

How far is 'sexuality' the motive and/or the means for the enactment of villainy in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, and *Othello*, and to what degree is this attractive?

The iconic male 'villains' of Shakespeare's works have proved subjects of fascination for generations of theatregoers. This essay will explore the nature of this 'fascination' through the medium of 'sexuality' as employed by Aaron the Moor (*Titus*), Richard Gloucester (*Richard III*) and Iago (*Othello*). The legacy of the dramatic Vice, the 'single representative figure of evil' (Hammond, Anthony 101) from the morality play is key to the examination and understanding of these figures. The characteristics shared by these villains; 'self-explanation and soliloquy,' 'long avoidance, but ultimate suffering of, punishment' and 'various signs of depravity such as boasting and conceit, enjoyment of power, *immoral sexuality*' (Hammond 101 [emphasis mine]), are a direct borrowing from this figure of Vice. Despite, or perhaps because of his total moral and social depravity, the Vice offered great dramatic opportunities for an actor, and became the 'star part', his entrance eagerly anticipated by the audience. This popularity peaked mid-century until around 1580 when, with the advent of sophisticated plots and characters, the role of the Vice diminished in importance (Hammond 100).

The sixteenth century audience's fascination with this manifestation of 'evil', however, established a precedent for the 'attraction' of, and to, the villain in play and performance texts, an attraction still apparent in popular culture today. The source of this attraction is as mysterious and subjective as the meaning of 'attraction' itself. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'attraction' had corporeal connotations, of the movement of blood around the body, the 'drawing of humours', and of being 'drawn or pulled' towards something. It inferred, moreover, a physical force acting upon the body, producing a physical response in turn (*LEME*). The audience's 'fascination' with the villain also suggests a 'bewitching by the eye' (*LEME*), attraction and intimacy in a corporeal sense.

This notion of bodily attraction and fascination, embodied in the Vice who was often physically attractive himself, is not always as apparent in play texts as in performance and visual media, although notable exceptions to this are Iago's direct confrontation of the audience, 'And what's he then that says I play the villain?' (*Othello* 2.3.331), and Richard's amazed question, 'Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?' (*Richard III* 1.2.232). One basis for 'attraction', however, is the essential humanity of the Shakespearean villain, an *active* and

individual force that is consistently re-making and re-defining itself, as opposed to the Vice, a single and static representation of the notion of 'evil.'

Aaron, Richard and Iago are all deserving of the epithet 'the consummate villain' (Bartels, Emily 435) but, equally, they demonstrate human anxieties and behaviours that, whilst failing to detract from their enjoyment of evil, make identification with and 'attraction' to them easier. Whether we like it or not, at a fundamental, *human* level, there is something of each of us in these characters. Aaron has 'a truly consuming love for his baby' (Bate, Jonathan 53); Richard wakes from a series of nightmares and exclaims 'There is no creature loves me' (5.3.201) and Iago, in his anxiety over rumours that 'the lusty Moor / Hath leap'd into my seat' (2.1.293-4), articulates a husband's fear of his wife's infidelity. All of these 'fears', the villains' moments of weakness, however fleeting, extend beyond their theatrical representation and into the real: the realism of their concerns functions, on some level, to 'attract' us to them.

Often, these anxieties are sexual, concerning male power, potency and self-image, both within marriage and outside of this: suggesting, ultimately, a need to assert the self, to create a powerful image of this for an audience. Marjorie Pryse, writing on this 'lust for audience' as it appears in *Othello*, emphasises Iago's need to perform for an audience – he has one, too willing, in Roderigo – because he can only be 'heard' insofar as he speaks onstage: 'without an audience, [Iago] is worth nothing, yet he knows his price and will be heard' (462-3). In his 'lust for audience' that surpasses Aaron's, who seems to act to, and for, his own pleasure, and Richard's, who, as Duke and later King, is aware of the kingdom as 'audience', Iago's theatricality owes much to that of the Vice. This 'lust', however, seems to work both ways: the villain desires his audience and the audience eagerly desires their villain, at times quite literally, as demonstrated in a contemporary anecdote of John Manningham:

Upon a time when Burbage played Richard III, there was a citizen grew so far in liking with him, that before she went from the play she appointed him to come that night unto her by the name of Richard III. Shakespeare, overhearing their conclusion, went before, was entertained and at his game ere Burbage came. The message being brought that Richard III was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Richard III.

