

# THE FUNCTION OF CHARACTER FOILS AND COUNTER-SCENES AS A MEANS OF CHARACTERIZATION IN SHAKESPEARE'S MAJOR TRAGEDIES

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## Abstract

Despite the fact that many of Shakespeare's plots are adopted from the chronicles or other stories written by other writers, today almost all of his critics agree that what marks the superiority of his plays over the same imitated stories is his genius in creating characters, situations and atmospheres through which he renders and vivifies his universal and humanistic concepts and themes effectively. With regard to the above-mentioned point, this essay is meant to focus on two major issues from a structuralist point of view: First it will elaborate on Shakespeare's creation of character foils which contributes to the vivid depiction of the key characters and the presentation of their overt or covert motivations. Second, the article will concentrate on Shakespeare's particular technique of creating counter-scenes which serves as a means to characterization and the enhancement of the major themes. (Of course, by counter-scenes the writer means parallel scenes as well as the opposite ones.)

## Introduction

With regard to the immense bulk of Shakespearean criticism, one wonders what to say about Shakespeare's tragedies which has not been already stated. Yet the illimitable treasure of Shakespeare's works always leaves some room for exploring new patterns. The various and numerous versions of modern performances, each of which finds attractions in Shakespeare's plays which can be appealing even to the very modern audience, may verify the above claim (Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, 1999).

As Andrews quotes Coleridge, "If all that has been written upon Shakespeare by Englishmen were burned, in the want of candles, merely to enable us to read one half of what our dramatist produced, we should be great gainers" (39). The main appeal of Shakespeare lies in the fact that despite his plots' being borrowed from others, he displays his genius in presenting characters by different devices peculiar to him. This ability enables him to render and vivify his humane and universal themes. Professor Reese maintains that "Shakespeare's greatest characters



touch life at so many points, sum up so much in their experience, that they do indeed take on the vesture of the universal, but we should not claim to know what they would do in different circumstances and the company of different men" (391) and stresses that "the only thing that has an independent life is the play itself. The characters are not even independent within their particular world, for they affect, and are affected by, those who inhabit it with them. Shakespeare presents us with a group of people whose story is their interaction upon one another"(390) and, therefore, "his characters are men caught in particular circumstances, not puppets manifesting predetermined principles. It is not only passions that spin his tragic plots...personality always breaking in... " (330).

Thus this study is an attempt to elaborate on Shakespeare's implementation of character foils and counter-scenes which contribute to the character delineation in his major tragedies: Hamlet, King Lear, Othello and Macbeth.

### **The Major Discussion**

The crowd of characters that appear in the plays may seem to fill up the gaps of the plot and intensify the attraction of the plays only, in fact play a crucial role and serve the author's purpose: some function as an aid to better delineation of the major characters; some others enhance the main themes; and some may serve both purposes. This is the same function of the technique of character foils in Shakespeare's major tragedies. As Muir quotes Una Ellis-Fermor, a "dramatist may relate his characters in such a way that, instead of a close-locked group, itself the image of the operation of a force, with each member sustaining an essential part of the whole in strict relation of contrast and likeness to the others, we find characters widely differing as individuals or as groups, and so placed that our imaginations are induced to supply, it may be at unawares, intermediate and background figures or moods that complete a harmony of wide range a complexity, suggesting to our minds not clearcut image or a dominant theme, but the breadth of life

and humanity. We recognize that without such subtlety or relationships between the figures in the picture there would be no harmony..." (48). Thus, "harmony" is what emerges from the seemingly random character presentation.

As a point in case to verify the above-mentioned claim, one has to attend to the juxtaposition of character foils in Hamlet, one of the most controversial plays throughout ages since its creation, in order to apprehend Hamlet's complex character and the various moral, philosophical and aesthetic points which Shakespeare has woven into the warp and woofs of this play. In the last few centuries, the problem of Hamlet's hesitation and his procrastination of revenge has been the matter of contemplation and contention among Shakespearean critics, whereas today this hesitation has been resolved as the signification of Hamlet's thoughtfulness as opposed to the rashness and instability--as perceived by the present writer--of his foils: Fortinbras, Laertes, Ophelia and even Pyrrhus, the character in the play-within-the play.

These four characters have all shared a similar case with Hamlet; they have all lost a father and claim an equal motivation for revenge, whereas their reactions differ from that of Hamlet. Fortinbras, the son of King of Norway, who has lost his father in a just battle with Hamlet's father, the deceased king of Denmark, gathers all his forces against Denmark in order not only to restore a piece of land his father had lost in that battle, but also to avenge his father's death upon the murderer. Laertes also, whose father is mistaken for Claudius and is killed by Hamlet, is so thirsty for revenge that thoughtlessly falls into the snare meshed by Claudius, the source of all evil and depravity in the play; he declares his readiness to cut Hamlet's throat even in the church. His rashness finally brings himself and many others into their doom. Moreover, even Ophelia, the tender-hearted and innocent figure of the play, is so overtaken by her father's loss (and of course by the loss of Hamlet's affection) that cannot bear the grief and chooses "not to be." Finally, in the play, which the actors



perform in front of Hamlet, Pyrrhus is the revengeful son of Priam, who challenges his father's murderer and callously mutilates him in front of the streaming eyes of his wife Hecuba. As a result, Shakespeare does not lose any chance to offer alternatives that stand in opposition to Hamlet: a host of characters who decide "to be" and take a violent revenge, or resolve "not to be" and commit suicide as Ophelia does. However, Hamlet waits for the due time to capture the Claudius at a moment of committing sin so that he would not drive his own soul to damnation as his father's ghost had advised him. Therefore, he abstains from murdering Claudius when he has knelt before God contemplating his own sin. Contrary to Laertes, who does not hesitate to "cut his throat" in the church, a sanctuary even for the criminals, Hamlet resolves to wait because killing Claudius at this moment is to reward not to punish him, as he says,

