

## THESIS ABSTRACT

The thesis is concerned with the analysis and comparison of the villain characters from William Shakespeare's plays *Othello* and *Richard III*. The basis for the examination is the polemics with F. R. Leavis's essay "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero: or The Sentimentalist's Othello", the main ideas of which are summarised and critically assessed in Chapter 2. The conclusions arising from the evaluation become the impulses for the analysis of Iago and Richard III which aims to highlight some aspects of Shakespeare's method of portrayal of villains. Special attention is paid to the issue of the contrast between the true villainous self and the pretended virtuous semblance which is considered vital for the whole concept of Shakespearean villainy. In Chapter 3, the characters' individual strategies of concealing their actual "being" with their internally created and controlled "seeming" identity are explored. Special attention is paid to their relation to the language as a tool which serves these strategies and, simultaneously, reveals them. Chapter 4 proceeds from a detailed and focused analysis to a general overview of the characters. It approaches the theme of the creation of Iago's and Richard III's identities as a complex process in which both the villains and other characters participate, the former by forming their image, the latter by responding to it. The thesis explores selected issues that contribute to the definition of the specificity of both Shakespearean villains, such as their methods of influencing other characters or any potential development from their first to the last appearance on the stage. Finally, the thesis suggests some of the possibilities in interpreting the characters of Iago and Richard III. Broadly speaking, the main aim of the thesis is to analyse how the villain's identity is constituted at various distinct levels. In the most general terms, the thesis strives to enter the dialogue with Leavis's essay in order to search for arguments that would suggest whether the term "diabolic intellect" is more appropriate in its ironical or literal sense.