pregnant out of wedlock and their first child, Susanna, was born after five months. According to Elizabethan social tradition, there was no disgrace in Anne’s pregnancy for the reason “the couple could have plighted their troth before the actual marriage…” The twins Hamnet and Judith were born in 1585.\textsuperscript{12}

About the year 1587, Shakespeare left Stratford; he went to London where he attended Burbage’s actor company. There was a rumour that he was forced to depart his village escaping the consequences of robbing a deer from Sir Thomas Lucy’s park. But it
was not sure whether, at the time Shakespeare was said to have robbed the deer, there was any deer at the place referred to. Actually, it is unfair to pollute the story of Shakespeare’s great life, which was the literary icon of its age by such hearsay.

There was no recorded information about what Shakespeare was doing during the ten years between 1582 and 1592 when he disappeared from all records leaving few historical traces and that is what was called Shakespeare’s lost years. But there was fixed evidence that in 1592 he was in London where he began to establish himself professionally. He enjoyed success as an actor and playwright and that is what represented enough reason for the dying playwright Robert Greene to disparage him for being an actor who had the rashness to write plays along with university-trained playwrights. In his deathbed, Greene declared “there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers heart wrapt in a players hide supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.” Henry Chettle, Greene’s editor, publicly apologized to Shakespeare in the preface to Kind Heart’s Dream and that is what indicated that Shakespeare was respected in London and that he had influential friends and connections.

During the period when actors were operating in companies, he was writing for at least three companies until 1594. Henceforth, he became a member of a company called the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. It was a prosperous company, afterwards it was allowed to name itself the King’s Men. This company received royal support and that is why it was counted as members of the royal household. Shakespeare was on his way to be rich. He received money in return for the plays he wrote, his job as an actor, and the profits of actors company of which he was a prominent member. He came back to his birthplace in 1610 and stopped writing in 1613. According to many rumours, Shakespeare became sick and as a result he was forced to retire to his country. He died on 23 April 1616 out of fever contracted while he was drinking at a reunion with Ben Jonson. He was buried in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford.
Although Shakespeare, who arrived to London to work in a theater, was of poor education in contrast with his contemporary, he was in need for no more than two years to be associated with scholars and dramatists when he wrote plays of kings and clowns, of heroes and heroines. In a few years, he became the master of the age leading all brilliant groups of poets and dramatists who found undying glory of the age. Shakespeare mighty drama of human life, which was of unrivaled poetry in any other language, ran from his pen play by play in unparalleled rapidity to stand as the test of its time. It is true that Shakespeare had a marvelous imagination and creative mind, but he invented few. He used to infuse life into an old story to make it glow with “the deepest thought and the tenderest feelings that ennoble our humanity, and each new generation… finds it more wonderful than the last.” How did Shakespeare achieve this task? It was an unanswered question that would be always the source of our wonder.17

Shakespeare was widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and called England’s national poet and the “Bard of Avon.” He wrote about 38 plays, 154 sonnets, and two long poems in addition to many other poems. Shakespeare plays were translated into many living languages. Most of his plays were written during the period from 1589 to 1613. The early plays were essentially commodities and history plays. His tragedies *Hamlet, King Lear, Othello*, and *Macbeth* were regarded the finest work in English language and were written before 1608. Shakespeare last plays were known as tragicomedies or romances, he wrote them with collaboration of other dramatists.18

Shakespeare’s plays reflected that he was profoundly interested in the classical form of drama which was popular in his time. The heroic roles of his drama were always occupied by men and women of strong individuality. Although his villains such as Iago in *Othello* were “Machiavellian figures laughing at the conventional creed and morality,” Shakespeare maintained admirable limit of decency in dealing with religious and moral matters.19

In the First Folio 1623, Shakespeare’s plays were divided into three main groups: comedies, histories and tragedies. Shakespeare wrote his great comedies in a typical period of cultural history of England, the 1590s, at which the professional public theatre
was prosperous, London emerged as a rich melting-pot city of people of different classes, printed books became available and cheaper than before, and the “artistic and philosophical discussions were fashionable…” Comedy in simple terms meant merely a play with a happy end. It was also a play which aimed to produce laugh. Shakespearean comedy included these elements, but they did not only to achieve that. “They can have very serious elements in their themes and plot, and often concern themselves with some of the weaker aspects of human nature.” The kind of comedy Shakespeare wrote was called romantic comedy. Shakespeare’s comedy was dominated by four plays; *Twelfth Night, As You Like It, A Midnight Night’s Dream,* and *Much Ado About Nothing.* Although each play was different, all of them had a number of shared characteristics which characterized Shakespearean comedy. The main characters were frequently misguided, but by means of courtship and love they were able to find their way far from their weakness happily. The problems however were soon resolved and the play ended with social harmony of marriage and dance.

Shakespeare used his language, particularly imagery, to make the themes of his comic plays come to life, bringing out the full implications of their plot. Shakespeare comedy was something more substantial than mere plays about men and women who fell in love. The plays were not particularly deep, but they did acknowledge that chaotic element in the people could destroy the order within the society. Those ideas were always implicit in romantic comedy, but the language used by Shakespeare made that implication apparent. Shakespeare’s move serious comedies, such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure,* were called tragicomedies. The pure romantic comedies took place in “a make-believe world,” the tragicomedies took place in a realistic world where the lovers came in struggle with those in authority. The plays dealt with the attempts of the society to govern its people. The lovers always threatened for their reckless conduct. The power of such type of plays lied in Shakespeare’s talent to explore the full implications of the story shedding light on the themes of justice and mercy.
“In the sequence of the history plays, Shakespeare ... achieved a reconciliation of epic material with dramatic form, somewhat as Milton, in *Samson Agonists* transmuted the matter of religions experience into drama.”23 He wrote a series of history plays. In spite of that they were hardly alike in form, they classed as histories because of “Their focus on the post-Conquest past.” Emma Smith states that the name histories were driven from the source material of the plays. They were histories primarily because of their relation to their external sources, but not of their internal shape of narrative form.25 Eight of Shakespeare’s histories were based on English History and Four on Roman History. *1, 2, 3 Henry VI, Richard III, King John, Richard II, 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VIII*, were based on English history, while *Julius Caesar, Timor Athens, Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* were based on Roman history. Stopford Brooke, on the one hand, tries to deny Shakespeare’s political purposes of writing the history plays saying:

Shakespeare desired to combine all plays into a whole. In completing it, the moral and political philosophy of good or bad government comes in as a necessary part of the conception, but its lessons were not directly or indirectly given. His true aim was to represent human life in action and thought within the limits which history set before him.”26

In his book, *Shakespeare’s Humanism*, Robin Headlam Wells, on the other hand, confirms Shakespeare’s political purpose saying that Shakespeare dramatized stories from ancient world for the reason “history is a storehouse of political lessons that can be applied to the modern world.”27

Actually Shakespeare’s political aims were undeniable element in these plays. Shakespeare had understood state affairs very well. His histories were political and patriotic statements of some activity and that is what represented Shakespeare’s continuous attempts of shaping British perceptions of the national past and of nationhood. They were of essential influence in creating Shakespeare as a national poet. According to English and European Romantic poets, from Keats, Bowning and Tennyson to Goethe,
Hugo, and Pushkin, Shakespeare clearly raised a key figure of shaping a specific national consciousness and as an inventor of a model out of which the future national history plays could be developed. Wilhem Hortmann goes further stating that there was political purpose even in Shakespeare’s comedies. In *As You Like It*, for example, Duke Frederick had usurped the position of the exiled Duke.