And so a goes to heaven;  
And so am I reveng'd. That would be scann'd:  
A villain kills my father, for that  
I, his sole son, do this same villain send  
To heaven.  
Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.  
(ActIII.iii.74-9)

Or Hamlet could have acted as Pyrrhus did, mincing Priam in front of his wife's eyes. Scragg asserts that the fact that Hamlet acts differently from others highlights his humanity and considerateness as opposed to Pyrrhus' bestiality and overwhelming passion (117-118).

Lily Cambell also, while focusing her discussion on the study of the characters' humors, says that Hamlet, Fortinbras and Laertes are all "called upon to mourn the death of a father, each feeling himself summoned to revenge wrongs suffered by his father... . But each must act according to the dictates of his own temperament and his own humor" (109). Yet she refuses to accept that Hamlet is by nature splenitive and peevish although he is associated with Northern Denmark whose people's moist humor marks their temper. Instead Cambell believes that "there is no indication of

paleness or severe melancholy; rather (Hamlet) has been on friendly terms with the players and his fellows, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern." Nevertheless, despite all these traits, there are some signs of drastic change in him when Ophelia says, "O, what a noble mind is here overthrown." Cambell asserts that this abrupt change is the result of too much grief in him. Then she also deals with different reactions of the characters whose differences delineate Hamlet's character more tangibly than when these alternatives were not offered by the playwright. She adds, "Laertes...is a complete foil for Hamlet in all his actions. His cry is an absolute contrast to Hamlet's timorous testing of the ghost's truthfulness:

I dare damnation. To this point I stand,  
That both the worlds I give to negligence,  
Let come what comes; only I'll be reveng'd  
Most thoroughly for my father" (139).

Thus, Cambell justifies Hamlet's delay as the result of his excessive grief that "is a grief which makes memory fade, that makes reason fail in directing the will. That makes him guilty of sloth" (144).

Likewise Bayley, who emphasizes the matter of consciousness of the characters, Points out to the discrepancy between Hamlet and Ophelia: "... she is the exact foil to Hamlet..." (173). He also maintains that "Laertes does show by contrast

how different Hamlet is..." (176). Similarly, Nigel Alexander underscores the disparity between Hamlet, on the one hand, and Laertes and Ophelia, on the other: "As they move passionately but unwittingly to their deaths, Laertes and Ophelia appear to exemplify in conduct the alternative courses of action considered by Hamlet in his soliloquy, 'to be' or 'not to be'..." Ophelia chooses "Not to be", whereas Laertes is determined "to be" and take revenge (49-50).

Nevertheless, Hamlet paradoxically has to pay a high price for his supposedly "wise" hesitation: He has to undergo the torturous pangs of conscience which are best expressed and vivified in his soliloquies. When the players dramatize the scene



of Priam's being brutally murdered by Pyrrhus while Hecuba, Priam's wife, laments his death, Hamlet violently reproaches himself for his own inaction; in this scene he is highly impressed by the actor's playing the role of Hecuba mourning over her husband's torn body (in Shakespeare's time, men used to play the role of women, because women were not allowed to appear on stage):

What's Hecuba to him, or he to her,  
That he should weep for her? What would he do  
Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,  
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,  
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed  
The very faculties of eyes and ears.  
(II.ii.553-560)

or

Am I a coward?  
Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,  
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,  
...  
Who does this? (566-570)

This is a burden too weighty for a young man to bear. The young man who has to wipe away all the notions of youth from his mind and instead of enjoying the prime of his life, he has to grow into a philosophically precocious maturity. Turner (1992) in his review of Barbara Everett's book quotes her that "according to Elizabethans, 'youth' is one of the three stages of life: youth, maturity and age. Yet what is tragic about Hamlet is that 'Hamlet grows up to find that he has grown dead'" (16). Everett's comment probably does justice to the magnitude of Hamlet's dilemma of taking revenge like others and rid himself of all the anguish, or wait for the proper time and suffer. He selects the latter alternative to display his humanity though.

Thus Hamlet becomes the moral center of the play who scrutinizes all the characters' conduct and becomes the voice of their conscience. He announces

his position at the outset of the play when he tells his mother that he does not know "seems", and condemns all the hypocrisy which other characters display. That is why his frequent affectionate responses to Horatio, who epitomizes constancy in friendship, reveal Hamlet's craving for honesty.