(*The Norton Shakespeare, Richard III, 507*)

This evocation of the villain's *active* sexuality, in terms of his 'sexual nature, instinct, or feelings, the possession or expression of these' (*OED*), is the main subject of this essay: sexuality, associated with masculine self-assertion and potency, is utilised by Aaron, Richard and Iago in different ways, and to differing intent. Broadly speaking, it functions as motive for Iago and means for Aaron and Richard although, in his use of sexual rhetoric, Iago too employs a 'distanced' sexuality as a means of his 'poisoning' of Othello's mind. The nature of our 'attraction' to villainy, further, varies between text and performance, but seems to have its strongest expression in visual media; a discussion to which I will return later.

Psychoanalytical criticism has explored Iago's motives in literal terms of 'sexuality,' his unconscious desire and sexual preference for Othello. These interpretations, however, have had mixed results in performance: to famously disastrous effect, Laurence Olivier played Iago in this way in 1938, though he neglected to share the reading with Ralph Richardson (*Othello*), and as a result, "Hardly anyone could tell what Olivier's Iago was doing and why" (Rosenberg 158). However, performing Iago's sexuality in this way has also been successful: David Suchet played Iago to Ben Kingsley's *Othello* with the RSC in 1985, towing, as Michael Billington remarked, the 'Freudian line' in representing the relationship between the General and his Ancient. Further, one critic for the *Yorkshire Post* suggested that, whilst 'both are small men with dark eyes, balding heads and beards... Suchet... and Kingsley exploit their physical similarities to suggest that Othello and Iago are two halves of one whole' (RSC online). Whilst perhaps lacking an aesthetic 'attraction' or appeal, the relationship here portrayed was balanced and 'attractive' in the sense of a positive identification between the characters and a recognition of their 'doubling.'

Regardless of the question of 'unconscious homosexuality,' since the lack of 'conscious' attraction was problematic, in itself, to represent onstage, as Olivier himself conceded (Rosenberg 182), Iago's motives appear to have a sexual bias. The first of these motivations that we learn of in *Othello* is his being 'passed over' for promotion in favour of Michael Cassio, a younger soldier with more book-learning than experience, 'mere prattle without practice / is all his soldiership' (1.1.25-6), hence Iago's gall: 'I know my price, I am worth no less a place' (1.1.10). Iago's language, when reporting these events to Roderigo, is couched not only in terms of value, but also those of dominance and submission: the 'three great ones' of the city assigned to plead Iago's cause are forced to back down in the face of Othello's decision, just as Iago must '*be-leed and calmed / By debtor and creditor*' (1.1.29-30 [emphasis mine]). This suggests that Iago has been abandoned, left 'high and dry' (*be-*

lead) by the apparent give-and-take relationship between Cassio and Othello which, Honigmann notes, may hint that Cassio was promoted to pay back a favour (117). It also implies that the source of his ire is his forced and unwilling submission to Othello's authority, seen here as unjust, 'the curse of service' (1.1.34).

The possible sexual overtones of this 'power play' become more defined as Iago elaborates on the next of his motives:

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,

But I for mere suspicion in that kind

Will do as if for surety.

(*Othello* 1.3.385-9)

From a very early stage, we realise that Iago's motivation is *at least* twofold, though it is difficult to work out which of the 'slights' against him is more galling: in both his martial and marital 'offices' he has been succeeded - or at least thinks that he has, rejected in favour of another, and he cannot bear it. The semantic likeness of 'martial' and 'marital' is important: the *marital* relationship of Iago and Emilia is one of established, casual hostility, and that of Othello and Desdemona becomes steadily more aggressive, *martial*. The categories become blurred and indistinct. Iago returns to this anxiety regarding cuckolding again at 2.1.293-4, 'I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat,' suggesting that as motive, sexual anxiety takes precedent over his failure to achieve martial 'preferment.'

