

Manipulative Maneuvers: A Comparative Study of *Othello* and *King Lear*

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Abstract

William Shakespeare is famous for the universality and uniqueness of his plays. Most of the characters that he portrays are life-like. In most of his plays, he portrays some manipulative characters who cunningly ruin the lives of the people around them. People trust, love, and admire them, but in response, these manipulative persons exploit them to achieve their goals. Othello (1603) and King Lear (1605) are two different tragic plays written by Shakespeare, and both have manipulative characters, i.e., Iago in Othello and Edmond in King Lear. They have been analyzed in this study to discover Shakespeare's understanding of human nature as manipulative in society and the meaningful similarities between them in light of the comparative contextual analysis technique. The findings reveal Shakespeare's nuanced portrayal of manipulative characters, showcasing the parallel yet distinct paths taken by Iago in "Othello" and Edmund in "King Lear," highlighting their cunning tactics, societal impact, and the universal thread of human manipulation; the conclusion underscores Shakespeare's profound comprehension of the darker facets of human nature, depicting the intricate interplay of manipulation, trust, and societal influence within his tragic plays.

Keywords: Manipulation, *Othello*, *King Lear*, Edmund, Iago.

Introduction

Shakespeare's literary genius has captivated audiences for centuries, as he masterfully crafted characters that reflect the complexity of human nature. Among his diverse range of personas, he often delves into manipulation, portraying characters that employ cunning strategies to deceive and exploit those around them. Manipulation, therefore cyclical as a motif, surpasses Shakespearean drama, providing valuable information about human principles and the systems that encourage mendaciousness. Manipulative behaviors have been associated with power base, trust, and ambition for so many years. New studies illustrate that manipulation occurs in many aspects, for instance, in interpersonal relationships and leadership; research shows that as much as 30% of people resort to manipulation to gain power. While portraying Iago and Edmund at that, Shakespeare does not merely reflect these hereditary vices but helps to expose the conditions that let manipulation operate.

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This thematic focus can be summarized as manipulation as a means of dominating, exerting control over weaknesses, and dominating over different truths. All of Shakespeare's tragedies cast the ethical use of manipulation into the controversy of whether such actions relate to the inherent vices or the inherent fears and social expectations. This work examines these dimensions, arguing that Iago's and Edmund's manipulative behaviors are grounded in cultural and psychological understanding. In particular, the plays *Othello* (1603) and *King Lear* (1605) showcase two such characters — Iago and Edmond, respectively who exemplify the art of manipulation.

Othello (1603) explores the tragic downfall of a noble general, while *King Lear* (1605) depicts the downfall of a king facing familial betrayal and political turmoil. Both plays serve as platforms for Shakespeare to delve into the depths of human manipulation, where characters such as Iago and Edmond skillfully manipulate the trust, love, and admiration bestowed upon them to fulfill their ambitions.

This research paper aims to conduct a comparative study of Iago and Edmond, shedding light on Shakespeare's portrayal of manipulative individuals in society. By employing the Comparative Contextual Analysis technique, we aim to identify meaningful similarities between these characters, thereby uncovering Shakespeare's profound understanding of manipulation and its implications for the human condition.

Through an in-depth analysis of the two plays, the researchers have explored the motivations, tactics, and consequences of Iago's and Edmond's manipulative actions. By examining their similarities, we will decipher the underlying themes and messages that Shakespeare intended to convey about human nature and the society in which he lived.

This study holds immense value as it enhances our understanding of Shakespeare's timeless works and provides insights into the enduring relevance of manipulation in contemporary society. By exploring the methods employed by these cunning characters, we may gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of manipulation, its effects on individuals and society, and the potential lessons we can glean from Shakespeare's profound observations. Through an in-depth study of Shakespearean tragedy, we can further appreciate the playwright's ability to shed light on the dark recesses of the human psyche, ultimately enhancing our comprehension of the universal themes and enduring impact of his works.