To emphasize Horatio's merit as an honest man who deserves Hamlet's reverence and trust, Shakespeare puts Horatio against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who are supposed to be Hamlet's life-time friends, but betray him. Therefore, the theme of honesty versus hypocrisy is reflected in the sharp contrast between Horatio, on the one hand, and these two clownish figures, on the other. Apart from Hamlet and Horatio, Marelyn French (1985) states, "all the other characters manifest inconstancy: they are continually checking up on each other-probing, eavesdropping, spying and even betraying. The world of Hamlet is a world of incertitude" (96). No wonder then that Horatio grows to be Hamlet's bosom friend. He addresses Horatio thus,

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,  
And could of men distinguish her election,  
Sh'ath seal'd thee for herself, for thou hast been  
As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing,  
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards  
Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those  
Whose blood and judgement are so commedled  
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger  
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
As I do thee. (III.ii.63-74)

Contrary to Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are after the rewards of life and become puppets in the hands of Fortune and finally are both victimized by their own treacherous plans. Hamlet cunningly by changing the content of Claudius's letter which bears the message of his own murder, sends both of them to "hell" as he had once promised himself. The King of England at receiving the letter, executes the carriers of the letter, namely Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. A very curious similarity exists



between the above passage addressed to Horatio and a passage which is spoken to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by Hamlet: both passages contain the same image of Pipe. When Claudius sends them to Hamlet to extract his secret and the reason of his "madness" from him, ironically instead of their worming out the secret from him, this is Hamlet who makes them confess their own secret of being the king's spies. At this point, he forces Guildenstern to play on a pipe and Guildenstern helplessly resists it since he does not know how to play the pipe. This is the way Hamlet mocks him:

Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you  
Make of me. You would play upon me, you  
would  
Seem to know my stops, you would pluck out  
the  
Heart of mystery, you would sound me from my  
lowest  
Note to the top of my compass; and here is  
much  
Music, excellent voice, in this little organ  
Yet cannot you make it speak. Do you think I  
Am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call  
Me what instrument you will, though you fret  
Me, you cannot play upon me.

Thus, Hamlet makes a fool of Guildenstern and mocks his idiocy which he shares with foolish characters like Rosencrantz, Polonius and Osric. The contrast between Hamlet's treatment of Horatio and that of Guildenstern conveys how dearly Hamlet values true friendship; in other words, the more noble Horatio looks, the more discriminating Hamlet's character appears to us and the more vivid is Shakespeare's characterization of Hamlet. As a consequence of Shakespeare's characterization through presentation of character foils, the audience is provided with all the means to perceive and appreciate Hamlet's system of values even if we come to believe with Dr. Dover Wilson (1962) that one should not deal with Hamlet's character based on today's psychology, because Hamlet "is a character in a play, not in history" (229-232). Shakespeare's dramatic techniques within

the play establish and justify the plausibility of Hamlet's personality.

Besides the use of character foils, in Hamlet Shakespeare deliberately employs counter-scenes, either opposite or parallel, to highlight dramatically the themes or to reveal the characters. In this way, Shakespeare constantly provokes the alert audience's imagination to draw correlations between the scenes and the characters in order to gain a better sense of judgement. Again as Muir quotes Fermor,

The art of the dramatist has been engaged not in presenting a closely locked and logically coherent action that points irresistibly to a certain deduction, but in selecting those fragments of the whole that stimulate our imaginations to understanding of the essential experience, to the perception of a nexus truths too vast to be defined as themes, whose enduring power engages a seemingly unending series of perceptions and responses (57).

As discussed before, one of the devices Shakespeare has used is the counter-scene of Pyrrhus which renders the horror of what could have happened to Claudius. The fact that Hamlet refuses to act as brutally as Pyrrhus, as Scragg (1988) believes, proves Hamlet's humane conduct (117-118).

The counter-scene of Hamlet and Laertes, besides stressing the disparity between the two characters, dramatically and aesthetically engages the audience's mind when s/he notices the parallelism between their speeches which paradoxically reinforces the same difference already discussed:

Hamlet This is most brave,  
That I, the son of a dear father  
murder'd,  
Prompted to my revenge by heaven  
and hell,  
Must like a whore unpack my heart  
with words  
And fall a-cursing like a very drab...  
(II.ii.578-582)



Laertes And so have I a noble father lost,  
 A sister driven into desperate terms,  
 Whose worth, if praises may go back  
 again,  
 Stood challenger on mount of all the  
 age  
 For her perfections. But my revenge  
 will come. (IV.vii.25-29)

Yet note the desperate and chiding tone of Hamlet and the confident tone of Laertes; the former, despite all the disasters befallen to him is still hesitant, and the latter is quite certain that "But my revenge will come".

