**LECTURE VI**

**OTHELLO**

**1**

Evil has nowhere else been portrayed with such mastery as in the character of Iago. Richard III., for example, beside being less subtly conceived, is a far greater figure and a less repellent. His physical deformity, separating him from other men, seems to offer some excuse for his egoism. In spite of his egoism, too, he appears to us more than a mere individual: he is the representative of his family, the Fury of the House of York. Nor is he so negative as Iago: he has strong passions, he has admirations, and his conscience disturbs him. There is the glory of power about him. Though an excellent actor, he prefers force to fraud, and in his world there is no general illusion as to his true nature. Again, to compare Iago with the Satan of *Paradise Lost* seems almost absurd, so immensely does Shakespeare's man exceed Milton's Fiend in evil. That mighty Spirit, whose

form had yet not lostAll her original brightness, nor appearedLess than archangel ruined and the excessOf glory obscured;

[208]who knew loyalty to comrades and pity for victims; who

felt how awful goodness is, and sawVirtue in her shape how lovely; saw, and pinedHis loss;

who could still weep—how much further distant is he than Iago from spiritual death, even when, in procuring the fall of Man, he completes his own fall! It is only in Goethe's Mephistopheles that a fit companion for Iago can be found. Here there is something of the same deadly coldness, the same gaiety in destruction. But then Mephistopheles, like so many scores of literary villains, has Iago for his father. And Mephistopheles, besides, is not, in the strict sense, a character. He is half person, half symbol. A metaphysical idea speaks through him. He is earthy, but could never live upon the earth.

Of Shakespeare's characters Falstaff, Hamlet, Iago, and Cleopatra (I name them in the order of their births) are probably the most wonderful. Of these, again, Hamlet and Iago, whose births come nearest together, are perhaps the most subtle. And if Iago had been a person as attractive as Hamlet, as many thousands of pages might have been written about him, containing as much criticism good and bad. As it is, the majority of interpretations of his character are inadequate not only to Shakespeare's conception, but, I believe, to the impressions of most readers of taste who are unbewildered by analysis. These false interpretations, if we set aside the usual lunacies,[[107]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_107) fall into two groups. The first contains views which reduce Shakespeare to common-place. In different ways and degrees they convert his [209]Iago into an ordinary villain. Their Iago is simply a man who has been slighted and revenges himself; or a husband who believes he has been wronged, and will make his enemy suffer a jealousy worse than his own; or an ambitious man determined to ruin his successful rival—one of these, or a combination of these, endowed with unusual ability and cruelty. These are the more popular views. The second group of false interpretations is much smaller, but it contains much weightier matter than the first. Here Iago is a being who hates good simply because it is good, and loves evil purely for itself. His action is not prompted by any plain motive like revenge, jealousy or ambition. It springs from a 'motiveless malignity,' or a disinterested delight in the pain of others; and Othello, Cassio and Desdemona are scarcely more than the material requisite for the full attainment of this delight. This second Iago, evidently, is no conventional villain, and he is much nearer to Shakespeare's Iago than the first. Only he is, if not a psychological impossibility, at any rate not a*human* being. He might be in place, therefore, in a symbolical poem like *Faust*, but in a purely human drama like *Othello* he would be a ruinous blunder. Moreover, he is not in *Othello*: he is a product of imperfect observation and analysis.

Coleridge, the author of that misleading phrase 'motiveless malignity,' has some fine remarks on Iago; and the essence of the character has been described, first in some of the best lines Hazlitt ever wrote, and then rather more fully by Mr. Swinburne,—so admirably described that I am tempted merely to read and illustrate these two criticisms. This plan, however, would make it difficult to introduce all that I wish to say. I propose, therefore, to approach the subject directly, and, first, to consider how Iago appeared to those [210]who knew him, and what inferences may be drawn from their illusions; and then to ask what, if we judge from the play, his character really was. And I will indicate the points where I am directly indebted to the criticisms just mentioned.

But two warnings are first required. One of these concerns Iago's nationality. It has been held that he is a study of that peculiarly Italian form of villainy which is considered both too clever and too diabolical for an Englishman. I doubt if there is much more to be said for this idea than for the notion that Othello is a study of Moorish character. No doubt the belief in that Italian villainy was prevalent in Shakespeare's time, and it may perhaps have influenced him in some slight degree both here and in drawing the character of Iachimo in *Cymbeline*. But even this slight influence seems to me doubtful. If Don John in *Much Ado* had been an Englishman, critics would have admired Shakespeare's discernment in making his English villain sulky and stupid. If Edmund's father had been Duke of Ferrara instead of Earl of Gloster, they would have said that Edmund could have been nothing but an Italian. Change the name and country of Richard III., and he would be called a typical despot of the Italian Renaissance. Change those of Juliet, and we should find her wholesome English nature contrasted with the southern dreaminess of Romeo. But this way of interpreting Shakespeare is not Shakespearean. With him the differences of period, race, nationality and locality have little bearing on the inward character, though they sometimes have a good deal on the total imaginative effect, of his figures. When he does lay stress on such differences his intention is at once obvious, as in characters like Fluellen or Sir Hugh Evans, or in the talk of the French princes before the battle of Agincourt. I may add that Iago certainly [211]cannot be taken to exemplify the popular Elizabethan idea of a disciple of Macchiavelli. There is no sign that he is in theory an atheist or even an unbeliever in the received religion. On the contrary, he uses its language, and says nothing resembling the words of the prologue to the *Jew of Malta*:

I count religion but a childish toy,And hold there is no sin but ignorance.

Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* might have said this (and is not more likely to be Shakespeare's creation on that account), but not Iago.

