

**“And what’s he then that says I play the villain”:** Understanding Iago as a Histrionic**Mohammad Wajih J. Alyo**Department of English Language and Literature  
College of Arts, King Saud University  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**Abstract**

Despite the extensive scholarly research conducted on the debatable topic of Iago’s motives in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, the debate has not yet been convincingly resolved. Following the method of psychoanalytical interpretation, this paper attempts to reconcile the puzzling contradictions between what Iago cites as his motives, on the one hand, and his inexplicably evil deeds in the play, on the other. It argues, thus, that Iago’s behaviour displays major symptoms of a mentally disordered personality. Relying on various sources that cite the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (APA –DSM-5)*, the study attempts to identify Iago’s conduct and deeds in the play with the salient features of two related “Cluster B Personality Disorders,” namely, ‘Histrionic’ and ‘Narcissistic’ Personality Disorders. Shakespeare’s Iago is portrayed as an egotistical young adult who has an obsession with self-esteem and who constantly seeks to be the centre of attention. His behaviour is overly dramatic, and he relishes role-playing and manipulating others as means of making him the centre of attention. Suddenly feeling underrated, underprivileged, and his self-esteem damaged, Iago develops into a victim in the grip of these personality disorders which transform him from the “honest Iago” his acquaintances used to trust and appreciate, into a “demi-devil,” whose deeds are, to the same acquaintances, baffling and appalling.

*Keywords:* Attention seeking, evil, histrionic personality disorder, Iago, motives, narcissistic personality disorder

**Cites as:** Alyo, M. W. J. (2019). “And what’s he then that says I play the villain”:

Understanding Iago as a Histrionic. *Arab World English Journal for Translation & Literary Studies*3 (4) 139-154  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol3no4.12>