Finally there is a scene (I, iii) where Polonius skeptically and mockingly warns Ophelia not to be seduced by Hamlet's vows which he compares to blazes which have no "heat":

These blazes, daughter,  
 Giving more light than heat, extinct in both  
 Even in their promise as it is a-making,  
 You must not take for fire.

or

Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers  
 Not of that dye which their investments  
 show,  
 But more implorators of unholy suits,  
 Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds  
 The better to beguile. This is for all.  
 (I.iii.117-131)

Here Polonius attributing his own youthful fancies to Hamlet, suspiciously analyzes Hamlet's love in an ugly and vulgar way in order to throw doubt on his pure affections. This scene is contradicted immediately by Hamlet's letter in which he sincerely expresses his profound love for Ophelia:

Doubt that the stars are fire,  
 Doubt that the sun doth move,  
 Doubt truth to be a liar,  
 But never doubt I love.  
 O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers  
 I have not art to reckon my groans. but that  
 I love thee best, O most best, believe it.  
 (II.,ii.,115-120)

The verisimilitude of above simple but pregnant speech of Hamlet-- who self-deniably understates his ability of expressing his affections in verse-- are proved in the nunnery scene where Hamlet ardently reveals his virtue and his care for spiritual values which were denied on him by Polonius. Hamlet flays women who change their natural appearance with which God has endowed them (III.,i.,144-148). What Hamlet displays in this scene exemplifies his high moral criteria which are far from Polonius' charges against him. This part both underscores Hamlet's nobility and reveals Polonius' injudiciousness and imbecility which he himself admits later. Such counter-scenes are set by the dramatist to unravel the tragic hero's abhorrence of hypocrisy and fraud which had become the vogue of time. The scenes as such also unfold the hero's being constantly misunderstood and misjudged. No wonder Horatio remains his only confidant with whom he can confide his thoughts and feelings.

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However, none of Shakespeare's plays is as crowded with character foils as King Lear is. We may move deductively from the major characters to the minor ones: Lear versus Gloucester in the parallel main and sub-plots; Cordelia opposes Goneril and Regan; Lear versus Fool; Kent contrasts with Oswald; and finally Albany stands against Cornwall.

Cordelia stands in opposition with Goneril and Regan; such character foils contribute to the enhancement of the theme of honesty versus hypocrisy. The contrast between these two sets of characters is reflected in their language, Goneril and Regan in their hyperbolic flatteries and Cordelia in her reticence.

Lily Cambell (1986) draws the differentiation between the two sisters in the following definition which distinguishes the flatterer from the friend:

the flatterer is inconstant, the friend constant; the flatterer always says and does what will give pleasure, the friend does not hesitate to give pain, to offer rebuke or correction, when it is necessary; the flatterer



is always ready to speak, the friend is often over-ready and excessive in his promises, the friend is temperate and just and reasonable; the flatterer bustles about but is not ready with genuine service, the friend will dissuade from unjust action but will serve even at great cost to himself.

The above definition exactly corresponds, with all its details, to Goneril and Regan, on the one hand, and to Cordelia, on the other hand. Goneril and Regan with all their lofty promises betray their father. On the contrary, Cordelia does not hesitate to tell the truth even if she loses all her share of dowery; she keeps no eye on her father's generosity and she has no intention to goad him into a false passion in order to win a more substantial property. She says to her father,

Unhappy that I am, I cannot leave  
My heart into my mouth; I love your majesty  
According to my bond; no more no less.

Cordelia can even foresee the sister's later treatment of their father. Shakespeare by juxtaposing opposing characters reinforces his humanistic theme of filial love. Furthermore, Cordelia is different from her sisters in her self-control too. One can compare the insolent language that Goneril uses against her father when she bursts into rage and fury with that of the gentleman's report of Cordelia's reading Kent's letter about her father's plight after he is banished by Goneril and Regan.

Goneril Not only, Sir, this your all licens'd Fool,  
But other of your insolent retinue  
Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking  
forth  
In rank and not-to-be-endured riots.  
(I.iv.198-200)

These words are spoken shortly after Lear has generously given them all his kingdom. Machiavellian Goneril --with her very short memory which consigns every filial relation into oblivion--speaks to her father so rudely that even Fool cannot keep silent and sardonically says, "The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,/ That it's had

it head bit off by it young (I.iv.213-14). Obviously, the implied comparison is drawn between Lear and hedge-sparrow and Goneril and Regan with the cuckoo; the cuckoo ungratefully has the sparrow beheaded, the same sparrow which had nourished it so long as Lear has fed Goneril and instead he has received ingratitude. And of course this point does not evade the audience's attention that this is the same Goneril who claimed that her father was "Dearer than eye-sight" when he was dividing his retinue among them.

Contrary to Goneril, Cordelia gently pours forth all her love and affection in her silent tears when she reads Kent's letter about how the sisters have treated him. The gentleman who reports her response to Kent, who inquired of him whether the letter impressed her, answers thus:

Not to a rage; patience and sorrow strove  
Who should express her goodliest. You have  
seen  
Sunshine and rain at once; her smiles and  
tears  
Were like, a better way; those happy smilets  
That play'd on her ripe lip seem'd not to  
know  
What guests were in her eyes; which parted  
thence  
As pearls from diamonds dropp'd. In brief,  
Sorrow would be a rarity most belov'd,  
If all could so become it. (IV.iii.16-23)

And later she summons all the "unpublished virtues of the earth"--meaning the remedial and healing herbs of the earth--to spring with her tears and provide a soothing balm for her father's wounded soul. In short, the difference between Cordelia, on the one hand, and Goneril and Regan, on the other, can be best expressed in the words of the servant who has served them a long time. He says about Goneril "If she live long/And in the end meet the old course of death/women will all turn monsters." Whereas Cordelia turns to a Christ figure who procures her father's redemption and salvation. Andrew Gurr (1988) suggests that "Not only is Cordelia said to be a redeemer, but she



echoes Christ's words: "O dear father, it is your business that I go about" (51). Even her hanging used to be a Roman punishment for the criminals as they hanged Jesus.