Despite his acting 'as if for surety', Iago's anxiety is unsubstantiated in, and by, *Othello*: he is almost entirely 'without basis for the suspicion and the fear upon which he soliloquises' (Farnham 142). However, at the very end of the play, 'the tragic loading of this bed' (5.2.361), where Othello *lies* with Desdemona and Emilia, is, as Lodovico charges, Iago's *own* work: it suggests that he has brought about the very 'end' that incensed him to act in the first place, his fear of Othello's having 'done his office.' This is particularly ironic given that Iago himself punned on 'lie' to 'poison' Othello, 'with her, on her, what you will' (4.1.34), as does the clown in conversation with Desdemona, 'I dare not say he lies anywhere' (3.4.3).

Iago's complex relationship with Emilia exemplifies his sexual anxiety regarding women. His jokes during 2.1 are almost entirely at Emilia's expense, as Desdemona

comments, 'she has no speech' (1.103), but it is Iago and not Emilia who reacts to a perceived threat. Emilia's responses, 'You have little cause to say so' and, 'You shall not write my praise' (ll.108, 116) indicate her strength of will within this relationship; 'you' is a direct confrontation with her husband, and 'not' is a direct refusal or undermining of his marital 'authority'. By contrast, Iago is on the defensive, commenting with no little irony that if Cassio were treated to as much 'of her tongue', i.e., her scolding, as he was, that he'd soon have had 'too much.' Further, this anxiety extends outside of his own marriage and into others', notably in his statement to Cassio that '*Our* general's wife is now the general' (2.3.310 [emphasis mine]). 'Our' here suggests the - exclusively male - military community, and his fear of the usurpation of this collective power, both military and sexual, by the woman, specifically the 'wife'.

Iago's demonstrable anxiety of the 'wife' and her corruption of masculine power, both military and sexual, is strongly suggested by one of his opening comments to Roderigo on Cassio, 'A fellow almost *damned in a fair wife*' (1.1.20 [emphasis mine]). Honigmann suggests that Shakespeare probably deleted this line to further his plot (116), and that it remains unexplained. The juxtaposition of 'damned' and 'fair' is oxymoronic but, arguably, it is an exact reflection of Othello's own fate after his murder of Desdemona. The suggestion of being 'damned' in marriage is also appropriate to Iago, revealed by Emilia as the 'villain of the piece' at the end of Act 5, leading to his certain torture and, by extension, eventual death. Bianca is interesting in this context because her relationship with Cassio is extra-marital: derided by men and women alike, she is 'creature', 'strumpet', 'caitiff,' but derision is not the same as anxiety in this play. Bianca represents no *active* threat, and thus is the only female character to survive the uxoricide with which *Othello* ends.

To argue that 'the potential for Iago's sexuality is undeveloped' (Charney 126), therefore, is problematic. His motivations are complex, but an element of sexual anxiety is apparent in him, to a greater degree than with Aaron the Moor and Richard Gloucester, who are more concerned with the achievement of power; political and social advancement, and are less conscious of their, and others' sexuality within these contexts. Part of the reason for this difference of motive is that both Aaron and Richard are firmly categorised as 'outsider/other' within their respective plays, Aaron due to his race and Richard because of his physical deformity. Iago, by contrast, is a part of the masculine (military) community, although he feels isolated within it. Further, Aaron and Richard seek the power and advancement denied to Iago from the outset of *Othello*. Thus, where Iago's motivations are *reactive*, we observe

the *active* creation of motive by Aaron and Richard, in which both are surprised at how effective a tactic it is to employ sexuality as a means to their respective ‘ends.’

Aaron and Richard present an audience with different motives in their respective plays. Aaron’s first soliloquy begins in praise of the Goth queen Tamora, who ‘climbeth Olympus’ top, / Safe out of fortune’s shot’ (*Titus* 2.1.1-2). Tamora is a female analogue to the male villain who uses raw ‘sexuality’ as a means of achieving revenge – her seduction of Saturninus is to this effect, she is the determined woman ‘tirelessly fashioning retribution exacted with animal ferocity’ (Rutter, Carol 53), avenging the murder of her son Alarbus in any and every way that she can. Aaron’s soliloquy quickly turns, however, into a consideration of his own desires and intentions:

Then, Aaron, *arm thy heart* and fit thy thoughts

To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress,

And mount her pitch whom thou in triumph long

Hast prisoner held, fettered in amorous chains

And faster bound to Aaron’s charming eyes

Than is Prometheus tied to Caucasus. (2.1.12-17 [emphasis mine])

The command ‘arm thy heart’ evokes the same need to defend against women expressed by Iago, and further, the interplay between dominance and submission here is explicitly suggestive – ‘mount’, ‘bound’, and ‘[amorous] chains’ imply sexual activity. Tamora’s being ‘fettered in amorous chains’ emphasises the fact that Aaron *deliberately* employs his sexuality as a *means* to exercise villainy, though sexuality is not his motivation. The implication is that Aaron’s motivation is his desire for social advancement, ‘Away with *slavish* weeds and *servile* thoughts...’ (2.1.18), though this is represented through the medium of his sexual dominance of Tamora. For him, ‘lust is subordinated to revenge’ (Charney 122), whereas for Iago, broadly speaking, lust *is* revenge, as it provides both his motivation for, and means of, achieving this.

Richard Gloucester, too, is surprised by his success in wooing Lady Anne, given that he is ‘not shap’d for sportive tricks, / Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass’ (1.1.14-15). Like Aaron, his decision to utilise this latent sexuality for his own purposes is more because he has discovered he *can* than because he *intends* to, as Iago does. However, Aaron is conscious of his sexual appeal from the outset of *Titus*, whereas Richard, in his own play,

is not: at the beginning, he rejects this idea completely, ‘since *I cannot* prove a lover’ (1.1.28 [emphasis mine]). Any sexuality on Richard’s part is artificial and performative: ‘for Richard, the political *is* the personal, as he fabricates sexual subjectivity as a usable fiction’ (Charnes 40). That Aaron and Richard, through direct and artificial means respectively, employ sexuality as a ‘means’ to the performance of villainy rather than a ‘motive’ for this, is the main argument to follow.

Aaron’s exercising of sexual power over Tamora is emblematic of gendered power relationships in *Titus* as a whole, where women are subject to male sexual authority (of which Lavinia offers the starkest example). Tamora, however, reverses this gendered power dynamic: her marriage to Saturninus ultimately causes his death, and her relationship with Aaron proves fatal to them both. Moreover, whilst Aaron and Tamora share the same means of acquiring revenge, Tamora’s is a savage and undisciplined performance, ‘which Aaron throws into high relief’ (Royster, Francesca 438). Aaron is thoughtful in his planning and speaks eloquently, a contrast that is particularly emphasised when he intervenes in the fighting between Tamora’s sons Chiron and Demetrius.

Aaron quickly utilises the boys’ histrionic ‘petty brabble’ (2.1.62) over Lavinia, as he proposes that they ‘both should speed’ (2.1.102), and ‘revel in Lavinia’s treasury’ (2.1.132). The terrible ease with which Aaron formulates this plan extempore is a contrast to the scheming of Iago, who seems to fall into decisions by chance and circumstance. By extension, Aaron is also far more cautious of the possible consequences of the boys’ play-fighting, and is similarly wary of Tamora’s casual and unbridled sexuality, of which her ‘injudicious project of copulating with Aaron in the midst of a forest swarming with Roman hunters, including her husband’ (Royster 447) is the zenith. The birth of their bastard child further complicates Aaron’s character, as he demonstrates a surprising, and unexpected, emotional commitment to his son: ‘He dies upon my scimitar’s sharp point / That touches this, my first-born son and heir’ (4.2.93-4). The uneasy ‘marriage’ of fatherhood and villainy is apparent in other plays of Shakespeare’s: *The Merchant of Venice* dramatises the emotion of the father-daughter relationship, complicated by issues of marriage, or a lack thereof, and Shylock does not emerge from this, or indeed, the play as a whole, very well. *Hamlet* offers in Claudius a surrogate ‘father’ who attempts to send his ‘son’ to death and eventually succeeds; the exact reverse of Aaron’s treatment of his son.