Shakespeare’s tragedies were probably the best known of all his plays, “it is the tragic plays in general that seem most robustly to confirm Shakespeare’s greatness” for the reason that the tragedies examined the emotional resources of both the reader and the audience deeper than the history plays and the comedies. Admittedly, a tragedy was essentially a story of suffering ended with death of the hero. But Shakespeare’s tragedies were more than powerful stories of death and suffering, “tragedy as conceived by Shakespeare is concerned with ruin or restoration of the soul and of the life of the man.” Shakespeare’s tragic play was not classified as tragedies for showing a series of moving pictures of the hero and the heroine trapped in the coils of suffering, “Its characteristic motive is the exhibition of the man in unsuccessful conflict with circumstances.”

Richard C. McCoy states that all of Shakespearean tragedies were distinguished by equivocation as a pervasive element and that the suffering of their tragic hero was, to some degree, influenced by “Christian ideas of altruism and sacrifice.”

Shakespearean tragedy dealt with the disaster of a person of high social position, often with kings, princes, or military larders and that is why it was the tragedy of one person or at most two in the tragedy of love. The tragic hero fell towards his tragic end as a result of a weak point within his personality, tragic flaw, that led him to commit several mistakes throughout the events and that is what drove him into a situation where he could not win. The plot of the tragic play should be developed by creating internal and external conflict and the actions should appear real to the audience for the aim of bringing catharsis in order to purify the soul from emotions.

There is no doubt that Shakespeare, in some of his tragedies and specially the earlier ones, was influenced by Seneca, the Mystery and Morality plays of the Middle Ages, Marlowe and Kyd. But it seemed that Shakespearean great tragedies, *Macbeth, Hamlet,*
Othello, and King Lear had outgrown this influence.\textsuperscript{34} They were the climax of Shakespeare’s art, “in intensity of emotion, depth of physiological insights, and power of style they stand supreme.”\textsuperscript{35}

While it was interesting to differentiate between plays written by Shakespeare and to describe them as comedies and tragedies, it is important to explain that all these plays shared elements of both columns and that is what interpreted the use of the same tropes in the comedies and tragedies. At the end of his career, Shakespeare intermixed the comic and the tragic elements in a group of plays, including The Winter’s Tale, Cymbeline, and The Tempest. Many scholars tended to deal with these plays as a distinct type; they dubbed them the “late romance.”\textsuperscript{36}

Finally, one has to conclude that what set Shakespeare as the greatest English dramatist was not that he wrote different kind of plays, but what gave him this status was the undeniable fact that he wrote plays so much better than that of other playwrights. Shakespeare had unparalleled ability of characterization and that is what enabled him to create so many distinguished characters. He was able to invent a full meaning of how complicated life was.

5.2. Machiavelli and Shakespeare’s Richard III

5.2.1. Richard III: a Brief Introduction

Richard III is clearly a performance piece. It “was critical in developing a new and spectacular symbiosis” between Shakespeare, the actor who was turned into playwright, and Richard Burbage, the aspiring actor for whom the role of Richard as a key character was written. Shakespeare shaped the historical materials introducing him “as tyrant into the language and conventions of the theater.”\textsuperscript{37}

It was a historical play, deemed to have been written in approximately 1591 depending on the fact Richard III was a known play before June 1592, the date of suspending theatre. Shakespeare first tetralogy was started in 1590 and terminated with
Richard III may be late in 1591. The first performance of the play could not have been achieved until the summer of 1594 in London.\(^{38}\)

Except Hamlet, it was the longest play of Shakespeare’s canon and was the longest of the First Folio in which the vision of Hamlet was shorter than its Quarto analogue. Richard III was always performed with an abridgment and as a result certain flat characters had to be removed completely and that is what created a need to invent extra lines or to add them from elsewhere for the aim of founding the natural background of the relationships among the characters during the development of its plot. The direct cause why abridgment should be achieved was that Shakespeare himself assumed that the audience would be familiar with the events of the Henry VI plays, and they regularly made indirect references to events such as the murder of Henry VI committed by Richard III or the defeat of Henry’s queen Margaret.\(^{39}\)

The structure of the play was well Arranged and formal. Its protasis showed so many materials from the Henry VI cycle preparing, at the same time, the audience for the new materials of the current play. The catastasis was represented by Richard’s gaining of power as a King in addition to the efforts exerted by the opponents to depose him. The catastrophe was deliberately spread on the Bosworth Field which was “elaborately prepared and symbolically significant event then any of the battles…. In the Henry VI plays.”\(^{40}\) The events followed each other in logical sequence to the point that each scene came to be a unit within a large unite. In short the plot of Richard III was extraordinary knitted.\(^{41}\)

In the section of history plays of the First Folio, the only play among the histories to be called tragedy was Richard III. In this play, Shakespeare combined the historical elements with tragic structure for the aim of showing Richard as the solely tragic hero emphasizing his rise to the crown and his downfall towards the tragic end. In spite of its large number of characters, Richard III had no subplot. All characters, including the hostile characters, were employed in different combination to achieve the task of developing Richard’s story and that is what gave the play, “a classic pyramid structure,”
rising action in the direction of climax, crisis, and then falling action to the tragic conclusion.\textsuperscript{42}

Except for its malformed Richard, the male characters of the play were all not practically individualized either the one exception embodied by the Duke of Clarence who was shown vivid by his depiction of an amazing dream of his own death. Clarence could be remembered for his miserable fate when he was stabbed and then to be drawn in the butt of Malmsey wine and for his great dream, “Shakespeare’s dream” as it was named by Harold bloom, which was not only the best poetic quality in \textit{Richard III}, but it was the most powerful in all Shakespeare’s works.\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Richard III} was the only play of Shakespeare to start with a soliloquy by one of its characters. Richard was not mere a hero, he was employed to be a chorus and a presenter at the same time. As other characters appeared on the stage, it was Richard who introduced them to the audience.\textsuperscript{44} Richard for example, introduced Clarence saying, “Dive, thoughts, down to my soul; here Clarence comes.” (\textit{Richard III}, I. i, 41)

