

Shakespeare's Substantive Baddies List

by Alfred J. Drake

From Dr. Johnson's "Preface to *Shakespeare*," 1768.

His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose.... This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better....

From Dr. Johnson's "On Fiction" in *The Rambler* No. 4. 1750.

Vice, for Vice is necessary to be shewn, should always disgust; nor should the Graces of Gaiety, or the Dignity of Courage, be so united with it, as to reconcile it to the Mind.

Oscar Wilde, "Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," 1891.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

.....

I'll find a day to massacre them all
 And raze their faction and their family,
 The cruel father and his traitorous sons,
 To whom I sued for my dear son's life,
 And make them know what 'tis to let a queen
 Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain.

Tamora, Queen of Goths in Act 1, Scene 1 of *Titus Andronicus*.

Substantive Female “Baddies” in Shakespeare

Goneril, Lear’s daughter in *King Lear* (cruelly pushes her father aside from power)

Lady Macbeth (prods Macbeth to kill the good King Duncan, then goes mad)

Margaret of Anjou, Henry VI’s queen in the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*. (ferociously follows her own and Henry VI’s dynastic interests; curses the Yorkists. But see [Sylvia Morris’s article](#) in [theshakespeareblog.com](#))

Regan, Lear’s daughter in *King Lear* (cruelly pushes her father aside from power)

Tamora, Queen of Goths in *Titus Andronicus* (carries out vendetta against the Andronici)

The Queen in *Cymbeline* (plots to poison Imogen, who rejected her son Cloten, and assassinate her husband the king)

Dionyza, Cleon’s wife in *Pericles* (tries to kill Pericles’s daughter Marina)

Some people might add the following two female characters:

Gertrude, Queen of Denmark in *Hamlet* (she marries the usurper and fratricide Claudius, but in truth she seems more weak than evil)

Sycorax the Witch, Caliban’s mother in *The Tempest* (she confined Ariel in a tree trunk, but she isn’t a living character, so....)

.....

Why, I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
 And cry ‘Content’ to that which grieves my heart,
 And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
 And frame my face to all occasions.
 I’ll drown more sailors than the mermaid shall;
 I’ll slay more gazers than the basilisk;
 I’ll play the orator as well as Nestor,
 Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could,
 And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.

Richard of Gloucester (the eventual Richard III) in Act 3, Scene 2 of 3 *Henry 6*.

Substantive Male “Baddies” in Shakespeare

Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus* (arranges the rape of Titus’s daughter Lavinia)
 Angelo in *Measure for Measure* (tries to extort sex from the saintly Isabella)
 Antiochus in *Pericles* (has incestuous relationship with daughter, tries to kill Pericles)
 Antonio in *The Tempest* (Prospero’s treasonous brother, who usurped his duchy)
 Buckingham in *Richard III* (helps Richard pull off his power grab)
 Caliban in *The Tempest* (tried to rape Miranda, engages in conspiracy against Prospero)
 Claudius in *Hamlet* (kills his brother, Hamlet Sr.)
 Cloten, the Queen’s son in *Cymbeline* (plots to kill Leonatus and ravish Imogen)
 Cornwall, Regan’s husband in *King Lear* (blinds Gloucester for helping Lear)
 Don John in *Much Ado about Nothing* (tries to ruin Hero and Claudio’s marriage)
 Duke Frederick in *As You Like It* (usurps the duchy from Duke Senior, exiles Celia)
 Edmund the Bastard in *King Lear* (disinherits his “legitimate” brother Edgar)
 Iago in *Othello* (tricks Othello into murdering Desdemona)
 Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale* (falsely accuses and imprisons Queen Hermione)
 Macbeth in *Macbeth* (kills King Duncan, steals his crown)
 Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (disrespects Sir Toby, behaves like a Puritan egomaniac)
 Oliver, Jacques’s brother in *As You Like It* (deprives Orlando of a proper upbringing)
 Othello in *Othello* (murders Desdemona on false evidence)
 Richard III in *Richard III*, 2 & 3 *Henry VI* (oh ... all sorts of things)
 Sebastian in *The Tempest* (engages in conspiracy to kill his brother King Alonso)
 Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* (tries to collect his pound of flesh from Antonio)
 Titus Andronicus in *Titus Andronicus* (a true revenger, but bakes his enemies in a pie)
 Tyrrel in *Richard III* (organizes the killing of the princes in the Tower)