Aaron, then, is a complex development of the dramatic Vice: whilst they share a delight in the performance of cruelty, ‘the lust for audience’ (Pryse 461), he exhibits an almost incongruous affection for his child. Further, his using sexual feeling and attraction to ‘perform’ villainy is not arbitrary but considered, and as such, he is able to cope with changes in circumstance, where Iago, by contrast, must change tack. Whilst sexual relationships in *Titus Andronicus* are, at best, volatile, this is not so much to do with Aaron as with the Romans and the Goths: he fits into neither category, but he does possess ‘the good sense and sexual restraint that Tamora conspicuously lacks’ (Royster 447).

His definition as an ‘outsider’ aids Aaron in his activities, as does his lack of notoriety - the latter is also true of Iago. Both of these villains make full use of their ‘honest’ and ‘gentle’ façades and are accepted, for the greater part of their respective plays, as friendly go-betweens, an acceptance incongruous only to the audience, who can ‘see’ and understand to a degree beyond the other characters. Iago’s epithet, ‘honest,’ is used throughout *Othello*, and *Titus Andronicus* sees Aaron referred to as both ‘good’ and ‘gentle’ even as he cuts off Titus’ hand, with no intention of making a trade for his sons’ lives. This sense of the audience’s horrified fascination with the villain is particularly apparent in Julie Taymor’s film *Titus* (1999): Harry Lennix’s Aaron attracts and holds the viewer’s attention from the outset, and the camera rarely strays from his face during his soliloquies. However, his frighteningly casual proposal and sheer enjoyment of violence is more alienating than ‘attractive’, as when he offers a smirk to the camera before cutting off Titus’ hand. In this way, their public reputation is another *performance* for Aaron and Iago, one that other characters fail to decode until it is too late.

If notoriety is no issue for Aaron and Iago, who act under their inoffensive public ‘masks’ for much of their respective plays, it *is* problematic for Richard Gloucester, who is ‘rudely stamp’d’ (*Richard III* 1.1.16). His body’s deformity reflects the crippling of his reputation both within the play itself, due to his past actions, and in historical and literary sources, by the ‘Tudor myth’ surrounding him. Where Aaron and Iago can hide behind the images created for them in and by society, Richard, whose ‘foul deformity’ is yoked to his ‘heinous deeds’ (Charnes, Linda 39), cannot separate his actions from his reputation because he is a far more public figure than either Aaron or Iago.

Aaron intentionally employs his sexuality as a means ‘to mount aloft with [his] imperial mistress’, but Richard lacks this same consciousness in his wooing of Anne. Though

it is his goal and desire ‘to marry Warwick’s youngest daughter’ (1.1.153), this is not because of physical attraction, as he himself explains, ‘not all so much for love / as for another secret close intent’ (1.2.157-8). Playing his cards close to his chest here, Richard refuses to ‘run before his horse to market’, to get ahead of himself before he has a secure reason to do so. In this, he demonstrates caution far in excess of Iago: Richard is ‘*determined* to prove a villain’, he performs this role for his own benefit, and, unlike Iago, has planned ahead of time: ‘plots have I laid, inductions dangerous’ (1.1.32).

His ‘seduction plot,’ then, is a brazen employment of a ‘sexuality’ in which he apparently has no confidence or assurance of success: though, as Charney suggests, the ‘opposing’ roles of lover and villain – which are only linear alternatives in Richard’s mind – have comparable erotic attractions (127). Physical ‘attraction’ and desire, however, are not necessary for seduction, as Jean Baudrillard explains:

Seduction is not desire. It is that which plays with desire, which scoffs at desire. It is that which eclipses desire, making it appear and disappear ... such is the attraction of the *dark body of seduction*. Things seem to follow their linear truth ... but they reach their peak elsewhere, in the cycle of appearances. Things aspire to be straight ... but they all have a secret *curvature*. (67, 69-70 [emphases mine])

As an agent of seduction, Richard’s ‘dark body’ acts independently of sexual desire, although it maintains a ‘straight’ or legitimate performance of this, as Laurence Olivier revealed regarding his playing of this role in 1944, ‘...when she [Anne] looked away, I would spend my time devouring the region between her waist and upper thigh’ (Quoted in Prescott, Paul 120). Appearing, like Aaron, to use raw ‘sexuality’ as a means of enacting villainy, Richard’s actual purpose, the gaining of power and, eventually, the crown – the ‘secret curvature’, perhaps – remains hidden.