Another pair of character foils is the pair of Lear-Gloucester in the parallel plot of the play. Although the similarities between these two characters and their stories are numerous, the same very resemblances draw our attention to their differences: the difference which aims at enhancing the moral themes of the play. As Scragg (1988) points out, they both suffer from filial ingratitude and from the betrayal of unnatural children. They likewise banish their truthful children, Cordelia and Edgar. They both gain knowledge after one has lost his wits, the other his sight. Their truthful friends have to disguise themselves to keep their company as Edgar is disguised as a madman and Kent is disguised as a stranger (115). Yet Gloucester's torture is physical and Lear's mental. Gloucester is punished for his adultery whose product is the illegitimate Edmund, whereas Lear's punishment is prompted not by adultery, but by his flaw of measuring his children's love materialistically and of his denial of parental bond and blood kingship with his truthful child, whose ignominy in Renaissance time was not less than adultery. Therefore, it seems the difference between the two characters which change them into character foils is meant to concentrate the audience's attention on the indispensability of punishment for two downfalls which are equally sinful: Gloucester despises the sanctioned matrimonial contract; Lear also ignores the sacred father-child bond. However, despite their similar egotism which reduces anyone outside themselves, the ones who love them, into "negatives", (Turner's Review, 241), they must have two different punishments. Gloucester has committed a carnal sin and he has to pay for it with his body and Lear's impaired mind is the cause of his flaw and he has to be purged through a long-term mental torment.

As for more minor characters, one can readily point out to Kent and Oswald as character foils.

Their difference crystallizes the concept of fidelity and true service. Although in our age the concept of true "servant" may sound pejorative, in Shakespeare's time it was considered nobility for a man to serve his king and it was distinguished from knavery. Kent's honor and gentility exactly lies in his loyalty to his royal King Lear. He is the "friend", whose definition was elaborated on by French. He does not hesitate to undergo the humiliation of presenting himself as a slave in order to keep Lear company and see for him now that Lear is blind to reality. He begs Lear,

See better, Lear; and let me still remain  
The true blank of thine eye. (I.i.158-9)

and he declares that

My life I never held but as a pawn  
To wage against thy enemies; nor fear to lose it,  
Thy safety being motive.

But Lear foolishly banishes him as he did Cordelia.

On the other hand, there is Oswald who is called by Kent "O without a figure" or "zed", the "unnecessary letter," who very soon forgets that he has once been Lear's servant; as soon as power falls into the hands of Goneril and her sister, he directs his services to them. He is indeed the mercenary "knave" who even plays the role of a go-between in the illegitimate affair between Edmund, the bastard son of Gloucester, and Goneril. Kent does justice to him when in a quarrel to support Lear, he calls Oswald "...one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pandar, and..." (II.ii.18-20).

Lear and Fool also become character foils when their big difference establishes the central paradox of the play: Lear, the seemingly sane man, acts foolishly, whereas Fool becomes the voice of reason. Then when Lear loses his wits, but in madness comes to perceive the truth, he paradoxically is reduced to the level of Fool who could predict all the disasters which befall Lear. In the world of the play where everything is perverted and all the unnatural elements are replaced by the



normal ones, then this paradox of folly and wisdom in Lear and Fool is resolved. Bratchell (1990) quotes Coleridge who believes that the contrast and the Fool's "wild babbling, and inspired idiocy, articulate and gauge the horror of the scene(s)" (127). He also adds that there are many advantages in this;--a greater assimilation to nature, a greater scope of power, more truths, and more feelings;--the effects of contrast, as in Lear and the Fool" (51).

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As for character foils in Othello, the contrast between Othello and Iago is as obvious as the day and the night. Yet what has made this contrast debatable throughout ages, as it was the case with Hamlet's hesitation, is the motivation of Iago for such an immense and profound villainy. Iago's own justification is that he hates Othello, because he has taken away from him the position he had deserved. Although Iago is considered a pure Machiavellian and diabolic character who is innately vicious, there have been different attitudes about his motive. Harry Levin refers to Bradley's concern with characterization in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Othello. Bradley's stress is on the motivation of the characters and somehow solves the problem of Iago's motiveless villainy when he holds the idea that "the action of Iago is simple enough, since it originates from himself; the action of Hamlet is highly complex, because it is forced upon Hamlet..." (227). Andrew also quotes Tillyard who wonders why some have considered Iago motiveless since it was the first of the deadly sins--pride--which motivates Iago as it did Devil: "It was by that sin that the angels fell, and at the end of Othello, Iago is explicitly equated with the Devil" (78). Robert Watson comments on Iago's character as "less an actual person than a demonic possessor of the victims he reads so preternaturally well. He seems to be a catalogue of bad motives: social envy, sexual jealousy, lust and bloodlust, greed and pride... Iago has a faculty of envy as insatiable as Faustus's

faculty of desire..." (339).