Through this comparative study, the researchers hope to shed new light on the manipulative characters of Iago and Edmond, unraveling the intricate layers of their schemes and examining the profound insights that Shakespeare provides into the human experience. By doing so, they aim to contribute to the broader understanding of manipulation in literature and society and appreciate the timeless relevance of Shakespeare's works.

Research Questions

1. What are the similar manipulative characteristics of Iago and Edmond in the selected works?
2. How does Shakespeare reveal the inner psyches of his characters in the selected works?

Research Objectives

1. To find out similarities between Iago and Edmond, being manipulative characters in different plays from the same writer.
2. To unearth Shakespeare's understanding of manipulative people in real life.

Literature Review

Dhanwani (2017) conducted a research study on the character of fool in king Lear. In the abstract of her paper, she mentions that the role of the Fool is to amuse and entertain his master. She analyzed the role played by fool in king Lear and wrote, "the fool opens the eyes of Lear to his own mistakes. Fool through his jokes, songs, and proverbs speaks the truth which the King would have otherwise refused to listen" (p. 445). Swati's analysis of the fool in "king Lear" is intriguing. The assertion that the fool catalyzes Lear's self-realization is valid. However, it might be an oversimplification to suggest that Lear would have entirely refused to acknowledge the truth without the fool. Lear's journey to understanding his mistakes involves various influences, with the fool being one of them. Yet, the fool's role as a truth-teller is crucial in revealing hidden realities to Lear, prompting introspection and growth.

Sandry (2009) researched the study of the drama king Lear, believed to have been written between 1603 and 1606, and it portrays the society that influenced interest conflict in king Lear. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct research focused on the conflict of interest by using a sociological perspective titled Conflict of interest in William Shakespeare's king Lear: A Sociological Approach. Exploring "king Lear" through a sociological lens, focusing on conflicts of interest within the society portrayed in the play, is fascinating. However, the sentence's description of the influence of interest conflict is unclear. A sociological approach to understanding the conflicts of interest among the characters could offer valuable insights into the power struggles and societal dynamics depicted in the play, shedding light on human behavior and societal structures prevalent during Shakespeare's time.

Nahvi (2016) conducted a study where he studied the evil nature of Iago, that he gets pleasure while manipulating others so that they may harm one another unknowingly. He claims that in the play, Iago does so because of jealousy. Alaeddin's study of Iago's manipulative and malicious nature in "Othello" is insightful. While jealousy is a prominent motive suggested for Iago's actions, it might be reductive to attribute his behavior solely to jealousy. Exploring deeper psychological or contextual aspects, such as power dynamics, societal influences, or Iago's insecurities, could enrich the understanding of his evil actions.

Fainuddin (2015) conducted a research study in which he describes the main characters' jealous murders and their id, ego, and super-ego. It tries to explain the moral teachings of the drama. Nuri's exploration of the ethical teachings through the lens of Freudian psychology in "king Lear" is intriguing. However, solely attributing the characters' jealous murders to the id, ego, and superego might oversimplify their complex motivations. While Freudian analysis can provide valuable insights into characters' subconscious drives, a broader examination considering societal, ethical, and contextual aspects could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the moral implications within the play.

These commentaries aim to appreciate the insights offered by each study while encouraging a nuanced exploration beyond the stated perspectives.

Research Methodology

This paper uses the Comparative Contextual Analysis (CCA) method to analyze two manipulative characters, Iago from Othello and Edmund from King Lear. Comparative Contextual Analysis is an improved qualitative research paradigm enabling the researcher to examine two or more study subjects in a broader context. With the protagonists of the tragedies Othello by Shakespeare and King Lear by Shakespeare, the study will reveal the comparative analysis of the main characters, Iago and Edmund, and analyze the nature of their manipulations caused by socio-psychological

and moral factors. As for the method and approach used in the present work, the features of CCA usage fit well to analyze Shakespeare's conception of manipulation as an intricate, interdependent web of personas' motives, social pressure application, and sensitivity impression.