I come to a second warning. One must constantly remember not to believe a syllable that Iago utters on any subject, including himself, until one has tested his statement by comparing it with known facts and with other statements of his own or of other people, and by considering whether he had in the particular circumstances any reason for telling a lie or for telling the truth. The implicit confidence which his acquaintances placed in his integrity has descended to most of his critics; and this, reinforcing the comical habit of quoting as Shakespeare's own statement everything said by his characters, has been a fruitful source of misinterpretation. I will take as an instance the very first assertions made by Iago. In the opening scene he tells his dupe Roderigo that three great men of Venice went to Othello and begged him to make Iago his lieutenant; that Othello, out of pride and obstinacy, refused; that in refusing he talked a deal of military rigmarole, and ended by declaring (falsely, we are to understand) that he had already filled up the vacancy; that Cassio, whom he chose, had absolutely no practical knowledge of war, nothing but bookish theoric, mere prattle, arithmetic, whereas Iago himself had often fought by Othello's side, and by 'old gradation' [212]too ought to have been preferred. Most or all of this is repeated by some critics as though it were information given by Shakespeare, and the conclusion is quite naturally drawn that Iago had some reason to feel aggrieved. But if we ask ourselves how much of all this is true we shall answer, I believe, as follows. It is absolutely certain that Othello appointed Cassio his lieutenant, and *nothing* else is absolutely certain. But there is no reason to doubt the statement that Iago had seen service with him, nor is there anything inherently improbable in the statement that he was solicited by three great personages on Iago's behalf. On the other hand, the suggestions that he refused out of pride and obstinacy, and that he lied in saying he had already chosen his officer, have no verisimilitude; and if there is any fact at all (as there probably is) behind Iago's account of the conversation, it doubtless is the fact that Iago himself was ignorant of military science, while Cassio was an expert, and that Othello explained this to the great personages. That Cassio, again, was an interloper and a mere closet-student without experience of war is incredible, considering first that Othello chose him for lieutenant, and secondly that the senate appointed him to succeed Othello in command at Cyprus; and we have direct evidence that part of Iago's statement is a lie, for Desdemona happens to mention that Cassio was a man who 'all his time had founded his good fortunes' on Othello's love and had 'shared dangers' with him (iii. iv. 93). There remains only the implied assertion that, if promotion had gone by old gradation, Iago, as the senior, would have been preferred. It may be true: Othello was not the man to hesitate to promote a junior for good reasons. But it is just as likely to be a pure invention; and, though Cassio was young, there is nothing to show that he was younger, in years [213]or in service, than Iago. Iago, for instance, never calls him 'young,' as he does Roderigo; and a mere youth would not have been made Governor of Cyprus. What is certain, finally, in the whole business is that Othello's mind was perfectly at ease about the appointment, and that he never dreamed of Iago's being discontented at it, not even when the intrigue was disclosed and he asked himself how he had offended Iago.

**2**

It is necessary to examine in this manner every statement made by Iago. But it is not necessary to do so in public, and I proceed to the question what impression he made on his friends and acquaintances. In the main there is here no room for doubt. Nothing could be less like Iago than the melodramatic villain so often substituted for him on the stage, a person whom everyone in the theatre knows for a scoundrel at the first glance. Iago, we gather, was a Venetian[[108]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_108) soldier, eight-and-twenty years of age, who had seen a good deal of service and had a high reputation for courage. Of his origin we are ignorant, but, unless I am mistaken, he was not of gentle birth or breeding.[[109]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_109) He does not strike one as a degraded [214]man of culture: for all his great powers, he is vulgar, and his probable want of military science may well be significant. He was married to a wife who evidently lacked refinement, and who appears in the drama almost in the relation of a servant to Desdemona. His manner was that of a blunt, bluff soldier, who spoke his mind freely and plainly. He was often hearty, and could be thoroughly jovial; but he was not seldom rather rough and caustic of speech, and he was given to making remarks somewhat disparaging to human nature. He was aware of this trait in himself, and frankly admitted that he was nothing if not critical, and that it was his nature to spy into abuses. In these admissions he characteristically exaggerated his fault, as plain-dealers are apt to do; and he was liked none the less for it, seeing that his satire was humorous, that on serious matters he did not speak lightly (iii. iii. 119), and that the one thing perfectly obvious about him was his honesty. 'Honest' is the word that springs to the lips of everyone who speaks of him. It is applied to him some fifteen times in the play, not to mention some half-dozen where he employs it, in derision, of himself. In fact he was one of those sterling men who, in disgust at gush, say cynical things which they do not believe, and then, the moment you are in trouble, put in practice the very sentiment they had laughed at. On such occasions he showed the kindliest sympathy and the most eager desire to help. When Cassio misbehaved so dreadfully and was found fighting with Montano, did not Othello see that 'honest Iago looked dead with grieving'? With what difficulty was he induced, nay, compelled, to speak the truth against the lieutenant! Another man might have felt a touch of satisfaction at the thought that the post he had coveted was now vacant; but Iago not only comforted Cassio, talking [215]to him cynically about reputation, just to help him over his shame, but he set his wits to work and at once perceived that the right plan for Cassio to get his post again was to ask Desdemona to intercede. So troubled was he at his friend's disgrace that his own wife was sure 'it grieved her husband as if the case was his.' What wonder that anyone in sore trouble, like Desdemona, should send at once for Iago (iv. ii. 106)? If this rough diamond had any flaw, it was that Iago's warm loyal heart incited him to too impulsive action. If he merely heard a friend like Othello calumniated, his hand flew to his sword; and though he restrained himself he almost regretted his own virtue (i. ii. 1-10).

Such seemed Iago to the people about him, even to those who, like Othello, had known him for some time. And it is a fact too little noticed but most remarkable, that he presented an appearance not very different to his wife. There is no sign either that Emilia's marriage was downright unhappy, or that she suspected the true nature of her husband.[[110]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_110) No doubt she knew rather more of him than others. Thus we gather that he was given to chiding and sometimes spoke shortly and sharply to her (iii. iii. 300 f.); and it is quite likely that she gave him a good deal of her tongue in exchange (ii. i. 101 f.). He was also unreasonably jealous; for his own statement that he was jealous of Othello is confirmed by Emilia herself, and must therefore be believed (iv. ii. 145).[[111]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_111) But it seems clear that these defects of his had not seriously impaired Emilia's confidence in her husband or her affection for him. She knew in [216]addition that he was not quite so honest as he seemed, for he had often begged her to steal Desdemona's handkerchief. But Emilia's nature was not very delicate or scrupulous about trifles. She thought her husband odd and 'wayward,' and looked on his fancy for the handkerchief as an instance of this (iii. iii. 292); but she never dreamed he was a villain, and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of her belief that he was heartily sorry for Cassio's disgrace. Her failure, on seeing Othello's agitation about the handkerchief, to form any suspicion of an intrigue, shows how little she doubted her husband. Even when, later, the idea strikes her that some scoundrel has poisoned Othello's mind, the tone of all her speeches, and her mention of the rogue who (she believes) had stirred up Iago's jealousy of her, prove beyond doubt that the thought of Iago's being the scoundrel has not crossed her mind (iv. ii. 115-147). And if any hesitation on the subject could remain, surely it must be dispelled by the thrice-repeated cry of astonishment and horror, 'My husband!', which follows Othello's words, 'Thy husband knew it all'; and by the choking indignation and desperate hope which we hear in her appeal when Iago comes in:

Disprove this villain if thou be'st a man:He says thou told'st him that his wife was false:I know thou did'st not, thou'rt not such a villain:Speak, for my heart is full.