Among the main themes of this play was the idea of fate and especially as it was reflected by “the tension between free will and fatalism in Richard’s actions and speech” in addition to the reaction of opponent characters towards him. As inspiration for his own rendering, it was clear that Shakespeare depended strongly on Thomas More’s point of view of Richard as a tyrant and culprit. More’s influence, particularly as it related to the part of divine punition in Richard’s governing of England, arrived its climax in the voice of Margaret. Janis Lull believes “Margaret gives voice to the belief, encouraged by the growing Calvinism of Elizabethan era, that individual historical events are determined by God, who often punishes evil with (apparent) evil.”\textsuperscript{45}

More’s \textit{History of Richard III} was the main cause of founding the remaining popular image of King Richard III as a villainous monster. More qualified him as follows:

\begin{quote}
Richard the third sonne, of whom we nowe entreate, was in witte and courage egall with either of them, in bodye and prouesse farre vnder them bothe, little of stature, ill fetured of limmes, croke
\end{quote}
backed, his Left shoulder much higher then his right, hard fauoured of visage, and suche as in states called warlye, in othermenne other wise. He was malicious, wrathfull, enuious, and from afore his birth, euer forward.46

5. 2. 2. Incarnation of Machiavelli’s Ideas in Richard III

One of the most obliviously Machiavellian plays was Richard III. It was the climax of Shakespeare’s first tetralogy of history plays and the logical place in which one could search “Shakespeare’s earliest treatment of Machiavellian themes…”47 Richard III “a flamboyant, grand-guignol type of villainy, the melodramatization of Machiavellianism on the Elizabethan stage…”48

Shakespeare used this play to provide adequate explanation of the ugliness of tyranny used by kings such as Richard III and that is why one has to give an idea about what tyrant is. The tyrant can be simply described as a king or a governor who employs the revenue of the state on his behalf in order to achieve his personal wishes rather than the needs of his citizens using oppressive power to suppress his opponents. The balance between power and justice is always missing and that is what make cruelty becomes clear-cut in his reign. Elizabethan moralists sums up the tyrant as “an epitome of deadly sins and compare his pride, ambition, and malice to those of Satan himself.”49 Shakespeare explored this idea using the character of Richard, the Duke of Gloucester, whose ambition led him to search the royal crown in spite of the Kings’ two sons and his brother Clarence. It seems that Shakespeare wrote this play not just for the aim of showing historical events in dramatic frame, but to stand for a live memory of what arrogant king, Richard III, committed during his reign.

As a result of the correlation among the historical events, Richard’s roots as a Machiavellian character stretching for the preceding play, 3 Henry VI, and that is why it is better for anyone who wants to study Machiavellism in Richard III to choose it as a starting point providing a brief summary about his behavior that embodied a representation of Machiavelli’s ideas. In 3 Henry VI, where Shakespeare’s idea of
writing Richard III was started, Richard presented his credentials as a Machiavellian character whose overweening ambition led him to look for kingdom regardless all the obstacles he had to face. At the beginning of this part, Richard was introduced by Shakespeare as a proud soldier depending on what he had achieved in the battle field. He was esteemed for being brave by his father who stated “Richard hath best deserved of all my sons.”50 Even he was the youngest among his brothers, he always intervened in making decision so that it was not strange that Richard was behind the idea of staying Parliament House. He asked his father to take Henry’s crown describing him as an extorter.

Richard: you are old enough now, and yet, methinks, you lose.
Father, tear the crown from the usurper’s head.

(3 Henry VI, 1. i, 113-115)

It was Richard who convinced his father not to comply with his pact with the King debating that the lawful king was his father and he had not to waver to regain his right even by using force. In this situation, Patrick Libuda states that Richard’s following speech reflected that his line of debate was truly Machiavellian.51

Richard: An oath is of no moment, being not took
Before a true and lawful magistrate,
That hath authority over him that swears:
Henry had none, but did usurp the place;
Then, seeing ‘taws he that made you to depose,
Your oath, my lord, is vain and frivolous.

(3 Henry VI, 1. ii, 21-26)

It is true that Richard was thinking of the throne for himself, but in this situation he wanted it for his father whom he loved. His father’s death shocked him and left him incapable of even weeping. He promised to carry his revenge out saying:

Richard: To weep is to make less the depth of grief:
Tears then for babes: blows and revenge for me !
Richard, I bear thy name ; I’ll avenge thy death,
Or die renowned by attempting it.       (3Henry VI, II. I, 84-88)
Although Richard disguised the fact, his father’s death, which had deprived him of the only one he loved, affected him badly, was of psychological consequences upon him. Hence forth, there was no one to love. Richard became no longer the pampered hunchback whose sound of complaining was admirably accepted to his father. His deformity pushed him into a type of isolation. While he was fighting for the goal of crowning his father, his brother, Edward, occupied the throne. Edward, who promised to enter into an alliance with Frenchs, decided to marry Elizabeth Gery and to crown her queen of England. As result of this marriage, the king of France, whose sister was engaged by Edward, changed his mind and decided to support to the Lancaster House. Clarence’s and Warwick’s defection was another outcome of this marriage. Edward was captured by the Lancastrians and King Henry, who was taken as a capture, regained his position. Richard, who freed his brother from captivity, was keen to help Edward to retrieve the crown he had forfeited. The play, 3 Henry VI, ended “with a pleasant family reunion. The three brothers (Edward, Clarence and Richard) kiss in all confidence and the besotted Edward esteems himself a happy man.”52

At the beginning of Richard III, every a thing was stable. The civil war between the two houses of Lancaster and York was come to an end. Edward, Richards’ brother, became the king of England. King Henry VI was killed by Richard, in London tower, “with commendable gusto.”53 It was Richard’s first political crime to which he commented ironically saying:

Richard: O, may such purple tears be always shed
From those that wish the downfall of our house!
If any spark of life be yet remaining,
Down, down to hell; and say I sent three thither

(3 Henry VI, V.vi, 63-67)

Richard was cheater of first rate and that is what enabled him to play a string of lies to snare the victims into his traps. His means was always justified by the solely goal he wanted to reach, the throne. He put in his consideration Machiavelli’s recommendation mentioned in chapter fifteen of The prince that the prince should be educated in what
way he had not to be always good. W. A. Armstrong states that Richard presented all the notorious traits of being Machiavellian. He was a deceitful fox. Richard was clever in manipulating his victims by expressing situations that were contradictory to his real feelings. “He simulates love in its various forms; brotherly affection for Clarence: romantic adoration for Anne: loyalty towards King Edward: friendship towards his fellows-nobles.”

Early in the opening scene, Richard commenced to introduce himself as a Machiavellian figure when he informed the audience saying:

Richard: I am determined to prove a villain,  
          And hate the idle pleasures of these days.  
          Plots have I laid inductious, dangerous,  
          By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,  
          To set my brother Clarence and the king  
          In deadly hate the one against the other;

         *(Richard II, I. i, 30-35)*

This speech reflected Richard’s obvious intention. His mind became fond of concentration on the aim which he had drawn for himself. Henceforth Richard started planning to extort the throne insinuating that conspiracy would be the means he had to follow to achieve his aim. Regarding chapter eight of *The Prince*, page 30, Richard definitely appeared as a Machiavellian figure who did not hesitate to use the disgraceful means in order to be crowned King of England. “I will shortly send thy soul to heaven”.