Justification for the Methodology

The relation for selecting comparative contextual analysis stems from its ability to bring out the workings of manipulation as seen in both plays, taking into account the inner psychological planes and the second scales, which are the socio-political processes within which the manipulation occurs. Manipulation in both *Othello* and *King Lear* is a skill used not only by characters as a personal strategy but as a self-created tool reflecting the military background in *Othello* and the internal power struggle in the Kingdom of Britain in *King Lear*. Different dimensions of the CCA enable a comparative analysis of these characters and the socio-political factors that affect each. In addition, CCA can support contextual analysis and cross-country comparison in the same vein. Using this methodology to compare the characters' manipulative behaviors underscores the importance of the social and historical environments in shaping these behaviors. For example, Iago's manipulative principal character acts grounded on Venetian society's social and military culture and conditions. Instead, Edmund's manipulations are placed within the context of the political strife and family strife in the monarchy of England. The comparative element of CCA illuminates how manipulation is played out in these two contexts and uncovers coherent psychological trends in characterizing the characters.

Methodology in Context

The comparative Contextual Approach has been positively received in studies with methods, especially in Shakespeare, that feature strong historical, psychological, and social influences on characters. This method is beneficial in studies that seek to contrast the characters from the different plays because they involve such a systematic approach that not only breaks down the roles of the characters in a reciprocal manner but also studies how elements of social context in terms of power relations, social hierarchy, and family relations shape character disposition and behavior. It also enables analysis beyond mere socio-cultural and psychological contextualization of text that is often essential on account of the manipulative character of the behaviors portrayed in the two texts.

For instance, Giorgio (2000) and Eliot (1964) employ the method of comparative criticism to reveal psychological and social relationships that affect the characters in Shakespeare's plays. For instance, Melchiori highlights the cyclical treatment of the historical and social conditions when reconstructing the multiple characters of Shakespeare, including such intricate ones as Anthony, who should be figured more according to the nature of the historical circumstances than as one of the given characters. In the same manner, Abrams (1999) has pointed out how Iago or Edmund, for instance, can only be fully explained concerning the culture that casts an overbearing influence on their actions.

To be more precise, textual and character analysis can be applied in literary criticism separately and, for the most part, address language and rhetoric on one hand and character on the other. On the other hand, Comparative Contextual Analysis is more comprehensive in that it also considers how characters use manipulative in behaviors in interaction with the environment, how such behaviors result in the environment, and how they reflect further the operations of societies' force. This approach makes CCA appropriate for analyzing Shakespeare's works, where characters are driven by rooted social structures and ethical standards.

Analysis and Discussion

In two plays, Shakespeare created certain characters that plan secretly to create misunderstandings among other characters for a personal cause. They succeed because people around them trust them. Danielle Tralongo rightly states about Iago that he "for one, is someone who is well respected by those around him, especially Othello. He has built up a respectable reputation, making it easier for him to ensure that those involved in his schemes trust him".

Much more is common between Iago from *Othello* and Edmond from *king Lear*. The manipulative characters' primary purpose is to obtain wealth and a high position. Iago is one of the central characters and the main antagonist in *Othello*. He appears in the first scene while talking to Roderigo against Othello, the protagonist in the play. Iago says in Act 1, Scene 1, "I do hate him, I swear"; later in the same act and scene, when Iago expresses his hatred while saying noblemen in Venice asked him (Othello) to take me as his lieutenant, the second in command but he refused and said "I have already chosen my lieutenant," a guy from Florence named Michael Cassio, "I may seem to love and obey him, but in fact, I'm just serving him to get what I want" (Act 1, Scene 1). This statement makes us predict Iago would do something wrong to Othello and Cassio because Cassio, as a hurdle, has stopped him from becoming lieutenant. In the first act and scene, Iago starts work on his evil plan when he asks Roderigo to shout so that Brabantio may awake, "Wake up, Brabantio! Wake up! Thieves! Thieves! Check on your daughter, your house, your money! Thieves! Thieves!" (Act 1, Scene 1)