This envy is in exact opposition with Othello's Christ-like innocence and his enthusiastic sense of honor both of which paradoxically lead to his fall prompted by Iago's sinister conspiracy. In other words, Othello's obsession with honor, under the influence of Iago's inculcations, change to envy--an envy whose nature is very different from Iago's or Roderigo's envy. The different concepts of envy are incarnated in different characters, each of whom stands as an individual in the pair of character foils. For instance, Lily Cambell, by giving an exact definition of envy from the French Academic, refers to the fact that Othello's envy originates from his "race" which is prone to passion and, therefore, jealousy out of honor. Othello at the end of the play when his own folly is revealed to him and pathetically discovers his being a victim of Iago's plot, he asks others to report his deed the way it was, because, he says, "For nought I did in fate, but all in honour" (148-174). Bayley likewise touches upon the same sense of honor which leads to a great conflict in Othello. To understand the reason for Othello's vehement reaction to Desdemona and Cassio, the audience should pose himself /herself in Othello's consciousness and see what he has gone through regarding his cultural and tribal values. Bayley (1988) says, "Othello reveals the extremes in the human heart: that the tender lover can also be the inflexible killer. But Othello is not freed by his sense of his own situation: he has been caught in it as if in a snare" (200).

He also adds,

Othello is in one trap, and our knowledge of it puts us in another one. This separation is very different from the freedom of mind we experience through Hamlet's need to kill Cassio and Desdemona belongs only to him.... Mind in Othello has walked into a trap, and the play both invites us in and keeps us out. We are close to Othello and yet alienated from him. (201)

Martin Elliott, in a fascinating book deals with the language used by the characters. Before



Othello's fall, the images used by him all associate with heavenly bodies. After his fall, his language is affected by Iago's language which is imbued with animal imagery. Finally, besides the different nature of envy in Othello and Iago and their effect, one has to take a look at another sample of envy in Iago and Roderigo. As we discussed, Othello's source of envy and jealousy is honor, whereas Iago's envy is based on monetary cause, namely losing the position as Othello's first assistant or lieutenant. Similarly, Roderigo's envy is based on a lustful purpose. He shamelessly gives all he has to secure Desdemona's love for himself.

The contrast in the nature of the character foils' envy overlaps with their notion of love. As we observed, Othello's concept of love and honor are intermingled, the same way that the marriage of Othello and Desdemona is "the marriage of minds". Desdemona tells her father and the senate in her defense of her love for Othello, who is a black moor, that she was in love with Othello's mind, not with his "visage". Othello says,

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd  
And I lov'd her that she did pity them.  
(I.iii.167-8)

Therefore, Othello's love is a spiritual love and even when Iago tries to make Othello suspect his wife, Othello resists and protects his love earnestly until, as Othello himself confesses, his mind is "wrought" by Iago's temptations.

Othello's spiritual sense of love is in exact contrast with Roderigo's lustful love and Iago's self-love. Roderigo's love for Desdemona directs him toward suicide and disgraceful means even prostitution. Iago also defines love as "a lust of the blood and a permission of will" ("Will" meaning physical desire). Lily Cambell is of belief that "self-love, which is in the thinking of Shakespeare's day was the mother of all vices, is the only love that Iago respects" (157). That is why he tries to direct the quiet, peaceful and healthy love of Othello and Desdemona to passion and thence to self-destruction (159). Again that is why Iago in every courteous manner of Venetian mannerism finds lust and vice.

When he watches Cassio's greeting of Desdemona, he immediately

thinks,

With as little a web as this will  
I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio.

Iago's destructive mentality has affected his wife Emilia too albeit a positive and likeable character. She has been so frequently humiliated by her husband who sees all women as lustful creatures that she tells Desdemona:

'Tis not a year or two shows us a man,  
They are all but stomachs, and we all but  
food;  
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full,  
They belch us. (III.iv.103-106)

Emilia's disgusting way of describing men's love is the reflection of Iago's treatment of her that has all accorded with his way of thinking.

The devastating effect of such a way of thinking leads Othello to his fall which is very well adumbrated in the counter-scenes of the play. As Aristotle states, the fall of the tragic hero involves a fall from fortune to misfortune. Othello's fall from greatness to misery is very specifically presented in a Pair of counter-scenes. As an illustration, one may refer to the first scene of the first Act. This is when Iago with the help of Roderigo has already provoked Brabantio, Desdemona's father, against Othello. On the other hand, Iago comes to Othello and alarms him against the high position and complex connection that Brabantio, as one of the Senators, has and he may use his influence against Othello. Meanwhile a noise is heard and Iago bewares Othello of the danger and asks him to hide since Brabantio and his men look for him everywhere. Iago does so to prove his fidelity to Othello and at the same time to arouse Othello against Brabantio and prompt him to a violent action. When Iago asks Othello to hide somewhere, Othello quite self-confidently tells him, "Not I: I must be found:/ My parts, my title and my perfect soul/Shall manifest me rightly" (I.i.30-32). Later, when Othello has fallen into the hands of Iago and bows to his will, this scene is opposed by the scene



in which Iago after wroughting Othello's mind and making him believe that his wife has an affair with Cassio, assures him that he can provide him with some convincing evidence. Thus, he goes out and already speaks to Cassio about another woman teasingly and when they enter the room, Othello who is helplessly and miserably hiding behind the curtain hears his speech about someone else and assumes that Othello speaks about his wife. At the beginning of this scene when Iago asks him to hide in order to give him a living evidence against his wife, Othello like a fool follows him around (William J. Grace, 65). S.C. Boorman comments on the same scene thus:

... when we see the "noble" Moor crouching in the background, moving at Iago's gesture, thrown into passion by an innocent laugh, and completely convinced by this charade, we feel the full force of Othello's decline, and laughter and tragic sorrow are mingled in a special paradox which lies at the root of all our lives (190).