*Richard III, I. i, 119* He started arranging his plot against his brothers and first of all Clarence, the Duke of Clarence, who stood before him in the line of priority to be the heir of the throne. He said

Richard: Clarence hath not another day to live;  
          Which done, God take King Edward to his mercy  
          And leave the world for me to bustle in.

         *(Richard III, I. i, 149-151)*

As an inevitable step towards his goal, Richard had to get rid of Clarence. He sent two nameless killers to kill him in the tower of London.
Richard: …sirs, be sudden in the execution, 
Withal obdurate. Do not hear him plead, 
For Clarence is well spoken, and perhaps 
May move your hearts to pity if you mark him. 

*(Richard III, I. iii, 346-349)*

Clarence, who just narrated his keeper the disturbing dream of his own death, asked the keeper not to leave him, “gentle keeper, stay by me.” *(Richard III, I. iv, 66)* After they were able to reach Clarence, who was asleep, by Richard’s Commission, Brakenbury, the Keeper, departed the tower saying:

Brakenbury: I am in this commanded to deliver 
The noble Duke of Clarence to your hands. 
I will not reason what is meant hereby, 
Because I will be guiltless of the meaning. 
Here are the keys, there sits the Duke asleep. 

*(Richard III, I. iv, 83-87)*

The killers entered into a discussion with themselves, while Clarence was sleeping, and then with their victim after he woke. Clarence pleaded with the criminal not to kill him and that is what affected one of them positively and caused the wakefulness of his conscience so that he did not share the crime. The other stubbed Clarence and drowned him “in the malmsey butt in the next room.” *(Richard III, I. iv, 244)*

The wakefulness of conscience founded in this scene, and in general during the progression of the Fourth Act, represented “a stop to the Machiavellian momentum that Richard, through force of will, has maintained from the outset.” The lost of Richard’s main ally accrued as a result of the need to present a sense of “individual humanity and the obligations of conscience” into any representation of political events. 55

The next plan Richard had to set in use was directed to the woman whom he had killed her husband and her royal father in law. She was, of course, Anne Nevill, prince Edward’s widow. His plan was to woo and marry Anne for the reason that she, as the widow of Wales last prince, represented the claims of Lancaster House as well as that Richard would brag that he was a man of great ability of persuading for winning her although he was hunchback and her hatred for him. Georg W. Keaton states that
although evil he did and “although his appearance is repulsive and Margaret habitually describes him as a monster, he is nevertheless generally trusted, has a reputation for blunt honesty and fidelity, and even has made himself attractive to women.”

Richard was self-confident; he said that he would marry Lady Anne as if he was sure of her agreement.

Richard:     … I’ll mercy Warwick’s youngest daughter
            What thought I killed her husband and her father?
            The readiest way to make the wench amends
            Is to become her husband and her father,
            The which will I _not all so much for love,
            As for another secret close intent
            By marring her which I must reach unto.

(Richard III, I. i, 152-158)

He did not love her at all. She was no more than an item on his table of seniorities he had to deal with for the sake of serving his purposes and that is why he informed the audience that he would discard her saying “I’ll have her, but I will not keep her long.”(Richard III, I .ii, 215) But Richard claimed that her husband’s murder came out of love for her. He succeeded in winning her over when he offered her his real sword asking her to avenge her husband killing.

Richard:      …here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword,
            [He kneels and presents her with his sword]
            Which if thou please to hide in this true bosom
            And let the soul forth that adoreth thee,
            I lay it naked to the deadly stroke
            And humbly beg the death upon my knee.
            Nay, do not pause, ‘twas I that killed your husband;
            But ‘twas thy beauty that provoked me.
            Nay, now dispatch, ‘twas I that killed King Henry;
            But ‘twas they heavenly face that set me on.
            Take up the sword again, or take up me.

Lady Anne: Arise, dissembler. Though I wish thy death,
            I will not be the executioner

(Richard III, I. ii, 160-171)
Richard was very clever in faking seriousness and that is what convinced Lady Anne and made her take this situation as an evidence of his authentic feelings towards her. Although she knew the truth, she succumbed to Richard’s rhetorical ability and his pride as well.

John Roe believes that in this adventure Richard embodied “the kind of figure who wins Machiavelli’s wholehearted approval” for the reason that his boldness to woo Lady Anne was similar to what Machiavelli stated in his speech on woman and fortune. Actually Machiavelli believed in impetuous men rather than cautious men. Fortune, for him, was a woman “and if you want to keep her under it is necessary to beat her and force her down” because she always preferred to be triumphed over by intrepid man, but not by a man who hesitated in dealing with her. (The Prince, P. 87) Machiavelli compared fortune to a woman who should be taken impetuously, Richard, with no doubt, was true Machiavellian prince for being impetuous in treating Lady Anne regardless any an unexpected consequences.

At the beginning of Act II, the dying king tried to reconcile the warring factions by gathering them around him. The queen asked him to join his imprisoned brother, Clarence, to his convention. Richard, who was waiting for the suitable occasion to inform them the tidings of Clarence’s death, exploited the chance saying:

Richard: Why, madam, have I offered love for this,
To be so flouted in this royal presence?
Who knows not that the noble Duke is dead?

(Richard III, II. i, 76-78)

A short duration later, the king died and Richard became near his final goal. It is true that Edward IV had two male heirs, but they were very young and that is what helped Richard to be the Lord Protector. Following Machiavelli’s teachings stated in chapter XIX of The Prince, Richard started to employ Buckingham as a means to achieve the dirty works in his way to put the final touches of getting the crown. Assisted by Buckingham Richard started to separate Edward’s sons from their mother’s relatives. A messenger entered to reveal “Lord Rivers and Lord Grey are sent to Pomfret, With them Sir Thomas Vaughan,
prisoners”. *(Richard III*, II. iv, 44-45) They were executed later. Richard, with the help of Buckingham also, introduced himself as the true heir of the throne pretending to be humble and devout man. Lord Hasting was arrested and executed for objecting Richard request. Richard was able to fool Lord Mayor of London and to convince him that Hasting’s execution was for the behalf of England.

Richard: The peace of England, and our person’s safety
          Enforced us to his execution?
Mayor: Now fair befall you! He deserved his death.

*(Richard III*, III. v, 44-46)

Using Buckingham, Richard began to slander King Edward’s standing alleging that his sons were illegitimate.

Richard: How now, my lord, what say the citizens?
Buckingham: Now by the holy mother of our Lord,
            The citizens are mum, and speak not a word.
Richard: Touched you the bastardy of Edward’s children?
Buckingham: I did

*(Richard III*, III. vii, 1-5)

At last, in the second scene of Act IV, Richard reached the goal he was looking for. Assisted by Buckingham and some other lords, Richard was installed King regardless the existence if the lawful successor of King Edward IV.