Olivier’s 1955 film *Richard III* blunted the effectiveness of the wooing scene by splitting it to form two shorter scenes: in the play, Richard achieves Anne’s promise of marriage – ‘vouchsafe to wear this ring’ (1.2.205) - in just one. However, Olivier’s performance demonstrates that ‘Richard is not repulsive at all’ (Charney 128): there is something complex about the ‘attraction’ of Olivier’s Richard, suggesting *attractive influence*, ‘the action of a body or substance in drawing to itself, by some physical force, another to which it is not materially attached’ (OED).

Arguably, the ‘physical force’ in 1.2 with which Richard draws Anne to him is when he prostrates himself before her, and offers ‘this sharp-pointed sword, / ... to hide in this true breast’ (ll.178-9). The stage directions offered here, ‘*[Kneels;] he lays his breast open, she offers at it with his sword*’ emphasise Richard’s ostensible position of subjection to Anne: in the ‘cycle of appearances,’ she seems to have all the power, he is ‘a kneeling man utterly at the mercy of an armed woman’ (Prescott 33). However, Richard’s language preceding this encounter becomes determinedly more erotic, and culminates in a session of word play between them on ‘lie’, (a language game repeated in *Othello*):

Anne. And thou unfit for any place but hell.

Rich. Yes, one place else, if you will hear me name it.

Anne. Some dungeon?

Rich. Your bed-chamber.

Anne. I’ll rest betide the chamber where thou liest.

Rich. So will it, madam, till I lie with you. (1.2.111-116)

Until the introduction of ‘lie’, Anne and Richard’s ‘keen encounter of wits’ (1.119) seems composed of parallel, but divergent statements shot back and forth between them: Anne emphasises the demonic aspects of Richard’s character whilst he smoothly turns them back on her. Neither seems to score a direct hit. However, the play on ‘lie’ between them is an important moment of verbal connection: until this point, their bantering offers a macabre anticipation of that of Beatrice and Benedick, as it seems to lack a purpose beyond itself. Richard himself makes the distinction; he changes tack, to ‘fall something into a slower method’ (1.120), a more determined approach to gaining his ‘desired’ end.

Whilst Richard seems less conscious of his employment of sexuality than Aaron does, Charnes suggests that he works within a ‘libidinal economy’ structured around penetration – ‘the transgression of political, social, personal and gender boundaries’ (42). In baring his chest to Anne, he invites this penetration: he has read her ‘attraction’ to speech and power, and ‘insinuates a desire for her that matches her own in its excessive vehemence and renders its bearer perversely appealing’ (Charnes 47). This, I suggest, is Richard’s moment of Iago-esque improvisation, in reading Anne’s reactions and gauging his response appropriately. Praising her beauty and ‘heavenly face’ at the same moment as confessing to the murders of Henry and Edward, he knows she ‘will not be [his] executioner.’ he has problematised her

emotional response, confusing her righteous anger with feelings that she does not understand: 'I would I knew thy heart' (1.2.196).

For all of his 'rude shape', Richard proves an 'attractive' figure in this scene, whose attractiveness 'lies chiefly in his ability to make us admire him, even while our better natures know perfectly well that what he is doing is monstrous' (Hammond 105). As with Aaron and Iago, however, this 'attraction' and admiration is finite and cannot last for the duration of the play. The parallel 'wooing scene' of 4.4 demonstrates the waning of Richard's 'attractive influence' as he nears the achievement of his goal, the crown. When Anne gave him an inch, Richard took a mile: by contrast, Elizabeth offers him no such opportunity. Towards the end of the scene in particular, Richard has his lines truncated, cut off by Elizabeth as she counters his every attempt at 'wooing': 'Now, by the world---' / 'Tis full of thy foul wrongs' (4.4.374-5). The hyphen suggests his silence is unwilling and forced by Elizabeth's interjection, that he is no longer 'determining' his own game. Both Aaron and Iago experience a similar problem. Aaron's fierce loyalty to his son divides him from Tamora, who wishes it killed, and thus separates him from his means of gaining power *through* her. Roderigo's reluctance to kill Cassio exemplifies the unravelling of the tenuous threads of Iago's 'means' of villainy, and necessitates Roderigo's death, so that Iago's 'honest' mask will conceal the truth for a few more desperate moments.