Edmond in *King Lear* also appears in the first act and scene with identity as a bastard son of Gloucester, but he seems not to be evil-natured with an evil plan in the beginning because Gloucester loves him more than his legitimate one, as he says, introducing Edmond to Kent "I love my bastard" (Act 1, Scene 1) but in the same act but scene 2, Edmond appears with a letter in hands which expresses his evil plan against his brother Edgar, the legitimate son of Gloucester as says "legitimate brother Edgar, I have to have your lands. Our father loves me just as much as the legitimate Edgar." (Act 1, scene 2) in the same scene Edmond creates misunderstanding between Edgar and his father while handed a letter to Gloucester in which it is written "... If our father were dead/you'd receive half of his revenue forever and you'd/ have my undying love, / Edgar." (Act 1, scene 2)

In *Othello*, Iago, for the second time, appears in scene 2 and tells a lie to Othello about Roderigo that he told Brabantio against you as he says, "he kept chattering so foolishly, talking about you in such insulting and despicable terms," (Act 1, Scene 2) when some torches coming towards them, Iago asks Othello "You'd better go inside." In *king Lear*, when Edgar appears, Edmond tells a lie him that someone told your father against you and advises him, "In the meantime, come/ home with me, and when the time is right I'll take/ you to talk to him ... arm yourself." (Act 1, scene 2) in *Othello* when Brabantio along with officers and men appears, Iago asks Roderigo to fight with him to win the favor of Othello, but Othello stops them. In Act 2, scene 1 of *king Lear*, Edmond also asks Edgar, "Draw your/ sword too, as if you're defending yourself." He does so to win his father's favor and make his plan more successful.

In *Othello*, Iago asks Roderigo, "Sell all your assets and your land, and turn it into cash ... When she's had enough of the Moor's body, she'll realize her mistake. She'll need to have a new lover. She'll have to have it ... attempt to get the woman you want." (Act 2, Scene 1) In *King Lear*, Edmond asks his Edgar to run as "Father is on the lookout. Get out of here quickly! It/ has leaked out that you're hiding here. If you leave/ now, you can take advantage of the darkness and/ sneak away." (Act 2, scene 1) Here, both the characters do something different for different purposes apparently; one asks his client to do what I say, soon you will have the woman you want to, and

the other asks his client to run so that you may not be killed, but the sole purpose is the same. Iago wants to obtain money from Roderigo and succeeds. As we come to know later that Iago has received all the cash from Roderigo when Roderigo states, "I've got no money left, The jewels you took/ from me to deliver to Desdemona" (Act 4, scene 2), and so Edmond wants to have Edgor's wealth. Ocelis writes that In ACT II, we witness Edmund pretending to help Edgar while he is just putting on a show to convince his father that Edgar is a traitor. Like Iago, Edmund can use one situation to be in the good graces of more than one person at a time. While pretending to help Edgar escape from Cornwall, Edmund was able to stage a scene that made it seem to his father that Edgar had tried to kill Edmund. This way, Edgar thinks that his brother is helping him, while their father turns against Edgar. Edmond succeeds in the first round as Cornwall tells him, "As for you,/ Edmund, you've been so loyal and virtuous/ throughout this whole business. I'd like you to work/ for me. I need people as trustworthy as you."