Although Richard occupied the top of the pyramid, his power lacked the proper base and that is why his fall was inevitable. It is true that he was “able to poison whomever ventures into his web, but not able to extend this web as a means of embracing the power of the kingdom”. Richard could not be true king; he did not reconcile and did not unite.58 On the contrary, immediately after installing him as king, Richard began to spin a new plot against the young princes and asked Buckingham to murder them. As a result of Buckingham’s hesitation, “Give me some breath, some little pause, my Lord.” *(Richard III*, IV. ii, 23) Richard shifted the task to James Tyrrell who agreed to kill the princes whom Richard considered the “two deep enemies.” *(Richard III*, IV. ii, 71) Latter Tyrrell informed King Richard his foul deed of killing them. “The tyrannous and bloody deed is
done.” *(Richard III*, IV. iii, 1) At the same time, Richard was planning to rid himself of his wife in order to be free to woo another princess, Queen Elizabeth’s daughter, so that he ordered Catesby “Rumour it abroad that Anne my wife is sick and like to die.” *(Richard III*, IV. ii, 50-51) The events of the play proved that he could not able to repeat the old scenario used with Lady Anne, queen Elizabeth was not taken by Richard eloquence. Meanwhile, Buckingham, who felt that he was manipulated by Richard fled to Richmond.

Catesby: bad news, my lord. Ely is fled to Richmond, And Buckingham, backed with the hardy Welshmen, Is in the field, and still his power increaseth. *(Richard III*, IV. iii, 46-48)

Richard denied Buckingham a Promised Land grant, “Tut, tut, thou troubles me; I am not in the vein.” *(Richard III*, IV. ii, 120) So that Buckingham turned against him and defected to the side of Richmond. In this situation, Richard acted according to Machiavelli’s recommendation for the reason that he did not keep his promise for Buckingham who expressed indecision in obeying Richard’s order’s who was not for “legitimate reasons to colour over his failure to keep his word.” *(The Prince*, P. 61)

Richard’s downfall towards his tragic end was an inevitable truth. Chanin storm sums up the main reason that lend to his downfall saying:

He was not able to put his own interests and power struggles aside for the betterment of the nation. He did not know how to put his good deed, if there were any, in the public light, and he did not know how to be cruel and just at the same time. Instead his rule was one of paranoia and fear, on his part and on the part of is people. When the King is unstable, everyone is an enemy, and it is only a matter of time before the power explodes, and the king is deposed by others…. 59

Finally one has not to agree with Patrick Libuda who concludes “Machiavelli, himself, would not have approved everything Richard did.” 60 A rapid review of the previous elaboration is enough to say loudly that Richard was Machiavellian figure for
being without religion, without morality, and without pity. He was able to pave his own way to the royal crown, but by using dishonorable means. He was a dissembler, cheater, and a criminal who did not hesitate to kill and even to defame his brother’s reputation for the sake of acquiring power and his means was always justified by his aim. As a result, Richard was able to gain power, but he could not maintain it. He could not replace the cruelty he used in obtaining power into something useful for his citizens, instead he continued plotting people for personal aims. He could not avoid hatred; he feared all those around him even his friends.

5. 3. Machiavelli and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*

5. 3.1. *Hamlet*: a Brief Introduction

*Hamlet* was the most popular work of literary art and the best example of this art produced all over the world. It was Shakespeare’s best known play and the most analyzed one because of the complex role of its hero, Hamlet, who defined himself as a key figure amid the intense suffering of extraordinary homelessness that caused his inability to find a suitable form for his unstable but mournful subjectivity in the fallen world.\(^{61}\)

In this play, Shakespeare introduced a kind of tragedy different from that he had written before. There was a new vision of what a play could include. In *Hamlet*, as in other tragic plays followed it, the characters and the events became larger than that of the 1590s and took on a symbolic and universal meaning. *Hamlet* represented the stimulus of Shakespeare’s following tragedies. It was the inaugural play of that was called Shakespeare’s tragic period. *Hamlet* marked a break from writing histories and comedies that had dominated Shakespeare’s writing up to the period of producing tragedies. In this play, the tragic conflicts were used as a means “to compel a deep, sympathetic recognition of the way cultural contradictions agonize the sensitive individual.” Shakespeare depicted several confrontations between contradictory concepts, morality versus ambition, true love versus the sexual horror, and Christianity versus revenge.\(^{62}\)
Along with *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, *Hamlet* was one of Shakespeare’s great tragedies that occupied the top of his career. But *Hamlet* was the most awful of Shakespearean tragedy for being the tragedy of human life. “Love, joy sorrow, death, hope, these are the things belonging to the tragedy_ or rather, to the tragic-comedy _ of life; all are in this play; and they are here idealized into a new, beautiful, eternal Being.”

It is, sometimes, regarded as the first great tragedy all over Europe for two thousand years. This accomplishment was due to Shakespeare distinguished ability of controlling the power to entertain and power to mean. Harold Bloom describes *Hamlet* as theatre of the world, like *The Divine Comedy* or *Paradise Lost* or *Faust*. The previous tragedies, according to Bloom, foreshadowed the writing of *Hamlet*, but they were of different spirit and tonality and there was no other single character in any of Shakespeare’s tragic play looked like that of Hamlet.

There was an earlier version of *Hamlet* that was revised by Shakespeare, but the author who composed this original version was unknown. Michael J. Redmond defined *Ur-Hamlet*, as it was named, as “a domestic text routinely postulated as the direct predecessor of the entire work.” Kenneth Muir believes that *Ur-Hamlet* was written by Kyd or one of his imitators and it was presumably the chief resource upon which Shakespeare based his *Hamlet*. Peter Alexander assumes that the early *Hamlet* was written by Shakespeare himself, it was the first version of the play we have now in its final form.

The story of this play was mainly based on a legend called Amleth mentioned in the third and fourth books of the *Historia Danica*, Danish history, composed by the historian Saxo Grammaticus at the beginning of the 13th century published later in 1514. This legend was translated into French by Francis de Belleforest to be among his collection of *Histoires Tragiques*, tragic stories. It did not appear that Hamlet’s story was translated into English before 1608 and that is why one has to assume that Shakespeare adapted for the plot of his play either the original French version or the lost earlier play of *Hamlet* which was already an adaptation of the French version.
Shakespeare was not a slave of the original source. He did not exactly follow Saxo’s old story exactly, rather he made several changes which were of great importance in giving the play its new dramatic shape. The changes could be stated in the following points:

1. The murder of the king became secret.
2. A ghost used to reveal everything about the crime and to ask Hamlet to carry his revenge out.
3. Laertes and Fortinbras were introduced into the play.
4. Ophelia’s role was so much extended and elevated.
5. The players of the dumb scene and their play were introduced.
6. Hamlet died as he killed the murderer King.\textsuperscript{70}

*Hamlet* was written in about 1600-1601 at the climax of Shakespeare’s ability of writing.\textsuperscript{71} The first performance of this play was probably in 1600-1601 at the Globe theatre which belong to the Chamberlain’s Men, one of the two major companies that dominated the theatre scene of the London since 1594.\textsuperscript{72}