Even if Iago *had* betrayed much more of his true self to his wife than to others, it would make no difference to the contrast between his true self and the self he presented to the world in general. But he never did so. Only the feeble eyes of the poor gull Roderigo were allowed a glimpse into that pit.

The bearing of this contrast upon the apparently excessive credulity of Othello has been already [217]pointed out. What further conclusions can be drawn from it? Obviously, to begin with, the inference, which is accompanied by a thrill of admiration, that Iago's powers of dissimulation and of self-control must have been prodigious: for he was not a youth, like Edmund, but had worn this mask for years, and he had apparently never enjoyed, like Richard, occasional explosions of the reality within him. In fact so prodigious does his self-control appear that a reader might be excused for feeling a doubt of its possibility. But there are certain observations and further inferences which, apart from confidence in Shakespeare, would remove this doubt. It is to be observed, first, that Iago was able to find a certain relief from the discomfort of hypocrisy in those caustic or cynical speeches which, being misinterpreted, only heightened confidence in his honesty. They acted as a safety-valve, very much as Hamlet's pretended insanity did. Next, I would infer from the entire success of his hypocrisy—what may also be inferred on other grounds, and is of great importance—that he was by no means a man of strong feelings and passions, like Richard, but decidedly cold by temperament. Even so, his self-control was wonderful, but there never was in him any violent storm to be controlled. Thirdly, I would suggest that Iago, though thoroughly selfish and unfeeling, was not by nature malignant, nor even morose, but that, on the contrary, he had a superficial good-nature, the kind of good-nature that wins popularity and is often taken as the sign, not of a good digestion, but of a good heart. And lastly, it may be inferred that, before the giant crime which we witness, Iago had never been detected in any serious offence and may even never have been guilty of one, but had pursued a selfish but outwardly decent life, enjoying the excitement of war and of casual pleasures, but never yet meeting with any sufficient [218]temptation to risk his position and advancement by a dangerous crime. So that, in fact, the tragedy of *Othello* is in a sense his tragedy too. It shows us not a violent man, like Richard, who spends his life in murder, but a thoroughly bad, *cold*man, who is at last tempted to let loose the forces within him, and is at once destroyed.

**3**

In order to see how this tragedy arises let us now look more closely into Iago's inner man. We find here, in the first place, as has been implied in part, very remarkable powers both of intellect and of will. Iago's insight, within certain limits, into human nature; his ingenuity and address in working upon it; his quickness and versatility in dealing with sudden difficulties and unforeseen opportunities, have probably no parallel among dramatic characters. Equally remarkable is his strength of will. Not Socrates himself, not the ideal sage of the Stoics, was more lord of himself than Iago appears to be. It is not merely that he never betrays his true nature; he seems to be master of *all* the motions that might affect his will. In the most dangerous moments of his plot, when the least slip or accident would be fatal, he never shows a trace of nervousness. When Othello takes him by the throat he merely shifts his part with his usual instantaneous adroitness. When he is attacked and wounded at the end he is perfectly unmoved. As Mr. Swinburne says, you cannot believe for a moment that the pain of torture will ever open Iago's lips. He is equally unassailable by the temptations of indolence or of sensuality. It is difficult to imagine him inactive; and though he has an obscene mind, and doubtless took his pleasures when and how he chose, he certainly took them by choice and not from weakness, [219]and if pleasure interfered with his purposes the holiest of ascetics would not put it more resolutely by. 'What should I do?' Roderigo whimpers to him; 'I confess it is my shame to be so fond; but it is not in my virtue to amend it.' He answers: 'Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus and thus. It all depends on our will. Love is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will. Come, be a man.... Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon.' Forget for a moment that love is for Iago the appetite of a baboon; forget that he is as little assailable by pity as by fear or pleasure; and you will acknowledge that this lordship of the will, which is his practice as well as his doctrine, is great, almost sublime. Indeed, in intellect (always within certain limits) and in will (considered as a mere power, and without regard to its objects) Iago *is* great.

To what end does he use these great powers? His creed—for he is no sceptic, he has a definite creed—is that absolute egoism is the only rational and proper attitude, and that conscience or honour or any kind of regard for others is an absurdity. He does not deny that this absurdity exists. He does not suppose that most people secretly share his creed, while pretending to hold and practise another. On the contrary, he regards most people as honest fools. He declares that he has never yet met a man who knew how to love himself; and his one expression of admiration in the play is for servants

Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves.

'These fellows,' he says, 'have some soul.' He professes to stand, and he, attempts to stand, wholly outside the world of morality.

[220]The existence of Iago's creed and of his corresponding practice is evidently connected with a characteristic in which he surpasses nearly all the other inhabitants of Shakespeare's world. Whatever he may once have been, he appears, when we meet him, to be almost destitute of humanity, of sympathetic or social feeling. He shows no trace of affection, and in presence of the most terrible suffering he shows either pleasure or an indifference which, if not complete, is nearly so. Here, however, we must be careful. It is important to realise, and few readers are in danger of ignoring, this extraordinary deadness of feeling, but it is also important not to confuse it with a general positive ill-will. When Iago has no dislike or hostility to a person he does *not*show pleasure in the suffering of that person: he shows at most the absence of pain. There is, for instance, not the least sign of his enjoying the distress of Desdemona. But his sympathetic feelings are so abnormally feeble and cold that, when his dislike is roused, or when an indifferent person comes in the way of his purpose, there is scarcely anything within him to prevent his applying the torture.