In Act 2 of *Othello*, Iago plans to create a misconception between Roderigo and Cassio. He tells Roderigo to see Cassio and how he gets closer to Disdimona, the one you want to have. Iago says, "Good lord! Did you/ notice how she and Cassio were fondling each/other's hands? Did you see that?" (Act 2, scene 1) Later, he persuades Cassio, as per his plan, to drink with them, which creates a misunderstanding between him and Othello. Here, Iago moves towards the second target, Cassio, after Roderigo. Iago says to Cassio, "Come with us, lieutenant. I've got a jug of wine, and these two Cyprus gentlemen want to drink a toast to the black Othello." (Act 2, scene 3) Cassio does not want to, but Iago offers more and more glasses. He drinks so much that he loses consciousness of what Iago wants as he says, "he's drunk already; he'll be as argumentative and eager to fight as a little dog." (Act 2, Scene 3) Roderigo appears as per plan just to make noise so that Cassio would want him to be silent and start fighting with him; when it happens, Othello appears and asks about the issue, and so Iago says, "But I don't think it'll hurt him to tell the truth. This is what happened, General. ... Cassio was chasing him with his sword out, trying to kill the guy." (Act 2, scene 3) Othello addresses Cassio: "Cassio, I love you, but you're never again going to be one of my officers." It happens as Iago expects and so succeeds in this round here. In *King Lear*, Edmond also moves towards his second target, his father, after Edgor. He now wants to make a plan against his father. When his father trusts him and reveals the secret that he is going to help the King, he says in soliloquy "I'll tell the duke right away that you're going to see the king, ... You'll get what you deserve, and I'll/ be rewarded with everything you lose" (Act 3, scene 4) Cornwall and Edmond appear, Cornwall says to Edmond that I will get my revenge, before I live this house, which indicates Edmond's another stroke also hits the right place. Edmond hands over Cornwall the letter and says, "If this letter's right, you've got a lot to deal with." In response, Cornwall says, "Right or not, it's made you the Earl of Gloucester. / Go find your father and let him know we're going to/ arrest him." (Act 3, scene 5) And so Edmond succeeds once again in his planning and gets the position he struggled for.

Key Findings

While conducting this particular study I found that both the characters try to be innocent and loyal. It should also be noted that Iago uses Cassio to create a misconception between Cassio and Othello, while Edmond uses Edgor to create a misconception between Edgor and Glixitor. Cassio ranks second in the rating after Othello, so Edgore takes second place as the eldest son, but the difference is one in the army, and the other in the family. Every two love each other, but the delusion between them destroys everything.

In *Othello*, Iago initially states that he is extremely honest in his words and, ultimately, manipulates people in his own words. It is similar to Edmund's "King Lear", which begins the game, being loyal to Gloucester, making Edgar the villain; However, this changes when he accuses Gloucester of assisting Lear.

In addition, Iago also spends all his time on the game to schedule a rematch, as seen in *King Lear* with Edmund, who is plotting against his entire family. Edmund seeks revenge as a reaction to his life of rejection and ridicule for being an illegitimate child. Edmund's revenge is always bad, since Gloucester is blind, and Edgar has to resort to becoming poor Tom as a disguise.

Both characters are excluded in society, since Edmund seems as different from his brother in *King Lear*, and even familiar with other characters, including Kent, as a stranger. He begins to question his exclusion through his monologue when he calls into question the word "base" and why he concedes in society because of the circumstances of his creation. While Iago's distance is created thanks to his resentment of *Othello* after he surpassed him for promotion.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can say Shakespeare was well aware of the nature of every individual. He has truly portrayed manipulative character in his plays especially in *Othello* and *King Lear*. He wanted to show us the hidden and cunning nature of the people around us, they may pretend to be very near and dear but there may be a snake hidden in their sleeve. He wanted to make us aware that everyone should not be trusted. A manipulative seems to be near and dear but he/she may ruin our life. In short a book should not be judged by its cover.

Shakespeare took manipulation further than Elizabethan drama by having Iago and Edmund as his creations that mirror humans and societies in the modern world. Even in today's world, manipulation stays an essential component influencing population, politics, companies, and interpersonal interactions. Clinical, social, and developmental research of the present day support the hypothesis stating that manipulative behaviors are learned where trust is expected and where positions of power and influence are at play, and where the drive to succeed is strong—factors as prevalent in the Elizabethan Age. Analyzing the actions of Iago and Edmund we not only go through the psychological patterns of scheming but also obtain proper key for the definition of such conduct in own life experience.

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