Unlike Aaron and, to some extent, Richard, Iago is not an active sexual agent in *Othello*. His prose, however, is, as he substitutes graphic sexual puns and jokes for the other characters' discussions of love, for example, Cassio's 'She's a most exquisite lady' is countered by Iago's: 'I'll warrant her full of game' (2.3.18-19). Kathryn Hunter's *Othello* (RSC 2009) emphasised Iago's obsession with sex and, importantly, his *performance* of 'immoral sexuality:' the audience watched in horrified silence as, to 'turn her virtue into pitch' (2.3.355), Michael Gould's Iago rubbed shoe polish between the legs of a white mannequin in the centre of the stage. This scene also exemplified how, despite Gould's great success in 'attracting' the other characters – he was *very* tactile in his relationships with Roderigo, Cassio and Othello, often neatening their uniforms and throwing an arm around their shoulders – he failed to draw the audience into anything like the same 'intimacy.' Sexual rhetoric and performance become Iago's means of achieving revenge, a distanced utilisation of 'sexuality' compared to Aaron and Richard, and one that seems to pay off. Iago is alive at the end of his play where Aaron and Richard are not, his short-term survival to

some extent guaranteed by his silence, as the governors hope that ‘torments will open [his] lips’ (5.2.303).

Generally speaking, the ‘attraction’ of, and to, the villain is more evident in visual media: performance, film and image, than in the play text. However, the active performance of villainy - the mutilations in Taymor’s *Titus*, and mimed sexual violation in Hunter’s *Othello* - negates this sense of ‘attraction’ and identification and makes it far more problematic. If *active* villainy in film and performance is preventative of ‘attraction,’ it suggests that the textual villain can sidestep this problem. The *Manga Shakespeare Series* (Self-Made Hero, 2007-present) is interesting in this regard: broaching the gap between ‘play’ and ‘performance’ texts, manga offer visually striking images of the villain, ‘unbound by the physical realities of the theatre’ (Sexton, Adam 2). Heavily stylized in their respective manga adaptations, Iago and Richard, in the manner of manga villains generally, have a particular visual distinction from other ‘non-villainous’ characters: the former wears an eye patch, and the latter sports at least one raven on his shoulders and back throughout. The adaptation of Shakespeare’s plays into this format suggests their ‘attraction’ and interest to, and within modern culture, and their villains included, whilst avoiding the *active* performance of villainy that is often so visually disturbing. Thus, *Manga Shakespeare* titles offer the reader the essence of what is ‘attractive’ about the villain: retaining his word play, dark humour and asides, whilst emphasising his image as ‘outsider,’ the maligned individual seeking vengeance against those who have slighted him.

Ultimately, the ‘attraction’ of villainy seems a product of its image, performance, or presentation, as demonstrated in film and theatre. *Active* villainy - assault, rape and murder - is not attractive, but the addition of ‘sexuality’; sexual energy and attractive influence, complicates our instinctive and condemnatory response. Like Lady Anne, the audience regards the villain with a sort of ‘horrified fascination,’ an ‘attraction’ that still avoids precise definition. Aaron consciously employs, and plays on, sexual attraction as a means to perform villainy, utilising his own desirability as ‘other.’ Richard, too, performs as a ‘dark body of seduction’, though this is less conscious and more theatrical on his part. A development of his antecedent ‘villains’, Iago combines the performance of sexuality, the ‘dark body’ of Richard Gloucester, and the conscious, confident employment of this by Aaron. His language, further, offers an indirect performance of sexuality that certainly ‘attracts’, indeed moves, Othello, though not in a positive way.

This relationship particularly emphasises the dangerous and usually fatal ‘attraction’ of the villain in *Othello*, *Richard III* and *Titus*, an ‘attractive influence’ that, having knowledge of human emotion, turns this against other characters; whether they desire power, wealth, or social advancement, without their knowledge or understanding. Essentially human, Shakespeare’s villains acquire an ‘invisibility’ lacking in the Vice. They appear essentially human, normal; as such, they remain undetected until it is too late.

(5,166 words)

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