What is it that provokes his dislike or hostility? Here again we must look closely. Iago has been represented as an incarnation of envy, as a man who, being determined to get on in the world, regards everyone else with enmity as his rival. But this idea, though containing truth, seems much exaggerated. Certainly he is devoted to himself; but if he were an eagerly ambitious man, surely we should see much more positive signs of this ambition; and surely too, with his great powers, he would already have risen high, instead of being a mere ensign, short of money, and playing Captain Rook to Roderigo's Mr. Pigeon. Taking all the facts, one must conclude that his desires were comparatively moderate and his ambition weak; [221]that he probably enjoyed war keenly, but, if he had money enough, did not exert himself greatly to acquire reputation or position; and, therefore, that he was not habitually burning with envy and actively hostile to other men as possible competitors.

But what is clear is that Iago is keenly sensitive to anything that touches his pride or self-esteem. It would be most unjust to call him vain, but he has a high opinion of himself and a great contempt for others. He is quite aware of his superiority to them in certain respects; and he either disbelieves in or despises the qualities in which they are superior to him. Whatever disturbs or wounds his sense of superiority irritates him at once; and in *that* sense he is highly competitive. This is why the appointment of Cassio provokes him. This is why Cassio's scientific attainments provoke him. This is the reason of his jealousy of Emilia. He does not care for his wife; but the fear of another man's getting the better of him, and exposing him to pity or derision as an unfortunate husband, is wormwood to him; and as he is sure that no woman is virtuous at heart, this fear is ever with him. For much the same reason he has a spite against goodness in men (for it is characteristic that he is less blind to its existence in men, the stronger, than in women, the weaker). He has a spite against it, not from any love of evil for evil's sake, but partly because it annoys his intellect as a stupidity; partly (though he hardly knows this) because it weakens his satisfaction with himself, and disturbs his faith that egoism is the right and proper thing; partly because, the world being such a fool, goodness is popular and prospers. But he, a man ten times as able as Cassio or even Othello, does not greatly prosper. Somehow, for all the stupidity of these open and generous people, they get on better than the 'fellow of some soul' And this, though he [222]is not particularly eager to get on, wounds his pride. Goodness therefore annoys him. He is always ready to scoff at it, and would like to strike at it. In ordinary circumstances these feelings of irritation are not vivid in Iago—*no* feeling is so—but they are constantly present.

**4**

Our task of analysis is not finished; but we are now in a position to consider the rise of Iago's tragedy. Why did he act as we see him acting in the play? What is the answer to that appeal of Othello's:

Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devilWhy he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?

This question Why? is *the* question about Iago, just as the question Why did Hamlet delay? is *the* question about Hamlet. Iago refused to answer it; but I will venture to say that he *could* not have answered it, any more than Hamlet could tell why he delayed. But Shakespeare knew the answer, and if these characters are great creations and not blunders we ought to be able to find it too.

Is it possible to elicit it from Iago himself against his will? He makes various statements to Roderigo, and he has several soliloquies. From these sources, and especially from the latter, we should learn something. For with Shakespeare soliloquy generally gives information regarding the secret springs as well as the outward course of the plot; and, moreover, it is a curious point of technique with him that the soliloquies of his villains sometimes read almost like explanations offered to the audience.[[112]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_112) Now, Iago repeatedly offers explanations either to [223]Roderigo or to himself. In the first place, he says more than once that he 'hates' Othello. He gives two reasons for his hatred. Othello has made Cassio lieutenant; and he suspects, and has heard it reported, that Othello has an intrigue with Emilia. Next there is Cassio. He never says he hates Cassio, but he finds in him three causes of offence: Cassio has been preferred to him; he suspects *him*too of an intrigue with Emilia; and, lastly, Cassio has a daily beauty in his life which makes Iago ugly. In addition to these annoyances he wants Cassio's place. As for Roderigo, he calls him a snipe, and who can hate a snipe? But Roderigo knows too much; and he is becoming a nuisance, getting angry, and asking for the gold and jewels he handed to Iago to give to Desdemona. So Iago kills Roderigo. Then for Desdemona: a fig's-end for her virtue! but he has no ill-will to her. In fact he 'loves' her, though he is good enough to explain, varying the word, that his 'lust' is mixed with a desire to pay Othello in his own coin. To be sure she must die, and so must Emilia, and so would Bianca if only the authorities saw things in their true light; but he did not set out with any hostile design against these persons.

Is the account which Iago gives of the causes of his action the true account? The answer of the most popular view will be, 'Yes. Iago was, as he says, chiefly incited by two things, the desire of advancement, and a hatred of Othello due principally to the affair of the lieutenancy. These are perfectly intelligible causes; we have only to add to them unusual ability and cruelty, and all is explained. Why should Coleridge and Hazlitt and Swinburne go further afield?' To which last question I will at once oppose these: If your view is correct, why should Iago be considered an extraordinary creation; and is it not odd that the people [224]who reject it are the people who elsewhere show an exceptional understanding of Shakespeare?

The difficulty about this popular view is, in the first place, that it attributes to Iago what cannot be found in the Iago of the play. Its Iago is impelled by *passions*, a passion of ambition and a passion of hatred; for no ambition or hatred short of passion could drive a man who is evidently so clear-sighted, and who must hitherto have been so prudent, into a plot so extremely hazardous. Why, then, in the Iago of the play do we find no sign of these passions or of anything approaching to them? Why, if Shakespeare meant that Iago was impelled by them, does he suppress the signs of them? Surely not from want of ability to display them. The poet who painted Macbeth and Shylock understood his business. Who ever doubted Macbeth's ambition or Shylock's hate? And what resemblance is there between these passions and any feeling that we can trace in Iago? The resemblance between a volcano in eruption and a flameless fire of coke; the resemblance between a consuming desire to hack and hew your enemy's flesh, and the resentful wish, only too familiar in common life, to inflict pain in return for a slight. Passion, in Shakespeare's plays, is perfectly easy to recognise. What vestige of it, of passion unsatisfied or of passion gratified, is visible in Iago? None: that is the very horror of him. He has *less* passion than an ordinary man, and yet he does these frightful things. The only ground for attributing to him, I do not say a passionate hatred, but anything deserving the name of hatred at all, is his own statement, 'I hate Othello'; and we know what his statements are worth.

