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# Psychology of Evil: Applying Psychoanalytic Theory to Shakespeare's Iago and Richard III

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to provide a psychoanalytic study of two of William Shakespeare's most notorious villains, Iago and Richard III. It is my aim to focus on the psychological conditions that plague these two notorious villains in order to understand the psychological elements that both compel and allow Iago and Richard to commit harm with little to no remorse, which will reveal the true character that Shakespeare intended, resulting in a more accurate understanding of *Othello* and *Richard III* as a whole. The current scholarship that exists falls short from being able to fully understand these two characters. The main reason for this inability to grasp the full concept of these characters stems from the fact that scholars have been unable to understand their humanity. Psychoanalysis provides a deeper understanding of this humanity. However, the current psychoanalytic approaches that have tried to posit understanding have lacked empathy. Empathy lies at the core of psychology. Empathizing with Richard and Iago and defining them by their psychological hinderances, rather than focusing on their actions to define them, provides a more accurate explanation of their character as a whole. Maintaining empathy throughout, I focus on the psychological conditions that both begin, and influence, the actions of these two characters. By applying modern psychoanalysis, I am able to present a detailed understanding of the characters that Shakespeare originally intended.