The play was used to depict a clear picture of the world in which it was written. It included so much corruption and sickness in addition to decease imagery and that is why many critics associated this play to the supposed degeneration of the golden age of Elizabeth who became an old woman with no heir to her throne.\textsuperscript{73}

It was a play of revenge. The ghost of Hamlet’s father appeared to tell Hamlet that he had been killed by his own brother, Claudius. The ghost ordered Hamlet to avenge his father’s death. In spite of the several chances he gained during the events of the play, Hamlet hesitated to murder his uncle because of a psychological conflict within himself. Finally, Hamlet was able to do it, but the price was very expensive. His hesitation caused death of several characters in addition to his death. So that, one might perhaps say of Hamlet “as the tragedy of unbaptized Man… [who] lives without faith and dies without hope…”\textsuperscript{74}
5.3.2. Machiavellism in Hamlet

In *Hamlet*, Machiavellism was inescapable part of a given world. Machiavellian politics were presented in this play in two ways. First, *Hamlet* drew an international power conflict which made the audience acquainted with the political systems that had controlled the political life during the period before writing *Hamlet*. Second, the play used the conventions of revenge tragedy for the aim of embodying “the political manoeuvres in a specific atmosphere evoking death, treachery, deceit, and self-conscious theatricality.”

There is no doubt that the most Machiavellian figure was Claudius. As narrated by the ghost of Hamlet’s father, Claudius ambition led him to kill his brother, King Hamlet, for the sake of occupying his position and marrying his queen, Hamlet’s mother.

Ghost: Brief let me be. - sleeping within my orchard,
My custom always in the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of mine ears did pour
The leperous distilment; whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That, swift as quicksilver, it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body;
And with a sudden vigour, it doth passet
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine;
And a most instant tetter barked about,
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust
All my smooth body.
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatched

(*Hamlet*, I. v, 59-75)

In this sense, Claudius acted as Machiavellian prince when he did not waver to use evil against his brother in order to achieve his goal.

After doing what he had to do to gain the throne, Claudius continued acting as Machiavellian figure. He used the purity of language to manipulate people in order to
make them along with him. He had the perfect eloquence that allowed him to make anything he do came to be seen very nice. The hasty marriage of Gertrude, for example, was made as if it was something ordinary for his ability to establish strong impression early.

Claudius: Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen
Th’ imperial jointress of this warlike state,
Have we, as ‘twere with a defeated joy-
With one auspicious, and one dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole-
Taken to wife.

(\textit{Hamlet}, I. ii, 8-14)

It was clear that Claudius had made great effort to speak forcibly for the reason that he had to take care of choosing his sentences because he knew very well that Hamlet had the power to start a conflict with him as a result of being the heir of king Hamlet and that is why his claim of the throne should be justified. Claudius was aware of this fact, so that he tried to mollify the situation informing Hamlet that he is the crown prince. The apparent cause of his speech was that he was looking for Hamlet’s benefit, but he was not. Claudius was planning to maintain his power as a king by avoiding Hamlet’s range and looking for the stability of the kingdom. Hamlet, on the other hand, suspected his uncle from the very beginning of the play. “Not so, my Lord; I am too much i’ the sun.” (\textit{Hamlet}, I. ii, 67) Hamlet, for Claudius, represented a treat that Machiavelli himself cautioned the prince about. The “prince should have two fears: one internal…” (\textit{The Prince}, P. 63)

Another situation in which Claudius was an actual Machiavellian prince was that Claudius began to spin plots to get rid himself of Hamlet who could not abandon the morning of his father’s death in spite of Claudius attempts to make him forget not for the sake of Hamlet, but he wanted to feel that his crime became a part of the past. He addressed Hamlet saying:

Claudius: ‘tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet
To give these mourning duties to your father.
But you must know your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his; and the survivor bound
Of impious stubbornness; ‘tis unmanly grief.
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven

*Hamlet*, I. ii, 87-112

The dumb-show represented a turning point in the events of the play for being a “fictional story to confirm Hamlet’s claim.” It helped Hamlet to make sure that the ghost was not a devil, but the honest spirit of his father, and that his uncle was the foul who murdered him. *The mouse-trap*, as it was called by Hamlet, was employed to show all the information given by the ghost about king Hamlet’s murder. Hamlet’s plan succeeded to prove that his uncle was guilty when the criminal, who spilled the poisoned liquid into Gonzago’s ear, informed the audience, including Claudius, that the conspiracy was based on real murder. That is what made Claudius lost his balance, he left the show shouting “give me some light! Away!” *(Hamlet*, III. ii, 253) Hamlet stated, “Thought you can fret me, you cannot play upon me.” *(Hamlet*, III. ii, 346-347) Accordingly, Claudius seriously started his plot to kill Hamlet. His means was always justified for the aim of maintaining power. He wanted to protect his position as a king. Claudius decided to send Hamlet to England to be killed, but Hamlet, who was Machiavellian in this situation, was able to discover the trap and to reverse the plot spun against him by Claudius and his men. Hamlet “causes the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by substituting a forged letter on their way to England, as they sleep…” He outwitted the two spies, he was not afraid of the consequences. The only thing he had to concentrate on was that he had to work as much as he can in order to expose Claudius for the evil he committed and to avenge his father’s death.

To keep his power, Claudius tried to get rid of Hamlet again. For his new attempt Claudius exploited Polonius’s murder to push Hamlet and Laertes, who came back from Paris where he was studying, against each other. Hamlet killed Polonius mistakenly thinking that he was the king. Claudius, as a Machiavellian figure, succeeded in manipulating Laertes mind in order to use him as a means to kill Hamlet. His scheme
with Laertes to murder Hamlet indicated Claudius ruthlessness in keeping the throne. He was shrewd Prince who acted for the sake of maintaining his authority even if he had to kill his nephew, the only son of his wife, whose farther had been killed by him also. According to Machiavelli, “love of anything but the throne is considered to be a plagued way of thinking.” In *The Prince*, chapter XVII, Machiavelli gave priority to fear over love. Claudius used to apply his idea when he arranged his ladder of seniorities, he put Gertrude in the last position saying “My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.” *(Hamlet, III. iii, 55)*

Hugh Grady believes that Hamlet himself, “After accepting the commission of scourge and minister delivered to him by the ghost,” became Machiavellian for trying to topple a king and to punish a murder he had no evidence to prove it. Hamlet was obliged to act outside law, within the grey area of struggling duties and responsibilities. As a result, he adopted the same dissembling Claudius “who can smile and smile and be a villain.” *(Hamlet, III. iii, 55)*