But the popular view, beside attributing to Iago what he does not show, ignores what he does show. It selects from his own account of his motives one or two, and drops the rest; and so it[225]makes everything natural. But it fails to perceive how unnatural, how strange and suspicious, his own account is. Certainly he assigns motives enough; the difficulty is that he assigns so many. A man moved by simple passions due to simple causes does not stand fingering his feelings, industriously enumerating their sources, and groping about for new ones. But this is what Iago does. And this is not all. These motives appear and disappear in the most extraordinary manner. Resentment at Cassio's appointment is expressed in the first conversation with Roderigo, and from that moment is never once mentioned again in the whole play. Hatred of Othello is expressed in the First Act alone. Desire to get Cassio's place scarcely appears after the first soliloquy, and when it is gratified Iago does not refer to it by a single word. The suspicion of Cassio's intrigue with Emilia emerges suddenly, as an after-thought, not in the first soliloquy but the second, and then disappears for ever.[[113]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_113) Iago's 'love' of Desdemona is alluded to in the second soliloquy; there is not the faintest trace of it in word or deed either before or after. The mention of jealousy of Othello is followed by declarations that Othello is infatuated about Desdemona and is of a constant nature, and during Othello's sufferings Iago never shows a sign of the idea that he is now paying his rival in his own coin. In the second soliloquy he declares that he quite believes Cassio to be in love with Desdemona; it is obvious that he believes no such thing, for he never alludes to the idea again, and within a few hours describes Cassio in soliloquy as an honest fool. His final reason for ill-will to Cassio never appears till the Fifth Act.

What is the meaning of all this? Unless Shakespeare was out of his mind, it must have a [226]meaning. And certainly this meaning is not contained in any of the popular accounts of Iago.

Is it contained then in Coleridge's word 'motive-hunting'? Yes, 'motive-hunting' exactly answers to the impression that Iago's soliloquies produce. He is pondering his design, and unconsciously trying to justify it to himself. He speaks of one or two real feelings, such as resentment against Othello, and he mentions one or two real causes of these feelings. But these are not enough for him. Along with them, or alone, there come into his head, only to leave it again, ideas and suspicions, the creations of his own baseness or uneasiness, some old, some new, caressed for a moment to feed his purpose and give it a reasonable look, but never really believed in, and never the main forces which are determining his action. In fact, I would venture to describe Iago in these soliloquies as a man setting out on a project which strongly attracts his desire, but at the same time conscious of a resistance to the desire, and unconsciously trying to argue the resistance away by assigning reasons for the project. He is the counterpart of Hamlet, who tries to find reasons for his delay in pursuing a design which excites his aversion. And most of Iago's reasons for action are no more the real ones than Hamlet's reasons for delay were the real ones. Each is moved by forces which he does not understand; and it is probably no accident that these two studies of states psychologically so similar were produced at about the same period.

What then were the real moving forces of Iago's action? Are we to fall back on the idea of a 'motiveless malignity;'[[114]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_114) that is to say, a disinterested love of evil, or a delight in the pain of others as simple and direct as the delight in one's [227]own pleasure? Surely not. I will not insist that this thing or these things are inconceivable, mere phrases, not ideas; for, even so, it would remain possible that Shakespeare had tried to represent an inconceivability. But there is not the slightest reason to suppose that he did so. Iago's action is intelligible; and indeed the popular view contains enough truth to refute this desperate theory. It greatly exaggerates his desire for advancement, and the ill-will caused by his disappointment, and it ignores other forces more important than these; but it is right in insisting on the presence of this desire and this ill-will, and their presence is enough to destroy Iago's claims to be more than a demi-devil. For love of the evil that advances my interest and hurts a person I dislike, is a very different thing from love of evil simply as evil; and pleasure in the pain of a person disliked or regarded as a competitor is quite distinct from pleasure in the pain of others simply as others. The first is intelligible, and we find it in Iago. The second, even if it were intelligible, we do not find in Iago.

Still, desire of advancement and resentment about the lieutenancy, though factors and indispensable factors in the cause of Iago's action, are neither the principal nor the most characteristic factors. To find these, let us return to our half-completed analysis of the character. Let us remember especially the keen sense of superiority, the contempt of others, the sensitiveness to everything which wounds these feelings, the spite against goodness in men as a thing not only stupid but, both in its nature and by its success, contrary to Iago's nature and irritating to his pride. Let us remember in addition the annoyance of having always to play a part, the consciousness of exceptional but unused ingenuity and address, the enjoyment of action, and the absence of [228]fear. And let us ask what would be the greatest pleasure of such a man, and what the situation which might tempt him to abandon his habitual prudence and pursue this pleasure. Hazlitt and Mr. Swinburne do not put this question, but the answer I proceed to give to it is in principle theirs.[[115]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_115)

The most delightful thing to such a man would be something that gave an extreme satisfaction to his sense of power and superiority; and if it involved, secondly, the triumphant exertion of his abilities, and, thirdly, the excitement of danger, his delight would be consummated. And the moment most dangerous to such a man would be one when his sense of superiority had met with an affront, so that its habitual craving was reinforced by resentment, while at the same time he saw an opportunity of satisfying it by subjecting to his will the very persons who had affronted it. Now, this is the temptation that comes to Iago. Othello's eminence, Othello's goodness, and his own dependence on Othello, must have been a perpetual annoyance to him. At *any* time he would have enjoyed befooling and tormenting Othello. Under ordinary circumstances he was restrained, chiefly by self-interest, in some slight degree perhaps by the faint pulsations of conscience or humanity. But disappointment at the loss of the lieutenancy supplied the touch of lively resentment that was required to overcome these obstacles; and the prospect of satisfying the sense of power by mastering Othello [229]through an intricate and hazardous intrigue now became irresistible. Iago did not clearly understand what was moving his desire; though he tried to give himself reasons for his action, even those that had some reality made but a small part of the motive force; one may almost say they were no more than the turning of the handle which admits the driving power into the machine. Only once does he appear to see something of the truth. It is when he uses the phrase '*to plume up my will* in double knavery.'