The next pair of counter-scenes is again at the beginning when we see Othello's open nature, confidence and extraordinary self-control in the face of Brabantio's accusations of witchcraft which in Shakespeare's time could drive one to his execution. Brabantio who means to disgrace Othello to compensate for the possible scandal about his daughter's elopement with Othello, does not come short with bombarding Othello with the worst charges, to the point that the Duke asks Othello to defend himself. All throughout the scene, he keeps silent and does not lose his temper. Even prior to this scene, when Brabantio sees him, he draws his sword for Othello, he very politely but ironically bids him to keep calm:

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.

Good signior, you shall more command with years

Than with your weapons.

His astonishing self-control proves his great soul and his courtesy, whereas later in the fourth Act

and in front of Lodovico, the messenger of the Duke, who announces the Duke's edict of Othello's replacement by Cassio, Othello slaps Desdemona. Shocked by his savage treatment of innocent Desdemona, Lodovico says,

Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate  
Call all in all efficient? Is this the nature  
Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid  
virtue

The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,  
Could neither graze nor pierce? (275-79)

Finally he concludes the scene that

I am sorry that I am deceiv'd in him!  
(IV.i.293)

This scene definitely marks the hero's downfall in the eyes of the audience: the great Othello, who under the influence of passion changes to a monster.

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Although in Macbeth character foils and counter-scenes occur less frequently, a couple of cases which do emerge are so forceful whose impetus overtakes the whole play. Since Bradley, Coleridge and Johnson, the central debate has been focused on Macbeth's motivation and his uncontrollable ambition which direct him toward his doom with open eyes. In other words, prior to the murder of Duncan, Macbeth has a clear moral vision about its consequences as Mc Elroy in a whole chapter on Macbeth contends. Craig and Bevington also elaborate on the same issue (1044-45). Yet the question is that Macbeth had been already showered by all the honors every man may crave for; he has displayed his valour against the rebels who meant to overthrow King Duncan.

In return, Duncan endowed him with recompense of which he was worthy. He has been promised by the witches to be a king in future. Then why does he want more and so hastily? The answer is overriding ambition. The whole play from the moment that the spark of ambition is enkindled in Macbeth to the point that he is beheaded by Macduff, concentrates on the psychology of ambitious passion for power and later on of crime.



The fact that despite Macbeth's being quite aware of the damnation which follows his crime, he commits a horrible murder to succeed the king-- who is his king, cousin and guest-- reinforces the irresistible impetuous effect of ambition on him.

Therefore to enhance this theme and to present this passion in Macbeth tangibly, Shakespeare provides the situation first by juxtaposing the character foils--namely Macbeth and Banquo. The manifestation of a hidden ambition in Macbeth is highlighted the moment the witches state their prophecies, the prophecies which are equally promising both for Banquo and Macbeth. In fact, the prediction made for Banquo is even more tempting since he is going to be the source of a chain of kings, namely his children and grand children. However, from the same moment Macbeth's desire for prompting the prophecy is awakened, while Banquo remains cool to the offer.

Cambell maintains that

Now it is Banquo who boldly challenges the witches, while Macbeth can but feebly echo his question to them. And as they hail Macbeth in turn as the Thane of Glamis, Thane of Cawdor, and King hereafter, his action call reproof from Banquo: 'Good Sir, why do you start and seem to fear/Things that do sound so fair?' (I.iii.51-52) (208-239).

In fact, Macbeth's fear is due to something within himself.

Thus, although Macbeth and Banquo are both in a similar situation, their reactions are different: Macbeth is insurmountably tempted, while Banquo responds to the temptation with philosophical contemplation. Banquo even warns Macbeth against the dangers of temptation:

But 'tis strange:

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,

The instruments of Darkness tell us truths,

Win us with honest trifles, to betray's

In deepest consequence,- (I.iii.122-125)

Banquo warns Macbeth that the evil forces tempt man with some promising truth and as soon as he is tempted, they drive him toward endless damnation.

This is the paradox that Banquo does apprehend, but Macbeth is too wrapped up in the illusion of kingship to notice. He says in an aside,

Two truths are told,

As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme--...

This supernatural soliciting

Cannot be ill; cannot be good: --

If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

Whose horrid image do unfix my hair,

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
against the use of nature? (I.iii.128-137)

Macbeth's speech is exactly the elaboration of the same paradox posed by Banquo. The witches' prediction starts with a truth which drives Macbeth to an ecstasy; yet it overtakes him with an ambivalent feeling of joy and fear.