Hamlet stimulated madness for knowing that his father’s killing gave him the reason to look for revenge and that Hamlet as a crazy man was better to complete his task, revenge, than Hamlet as a sane one. All people treated him as one who is not in the right state of mind and that is what provided him with a type of inviolability, madness helped Hamlet to do whatever he wanted and nobody asked him. Pretending madness was the best way to protect himself of the recent King and his men and that is what kept abreast of Machiavelli’s idea that “a prince must be cautious in believing accusations and in acting against individuals, nor should he be afraid of his own shadow”(*The Prince*, P-57)

Hamlet was able to play the role of being crazy perfectly. Polonius was the first to believe and to declare that Hamlet became mad thinking that the reason was Ophelia’s love. He informed the king saying “I will be brief: your noble son is mad.” *(Hamlet, II, ii, 92)* Claudius suspected that and as a result he asked Polonius to observe him, “Madness in great ones must not unwatched go.” *(Hamlet, III, i, 188)* But Claudius accepted the idea of Hamlet’s madness for using it to serve his vicious aims. He used it as a pretext to send him to England. So that one has to agree with Alexander W. Crawford’s statement,
“in this as in everything the king is insincere, and seeks not the truth but his own personal ends.80

John Roe states that Hamlet, while he was preparing himself to leave to England, spoke with his mother in such a way that suggested manipulative frame of mind and that is what characterized the Machiavellian character in general.81 He said.

Hamlet: There’s letters sealed. And my two school _ fellows
Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged
They bear the mandate; they must sweep my way,
And marshal me to knavery. Let it work;
For ’tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petar. And’t shall go hard
But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them at the moon. O,’tis most sweet

(Hamlet, III .iv, 203-210)

Finally one has to conclude that Claudius was a tormented leader who became the victim of his lust for power. At the beginning, Claudius was acting according to Machiavelli’s ideas and as a result he reached his aim the throne and the queen, He committed fatal mistake represented by sparing Hamlet’s life. He had to “secure himself… by wiping out all the bloodlines of (the old King) he had despoiled… (The Prince, P.28) Claudius did not follow this rule, but he tried to correct this mistake later when he tried to kill Hamlet. He said

Claudius: Love His affections do not that way tend;
Nor what he spake, though it lacked from a little,
Was not like madness. There’s something in his soul
O’er which his melancholy sits on brood;
And I do doubt the hutch and the disclose
Will be some danger; which for to prevent,
I have in quick determination
Thus set it down; he shall with speed to England

(Hamlet. III. i, 161-168)

He did his best to keep his position, he did not hesitate to use evil for the sake of achieving his goals, so in such way he was an ideal Machiavellian Prince. Hamlet, to
some extent, represented another Machiavellian character for the reason that he was forced to act illegally in order to avenge his father’s death

5.4. Machiavelli and Shakespeare’s *Othello*

5.4.1. *Othello*: a Brief Introduction

*Othello* was a tragedy of “radical misunderstanding and incomprehension between father and daughter, husband and wife, general and lieutenant…” It told a story of a secret marriage of an outsider black general, Othello, and a venetian beautiful white girl, Desdemona, who was of high social status. This marriage was ruined for the reason that Othello trusted Iago, who worked hard in order to drive Othello into his trap. Iago was able to plant doubt within Othello’s mind and that is what caused his suspicion of his wife and led him to kill her as a result of jealousy, and then he killed himself.82

The play can be divided into two halves of which the first half was a classic comic plot that stood for a conclusion of a happy romantic comedy of love. It was “a tragedy disturbingly grafted onto a budding comedy…” Two lovers, Othello and Desdemona, were able to triumph over an ordinary difficulty represented by Desdemona’s father who tried to use his legal authority to ban their marriage, but he could not. In the second half, the vision of social harmony was destroyed by Iago, “the persistent inscrutable agency of conflict and evil.”83

*Othello* was Othello’s tragedy in spite of that it was Iago’s play. Although the fact that the events of this play were built on the role of four main characters, Othello, Desdemona, Iago, and Cassio, Othello’s Lieutenant, the play was of striking oneness of action that came as a result of its oneness of interest. Iago’s villainy controlled the events in a whole. From the beginning till the end, the audience kept their breathless attention watching the traps of the villain that spun to drive Othello to his final tragic conclusion. These traps were “of something like absolute villainy.”84 Actually, one has to agree with this idea for the reason that it was Iago who used cunning to deceive all other characters and to direct their activities to serve his traps. He was able to do so by exploiting the
weak points of each character, who believed that Iago was honest, but he was not. Iago’s traps embodied the means used by Shakespeare to develop the plot to the point that without which there would be no play at all.

The earliest mention of Othello, referred to the first acting of a play named The Moor of Venis at the Banqueting House, In White hall, London, on 1st November 1604. Generally believed to have been written in approximately 1603-1604 and was first published in a Quarto in 1622 and then in a Folio a year later. Both the Quarto and Folio were good and “authoritative texts” in spite of the remarkable differences between them. The Folio had around 160 extra lines and the Quarto included some 53 oaths that could not be found in the Folio. Although all the editors came up with the play vision which was based on the Folio, they also utilized many details found only in the Quarto such as the oaths.85

The story of this play was based on an unromantic tale of jealousy and Machination found in a work called Hecatomithi, a collection of one hundred tales, written by the Sicilian novelist Giraldi Cinthio and published in 1565.86 Shakespeare skillfully modified the original sordid tale and introduced it in a new astonishing dramatic shape. For example, the only name one could find in the Hecatomithi was that of Desdemona. All characters names; Othello, Iago, Cassio, Emilia, in addition to many more were added by Shakespeare.87 Another example of Shakespeare’s departures from the original source was the dramatic concentration on the racial difference between the tragic hero, Othello, and other characters in the play.88

Othello was not the greatest play written by Shakespeare but it was one of the best. In spite of that Othello might lack, the diversity and the deepness one could find in Hamlet or the awful atmosphere in which Macbeth was created, but it obsessed the attention of the audience in such a way that was greater than that of Shakespeare’s other plays. It was of simple and potent plot. It employed a small number of characters in addition to the fact that its events moved quickly and the tension was intensified step by step to reach the moment in which Othello murdered himself.89
Thomas Rymer expresses an idea that it is better to entitle Shakespeare’s *Othello* as the *Tragedy of the Handkerchief* because of “so much passion and repetition about a handkerchief…” By the middle of events of the play, Desdemona’s missing Handkerchief dominated the trajectory of Othello’s jealousy. It was of high significance because it was Othello’s first gift to his beloved and for being the evidence Iago was planning to use in order to mislead Othello and to convince him to believe his untrue claim that Desdemona cheated him. Iago used the handkerchief with bloody impact on the jealous husband when he told him that he saw it with Cassio, who was accused that he was in love-affair with Desdemona.