To 'plume up the will,' to heighten the sense of power or superiority—this seems to be the unconscious motive of many acts of cruelty which evidently do not spring chiefly from ill-will, and which therefore puzzle and sometimes horrify us most. It is often this that makes a man bully the wife or children of whom he is fond. The boy who torments another boy, as we say, 'for no reason,' or who without any hatred for frogs tortures a frog, is pleased with his victim's pain, not from any disinterested love of evil or pleasure in pain, but mainly because this pain is the unmistakable proof of his own power over his victim. So it is with Iago. His thwarted sense of superiority wants satisfaction. What fuller satisfaction could it find than the consciousness that he is the master of the General who has undervalued him and of the rival who has been preferred to him; that these worthy people, who are so successful and popular and stupid, are mere puppets in his hands, but living puppets, who at the motion of his finger must contort themselves in agony, while all the time they believe that he is their one true friend and comforter? It must have been an ecstasy of bliss to him. And this, granted a most abnormal deadness of human feeling, is, however horrible, perfectly intelligible. There is no mystery in the psychology of Iago;[230]the mystery lies in a further question, which the drama has not to answer, the question why such a being should exist.

Iago's longing to satisfy the sense of power is, I think, the strongest of the forces that drive him on. But there are two others to be noticed. One is the pleasure in an action very difficult and perilous and, therefore, intensely exciting. This action sets all his powers on the strain. He feels the delight of one who executes successfully a feat thoroughly congenial to his special aptitude, and only just within his compass; and, as he is fearless by nature, the fact that a single slip will cost him his life only increases his pleasure. His exhilaration breaks out in the ghastly words with which he greets the sunrise after the night of the drunken tumult which has led to Cassio's disgrace: 'By the mass, 'tis morning. Pleasure and action make the hours seem short.' Here, however, the joy in exciting action is quickened by other feelings. It appears more simply elsewhere in such a way as to suggest that nothing but such actions gave him happiness, and that his happiness was greater if the action was destructive as well as exciting. We find it, for instance, in his gleeful cry to Roderigo, who proposes to shout to Brabantio in order to wake him and tell him of his daughter's flight:

Do, with like timorous[[116]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_116) accent and dire yellAs when, by night and negligence, the fireIs spied in populous cities.

All through that scene; again, in the scene where Cassio is attacked and Roderigo murdered; everywhere where Iago is in physical action, we catch this sound of almost feverish enjoyment. His blood, usually so cold and slow, is racing through his veins.

But Iago, finally, is not simply a man of action; he is an artist. His action is a plot, the intricate plot of a drama, and in the conception and [231]execution of it he experiences the tension and the joy of artistic creation. 'He is,' says Hazlitt, 'an amateur of tragedy in real life; and, instead of employing his invention on imaginary characters or long-forgotten incidents, he takes the bolder and more dangerous course of getting up his plot at home, casts the principal parts among his newest friends and connections, and rehearses it in downright earnest, with steady nerves and unabated resolution.' Mr. Swinburne lays even greater stress on this aspect of Iago's character, and even declares that 'the very subtlest and strongest component of his complex nature' is 'the instinct of what Mr. Carlyle would call an inarticulate poet.' And those to whom this idea is unfamiliar, and who may suspect it at first sight of being fanciful, will find, if they examine the play in the light of Mr. Swinburne's exposition, that it rests on a true and deep perception, will stand scrutiny, and might easily be illustrated. They may observe, to take only one point, the curious analogy between the early stages of dramatic composition and those soliloquies in which Iago broods over his plot, drawing at first only an outline, puzzled how to fix more than the main idea, and gradually seeing it develop and clarify as he works upon it or lets it work. Here at any rate Shakespeare put a good deal of himself into Iago. But the tragedian in real life was not the equal of the tragic poet. His psychology, as we shall see, was at fault at a critical point, as Shakespeare's never was. And so his catastrophe came out wrong, and his piece was ruined.

Such, then, seem to be the chief ingredients of the force which, liberated by his resentment at Cassio's promotion, drives Iago from inactivity into action, and sustains him through it. And, to pass to a new point, this force completely possesses him; it is his fate. It is like the passion with which [232]a tragic hero wholly identifies himself, and which bears him on to his doom. It is true that, once embarked on his course, Iago *could* not turn back, even if this passion did abate; and it is also true that he is compelled, by his success in convincing Othello, to advance to conclusions of which at the outset he did not dream. He is thus caught in his own web, and could not liberate himself if he would. But, in fact, he never shows a trace of wishing to do so, not a trace of hesitation, of looking back, or of fear, any more than of remorse; there is no ebb in the tide. As the crisis approaches there passes through his mind a fleeting doubt whether the deaths of Cassio and Roderigo are indispensable; but that uncertainty, which does not concern the main issue, is dismissed, and he goes forward with undiminished zest. Not even in his sleep—as in Richard's before his final battle—does any rebellion of outraged conscience or pity, or any foreboding of despair, force itself into clear consciousness. His fate—which is himself—has completely mastered him: so that, in the later scenes, where the improbability of the entire success of a design built on so many different falsehoods forces itself on the reader, Iago appears for moments not as a consummate schemer, but as a man absolutely infatuated and delivered over to certain destruction.

**5**

Iago stands supreme among Shakespeare's evil characters because the greatest intensity and subtlety of imagination have gone to his making, and because he illustrates in the most perfect combination the two facts concerning evil which seem to have impressed Shakespeare most. The first of these is the fact that perfectly sane people exist in whom fellow-feeling of any kind is so weak that an almost absolute egoism becomes possible to them, and with [233]it those hard vices—such as ingratitude and cruelty—which to Shakespeare were far the worst. The second is that such evil is compatible, and even appears to ally itself easily, with exceptional powers of will and intellect. In the latter respect Iago is nearly or quite the equal of Richard, in egoism he is the superior, and his inferiority in passion and massive force only makes him more repulsive. How is it then that we can bear to contemplate him; nay, that, if we really imagine him, we feel admiration and some kind of sympathy? Henry the Fifth tells us:

There is some soul of goodness in things evil,Would men observingly distil it out;

but here, it may be said, we are shown a thing absolutely evil, and—what is more dreadful still—this absolute evil is united with supreme intellectual power. Why is the representation tolerable, and why do we not accuse its author either of untruth or of a desperate pessimism?