The paradox is even more intensified when Hecate, the goddess of Witchcraft, advises the witches to give Macbeth a false security and drive him deeper into this slough of sin. The speech of Hecate is exactly the reproof of Banquo's comment about satanic "instruments". Hecate knows that by giving man security, she can "draw him on to his confusion/He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear/His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear;/And you know, security/Is mortals' chiefest enemy" (III.v.27-33). Afterwards, the witches go to assure Macbeth that no man born of a woman can harm him and no power can hurt him unless the Dunsinane woods starts to move. Macbeth then concludes that since every man is born of a woman and no wood can be rooted out and stir, then he will be invulnerably safe and he need not fear anyone or anything. This sense of security is what hastens him to his fatal end with the help of Lady Macbeth, the most villainous of all Shakespeare's women character. Garbor believes that despite her childlessness, "Macbeth becomes in fact the man-child his wife will bring to birth--and dash to shards" (154).

On the contrary, Banquo is immuned against all the temptations and never gives these promises a second thought. Thus, Macbeth is gradually changed



to a vampire destroying anyone who is in his way to his "imperial theme". Then when he is drowned in blood and is constantly haunted by the ghosts of those he has slain and still trusts the witches' guarantee of his safety, he finds out that how they have told him a little of truth but not the whole truth. Thus when all his enemies gather to form an army, in a camouflage they take a branch of tree and move toward his palace and, therefore, the Dunsinane wood seems to move. Moreover, when he confronts his avenger Macduff, whose family was slaughtered by Macbeth, he finds out that Macduff was born of his mother unnaturally and "untimely". Then he can see that what the witches have told him was both true and false. The same paradox which Banquo did understand and saved his soul, but Macbeth failed to see it and doomed his soul.

Besides character foils of Macbeth and Banquo, Shakespeare inserts a counter-scene in the play which starts with a paradoxical statement and underscores the ultimate similarity between Macbeth's vice and that of the witches. As Othello gradually converted into a Iago, Macbeth also comes to outdo the witches in his villainy, because if the witches only aroused man to commit sin, Macbeth himself voluntarily takes diabolic action. When the first time the witches appear on the stage, they say together "Fair is foul, and foul is fair." This paradoxical statement is reiterated by Macbeth the first time he appears on the stage too: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen". The moment he utters this sentence, he refers to the foggy and misty atmosphere as foul and it is "fair" because he has just come back from battle triumphantly and has drunk the "joy of battle". Nevertheless, the implications of this paradox can trespass this instance and can preside the whole play as discussed above. We just observed how the witches' seduction of Macbeth is all based on his misunderstanding of the implications of their speeches. How everything they said seemed "fair" first, but turned out to bring "foul" consequences as Banquo had realized. Therefore, the repetition of this statement in the counter-scenes is not accidental

and may also signify the gradual transformation of Macbeth to a devil, as vicious as the witches, who always plan to destroy someone the same way that Macbeth practically reaps all the ones who could be a threat to his throne.

To conclude, what was discussed in the foregoing article may seem too obvious. But since sometimes even the very obvious and significant points may be threatened by neglect, this was an attempt to draw the attention of Shakespeare's readers to the corresponding scenes or character foils which may seem to occur in the text precariously and randomly. But quite the contrary, nothing in an organic and unified literary work is in vain, let alone in Shakespeare's masterpieces in which all the actions, characters, and scenes form a coherent texture which enhances the central themes and develop the pivotal characters who represent those themes. Consequently, the character foils and counter-scenes in Hamlet, King Lear, Othello and Macbeth like a pattern secure the organic unity of the plays.

Then no wonder that Coleridge believes even if we have access to half of what Shakespeare has created, we will still be "gainers".

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## نقش شخصیتها و صحنه‌های قرینه در تراژدیهای اصلی شکسپیر

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### چکیده

به رغم این واقعیت که پیرنگ نمایشنامه‌های شکسپیر اقتباسی از داستانهای تاریخی و داستانهای نوشته شده توسط دیگر نویسندگان است، امروزه تقریباً همه ناقدان بر این باورند که نمایشنامه‌های شکسپیر سرآمد همه‌ی داستانهایی است که او از آنان تقلید کرده‌است. این برتری حاصل نبوغ وی در آفرینش شخصیت‌ها، موقعیت‌ها و فضایی است که او از این طریق مضامین خود و مفاهیم جهانی - انسانی را به‌طور زنده ارائه می‌دهد و آنها را مجسم و ملموس می‌گرداند. با توجه به این نکته، این مقایسه بر دو مسئله‌ی اساسی از دیدگاه ساختارگرایانه مبتنی است: ابتدا به تفصیل به آفرینش شخصیت‌های متضاد و قرینه می‌پردازد که سهم قابل توجهی در ارائه‌ی شخصیت‌های کلیدی و نمایش انگیزه‌های آشکار و پنهان آنها دارد. سپس توجه به شگرد ویژه‌ی شکسپیر مبنی بر خلق صحنه‌های قرینه معطوف خواهد شد، صنعتی که به‌عنوان شیوه‌ی اصلی در شخصیت‌پردازی و بسط مضامین اصلی در تراژدی‌های بزرگ او (هملت، مکبت، اتللو و شاه لیر) به‌کار گرفته می‌شود (البته مراد از صحنه‌های قرینه، صحنه‌های مشابه و متضاد می‌باشد).