Nicholas Royle describes *Othello* as “a play about the mad and deathly power of jealousy; seeing and blindness; the visibility and significance of blackness, racial and ethnic difference; religion and war (Christian Vs. Islam, Venetians Vs. Turks); story telling and witchcraft.” Dillon States that *Othello* was about racism and nothing else. Early in the opening scene, Shakespeare informed the audience about Othello’s race. A conversation between Iago and Roderigo focused on the fact that Othello was racially an outsider Moor. Othello’s experience in the military affairs might be welcome to the state of Venice, but he was not welcome to Venetian society. He could “never truly become a Venetian.” A. N. Jeffares believes that *Othello* was not mere a play of presenting tragic events, “but a study of the ways in which evil can cause the confusion of right and wrong and thus bring about the destruction of people who are fundamentally honest and virtuous.”

### 5.4.2. Iago as an Ideal Machiavellian Villain

In *Othello*, Iago was one of the most Machiavellian and interesting of Shakespeare’s villains. The exceptional cunning mind and the eloquence he was provided with made him a man of great ability of manipulating others. Many critics compared Iago to the Satan of *Paradise Lost* although “Milton’s Satan is a fiend, Iago’s character is as subtle as that of Hamlet; it is also as attractive.”
Iago was an embodiment of infinite evil to the point that no one could guess an end towards which he would direct his viciousness against other characters in general and Othello in particular. During the events of the play, Iago gave many motives that they were behind his intention to avenge himself. As the play opened, the audience was immediately introduced to Iago’s hostility against Othello. He claimed that he wanted to avenge for the reason that Othello did not nominate him in the position of lieutenant instead of Cassio who did not deserve this occupation.

Iago: That never set a squadron in the field,  
Nor the division of battle knows  
More than a spinster, unless the bookish theoretic  

(Othello, I. i, 22-24)

It was as unacceptable excuse for the reason that Iago did not stop his traps against both Othello and Cassio when he was able to drive Cassio into a quarrel and that is why he lost his post.

As another motive, Iago expressed suspicion that Othello had slept with his wife, Emilia.

Iago: … I hate the Moor,  
And it is thought abroad that, twixt my sheets  
He’s done my office. I know not if’t be true  
Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,  
‘ Will do as if for surety.  

(Othello, I. iii, 368-372)

According to the development of the events of the play, on the one hand, there was nothing abnormal between Othello and Emilia. She was Othello’s acquaintance for being his wife assistant, so that the relationship between them was no more than an official one. On the other hand, Iago did not work to prove or to deny his suspicion against his wife. It is a matter of finding a pretext by which he tried to justify his evil, but he could not, “the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity.”96 Showing different motives on different opportunities suggested the idea that he had no specific cause to hate Othello or and other character but he tried to create a pretext of what he was scheming to do.
Iago was not motivated for the fact that no one of the motives he mentioned during the events could give a satisfactory explanation for the aims he was planning to reach. So that it is quite correct to agree with Elaine. L. Robinson who states “though Othello is constructed around the remorseless desire of the ensign Iago to destroy his general, the Moor, Shakespeare refused to provide the villain with a clear and convincing explanation for his behavior.” Iago did evil for the sake of evil itself.

Iago cunningly used the weapon of honesty to achieve evil deeds and that is what made “Othello a story of intrigue rather than visionary statement.” He behaved as duplicitous whose Machiavellian behavior harmed all other characters who treated him as an honorable and trustworthy friend. He came out as an upright man, but his truth was exactly the opposite. Iago was a real vicious and malicious man who worked hard to push the persons who trusted him against each other.

Iago: So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all

(Othello, II. iii, 327-329)

According to Machiavelli, one needed not to have good qualities such as loyalty, mercy, humanity, uprightness and alike, but he should pretend to possess them all. (The prince, PP.61-62) Iago was very accurate in following this idea, “I am not what I am”. (Othello, I. i, 66) In his relationship with Othello, Iago was able to pretend loyalty and honesty perfectly so that Othello treated him as the most trustworthy.

Othello: This fellow’s for exceeding honesty
And knows all qualities with a learned spirit,
Of human dealing.

(Othello, III. iii, 260-262)

In the time Othello referred to Iago as a trusted friend, Iago, exactly on the contrary, revealed to Roderigo his plan against Othello saying

Iago: O Sir, content you.
I follow him to serve my turn upon him.
In following him, I follow but myself.  
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,  
But seeming so for my peculiar end.  

(Othello, I. i, 41-61)

As a Machiavellian villain, Iago was guided by using other characters as a means to do his dirty works. At brawl scene, for example, he used Roderigo to create a quarrel with Cassio then he pretended that he wanted to control this situation. When Othello appeared asking “Who began this?”(Othello, II.iii, 159) Iago exploited the occasion to testify against Cassio and as a result Cassio was dismissed from his occupation.

Othello: I know, I ago,  
The honesty and love doth mince this matter,  
Making it light to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee,  
But never more be officer of mine.  

(Othello, II. iii, 227-230)

Iago, “in full Machiavellian temperament,” used Desdemona’s innocent relationship with Cassio as it was debauchery and that is what reflected the idea that she was disloyal to her husband. As a spark to his Machiavellian plot, Iago told Othello that he saw Desdemona and Cassio whispering to each other as if they were in love-affair. Othello, who already appreciated that they were friends, asked Iago to present his evidence about his wife’s infidelity “Villain... Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof”. (Othello, III. iii, 360-361) As a second step, Iago told Othello that one night while he was sleeping near by Cassio, the latter confessed his love for Desdemona.

Iago: In sleep I heard him say, “Sweet Desdemona,  
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves”.  
And then, sir, he would gripe and wring my hand,  
Cry, “O sweet creature!” and then kiss me hard,  

(Othello, III. iii, 420-423)

As an advanced step of a Machiavel, Iago foist Desdemona’s handkerchief into Cassio’s room then he informed Othello that he saw “Cassio wipe his bread with” Desdemona’s handkerchief (Othello, III. iii, 439). Later after telling Othello that Cassio
claimed that he had slept with Desdemona, Iago led Othello to overhear a conversation between Iago and Cassio about bad woman, Bianca. Thinking that it was about Desdemona, Othello believed Iago. The series of lies told by Iago were able to convince Othello that Desdemona was not faithful for him.

Finally, one has to conclude that the Moor and the other characters in *Othello* have been cheated by a Machiavellian villain who supposed to be a trusted friend. But he is no more than vicious who play on the weak points within his friend’s personality in addition to their tendencies in order to be trusted and to mould his characters according to what they prefer him to be for achieving evil aims. He is not motivated simply because he is a villain.
NOTES


36. Emma Smith, p. 95.


53. Harold Bloom, p. 49.

54. W. A. Armstrong, p. 28.


56. Patrick Libuda, p. 14 of 40


60. Patrick Libuda, p. 28 of 40.


63. Morton Luce, p. 267.


68. Peter Alexander, p.162.


   Subsequent references to this play will be to this edition.


71. Martin Stephen and Philip Franks, p. 56.


73. Martin Stephen and Philip Franks, p. 56.


76. Michael J Redmond, p. 19.


84. Morton Luce, p. 295.

85. Nicholas Royle, p. 72.


90. Janette Dillon, p. 81


92. Nicholas Royle, pp. 72-73.

93. Janette Dillon, p. 78.