To these questions it might at once be replied: Iago does not stand alone; he is a factor in a whole; and we perceive him there and not in isolation, acted upon as well as acting, destroyed as well as destroying.[[117]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_117) But, although this is true and important, I pass it by and, continuing to regard him by himself, I would make three remarks in answer to the questions.

In the first place, Iago is not merely negative or evil—far from it. Those very forces that moved him and made his fate—sense of power, delight in performing a difficult and dangerous action, delight in the exercise of artistic skill—are not at all evil things. We sympathise with one or other of them almost every day of our lives. And, accordingly, though in Iago they are combined with something detestable and so contribute to evil, our perception [234]of them is accompanied with sympathy. In the same way, Iago's insight, dexterity, quickness, address, and the like, are in themselves admirable things; the perfect man would possess them. And certainly he would possess also Iago's courage and self-control, and, like Iago, would stand above the impulses of mere feeling, lord of his inner world. All this goes to evil ends in Iago, but in itself it has a great worth; and, although in reading, of course, we do not sift it out and regard it separately, it inevitably affects us and mingles admiration with our hatred or horror.

All this, however, might apparently co-exist with absolute egoism and total want of humanity. But, in the second place, it is not true that in Iago this egoism and this want are absolute, and that in this sense he is a thing of mere evil. They are frightful, but if they were absolute Iago would be a monster, not a man. The fact is, he *tries* to make them absolute and cannot succeed; and the traces of conscience, shame and humanity, though faint, are discernible. If his egoism were absolute he would be perfectly indifferent to the opinion of others; and he clearly is not so. His very irritation at goodness, again, is a sign that his faith in his creed is not entirely firm; and it is not entirely firm because he himself has a perception, however dim, of the goodness of goodness. What is the meaning of the last reason he gives himself for killing Cassio:

He hath a daily beauty in his lifeThat makes me ugly?

Does he mean that he is ugly to others? Then he is not an absolute egoist. Does he mean that he is ugly to himself? Then he makes an open confession of moral sense. And, once more, if he really possessed no moral sense, we should never have heard those soliloquies which so clearly betray [235]his uneasiness and his unconscious desire to persuade himself that he has some excuse for the villainy he contemplates. These seem to be indubitable proofs that, against his will, Iago is a little better than his creed, and has failed to withdraw himself wholly from the human atmosphere about him. And to these proofs I would add, though with less confidence, two others. Iago's momentary doubt towards the end whether Roderigo and Cassio must be killed has always surprised me. As a mere matter of calculation it is perfectly obvious that they must; and I believe his hesitation is not merely intellectual, it is another symptom of the obscure working of conscience or humanity. Lastly, is it not significant that, when once his plot has begun to develop, Iago never seeks the presence of Desdemona; that he seems to leave her as quickly as he can (iii. iv. 138); and that, when he is fetched by Emilia to see her in her distress (iv. ii. 110 ff.), we fail to catch in his words any sign of the pleasure he shows in Othello's misery, and seem rather to perceive a certain discomfort, and, if one dare say it, a faint touch of shame or remorse? This interpretation of the passage, I admit, is not inevitable, but to my mind (quite apart from any theorising about Iago) it seems the natural one.[[118]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_118) And if it is right, Iago's discomfort is easily understood; for Desdemona is the one person concerned against whom it is impossible for him even to imagine a ground of resentment, and so an excuse for cruelty.[[119]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_119)

[236]There remains, thirdly, the idea that Iago is a man of supreme intellect who is at the same time supremely wicked. That he is supremely wicked nobody will doubt; and I have claimed for him nothing that will interfere with his right to that title. But to say that his intellectual power is supreme is to make a great mistake. Within certain limits he has indeed extraordinary penetration, quickness, inventiveness, adaptiveness; but the limits are defined with the hardest of lines, and they are narrow limits. It would scarcely be unjust to call him simply astonishingly clever, or simply a consummate master of intrigue. But compare him with one who may perhaps be roughly called a bad man of supreme intellectual power, Napoleon, and you see how small and negative Iago's mind is, incapable of Napoleon's military achievements, and much more incapable of his political constructions. Or, to keep within the Shakespearean world, compare him with Hamlet, and you perceive how miserably close is his intellectual horizon; that such a thing as a thought beyond the reaches of his soul has never come near him; that he is prosaic through and through, deaf and blind to all but a tiny fragment of the meaning of things. Is it not quite absurd, then, to call him a man of supreme intellect?

And observe, lastly, that his failure in perception is closely connected with his badness. He was destroyed by the power that he attacked, the power of love; and he was destroyed by it because he could not understand it; and he could not understand it because it was not in him. Iago never meant his plot to be so dangerous to himself. He knew that jealousy is painful, but the jealousy of a love like Othello's he could not imagine, and he found himself involved in murders which were no part of his original design. That difficulty he surmounted, and his changed plot still seemed to [237]prosper. Roderigo and Cassio and Desdemona once dead, all will be well. Nay, when he fails to kill Cassio, all may still be well. He will avow that he told Othello of the adultery, and persist that he told the truth, and Cassio will deny it in vain. And then, in a moment, his plot is shattered by a blow from a quarter where he never dreamt of danger. He knows his wife, he thinks. She is not over-scrupulous, she will do anything to please him, and she has learnt obedience. But one thing in her he does not know—that she *loves* her mistress and would face a hundred deaths sooner than see her fair fame darkened. There is genuine astonishment in his outburst 'What! Are you mad?' as it dawns upon him that she means to speak the truth about the handkerchief. But he might well have applied to himself the words she flings at Othello,

O gull! O dolt!As ignorant as dirt!

The foulness of his own soul made him so ignorant that he built into the marvellous structure of his plot a piece of crass stupidity.

To the thinking mind the divorce of unusual intellect from goodness is a thing to startle; and Shakespeare clearly felt it so. The combination of unusual intellect with extreme evil is more than startling, it is frightful. It is rare, but it exists; and Shakespeare represented it in Iago. But the alliance of evil like Iago's with *supreme* intellect is an impossible fiction; and Shakespeare's fictions were truth.

**6**

The characters of Cassio and Emilia hardly require analysis, and I will touch on them only from a single point of view. In their combination of excellences and defects they are good [238]examples of that truth to nature which in dramatic art is the one unfailing source of moral instruction.

Cassio is a handsome, light-hearted, good-natured young fellow, who takes life gaily, and is evidently very attractive and popular. Othello, who calls him by his Christian name, is fond of him; Desdemona likes him much; Emilia at once interests herself on his behalf. He has warm generous feelings, an enthusiastic admiration for the General, and a chivalrous adoration for his peerless wife. But he is too easy-going. He finds it hard to say No; and accordingly, although he is aware that he has a very weak head, and that the occasion is one on which he is bound to run no risk, he gets drunk—not disgustingly so, but ludicrously so.[[120]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_120) And, besides, he amuses himself without any scruple by frequenting the company of a woman of more than doubtful reputation, who has fallen in love with his good looks. Moralising critics point out that he pays for the first offence by losing his post, and for the second by nearly losing his life. They are quite entitled to do so, though the careful reader will not forget Iago's part in these transactions. But they ought also to point out that Cassio's looseness does not in the least disturb our confidence in him in his relations with Desdemona and Othello. He is loose, and we are sorry for it; but we never doubt that there was 'a daily beauty in his life,' or that his rapturous admiration of Desdemona was as wholly beautiful a thing as it appears, or that Othello was perfectly safe when in his courtship he employed Cassio to 'go between' Desdemona and himself. It is fortunately a fact in human nature that these aspects of Cassio's character are quite compatible. Shakespeare simply sets it down; and it is just because [239]he is truthful in these smaller things that in greater things we trust him absolutely never to pervert the truth for the sake of some doctrine or purpose of his own.

There is something very lovable about Cassio, with his fresh eager feelings; his distress at his disgrace and still more at having lost Othello's trust; his hero-worship; and at the end his sorrow and pity, which are at first too acute for words. He is carried in, wounded, on a chair. He looks at Othello and cannot speak. His first words come later when, to Lodovico's question, 'Did you and he consent in Cassio's death?' Othello answers 'Ay.' Then he falters out, 'Dear General, I never gave you cause.' One is sure he had never used that adjective before. The love in it makes it beautiful, but there is something else in it, unknown to Cassio, which goes to one's heart. It tells us that his hero is no longer unapproachably above him.

Few of Shakespeare's minor characters are more distinct than Emilia, and towards few do our feelings change so much within the course of a play. Till close to the end she frequently sets one's teeth on edge; and at the end one is ready to worship her. She nowhere shows any sign of having a bad heart; but she is common, sometimes vulgar, in minor matters far from scrupulous, blunt in perception and feeling, and quite destitute of imagination. She let Iago take the handkerchief though she knew how much its loss would distress Desdemona; and she said nothing about it though she saw that Othello was jealous. We rightly resent her unkindness in permitting the theft, but—it is an important point—we are apt to misconstrue her subsequent silence, because we know that Othello's jealousy was intimately connected with the loss of the handkerchief. Emilia, however, certainly failed to perceive this; for otherwise, when Othello's anger showed itself violently and she was really [240]distressed for her mistress, she could not have failed to think of the handkerchief, and would, I believe, undoubtedly have told the truth about it. But, in fact, she never thought of it, although she guessed that Othello was being deceived by some scoundrel. Even after Desdemona's death, nay, even when she knew that Iago had brought it about, she still did not remember the handkerchief; and when Othello at last mentions, as a proof of his wife's guilt, that he had seen the handkerchief in Cassio's hand, the truth falls on Emilia like a thunder-bolt. 'O God!' she bursts out, 'O heavenly God!'[[121]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_121) Her stupidity in this matter is gross, but it is stupidity and nothing worse.

But along with it goes a certain coarseness of nature. The contrast between Emilia and Desdemona in their conversation about the infidelity of wives (iv. iii.) is too famous to need a word,—unless it be a word of warning against critics who take her light talk too seriously. But the contrast in the preceding scene is hardly less remarkable. Othello, affecting to treat Emilia as the keeper of a brothel, sends her away, bidding her shut the door behind her; and then he proceeds to torture himself as well as Desdemona by accusations of adultery. But, as a critic has pointed out, Emilia listens at the door, for we find, as soon as Othello is gone and Iago has been summoned, that she knows what Othello has said to Desdemona. And what could better illustrate those defects of hers which make one wince, than her repeating again and again in Desdemona's presence the word Desdemona could not repeat; than her talking before Desdemona of Iago's suspicions regarding Othello and herself; than her speaking to Desdemona of husbands who strike their wives; than [241]the expression of her honest indignation in the words,

Has she forsook so many noble matches,Her father and her country and her friends,To be called whore?

If one were capable of laughing or even of smiling when this point in the play is reached, the difference between Desdemona's anguish at the loss of Othello's love, and Emilia's recollection of the noble matches she might have secured, would be irresistibly ludicrous.

And yet how all this, and all her defects, vanish into nothingness when we see her face to face with that which she can understand and feel! From the moment of her appearance after the murder to the moment of her death she is transfigured; and yet she remains perfectly true to herself, and we would not have her one atom less herself. She is the only person who utters for us the violent common emotions which we feel, together with those more tragic emotions which she does not comprehend. She has done this once already, to our great comfort. When she suggests that some villain has poisoned Othello's mind, and Iago answers,

Fie, there is no such man; it is impossible;

and Desdemona answers,

If any such there be, Heaven pardon him;

Emilia's retort,

A halter pardon him, and Hell gnaw his bones,

says what we long to say, and helps us. And who has not felt in the last scene how her glorious carelessness of her own life, and her outbursts against Othello—even that most characteristic one,

She was too fond of her most filthy bargain—

lift the overwhelming weight of calamity that oppresses us, and bring us an extraordinary [242]lightening of the heart? Terror and pity are here too much to bear; we long to be allowed to feel also indignation, if not rage; and Emilia lets us feel them and gives them words. She brings us too the relief of joy and admiration,—a joy that is not lessened by her death. Why should she live? If she lived for ever she never could soar a higher pitch, and nothing in her life became her like the losing it.[[122]](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16966/16966-h/16966-h.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22Footnote_122)