something too loosely formulated and easy-going to be called an ideology: a cheerful belief in the native goodness of man; in a scale of values which placed the natural affections in paramount place, and in an all-too-human conception of the good life. His view of life was one which seems especially attractive to the ordinary Englishman. It looks far less sinister than the Marxist or Fascist view of life, but equally with these it is one from which the power and the glory of the absolute has vanished, together with the goodness that belongs to the omnipotent and omniscient and is visible in the human, limited, finite world only when it is conferred from without, and only then in a fractured and chequered form.

## IAGO AND ST THOMAS

DONALD B. KING

THE character of Iago in Shakespeare's play, *Othello*, has greatly puzzled critics over the past century, and much controversy has centred around the motivation behind his hatred of Cassio and Othello. The intensity of his emotion and the fiendishness of his actions seem to many critics completely disproportionate to the causes of resentment which Iago declares to be his motives. This puzzlement is, at least, partly caused by failure to recognize and appreciate the nature of sin in the Christian sense of the word. Critics would cease to wonder at the extent of Iago's moral depravity if they were willing to take seriously those Christian teachings on personal sin and its destructive effects on human nature which still formed a living part of western man's intellectual equipment in the fifteenth century. Shakespeare's dramatic analysis of the effects of sin on Macbeth afford one, though not the only, example of how well he understood them. His delineation of Iago is another. In many ways, indeed, Iago constitutes an excellent illustration in dramatic form of St Thomas' teachings on sin, as well as those on the special sins of pride and envy and on the Devil.

As so many critics have insisted, the specific instance of wounded pride which Iago alleges as the source of his bitterness certainly

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does not of itself suffice to explain the vicious extremes to which Iago's malevolence finally carried him. As St Thomas teaches, however, the elements in the immediate occasion of any sin seldom account in themselves for all the evil which ultimately will flow from the sin. To estimate the ultimate consequences of sin accurately it is necessary to take into account the ordinary effects of sin as sin. The lessened inclination to good, the darkened reason, the will hardened to evil, these and other results of all sin, and therefore of any particular sin, may in themselves give rise to subsequent sins with similar consequences. Since human acts generate an inclination to similar acts, this sequence may go on in an ever increasing series that finally becomes a constant stream, engulfing the personality and making it almost wholly evil. At this point we are confronted with that radical perversion of human nature by which a man takes a certain delight in evil for its own sake, and admits no limits to his evil inclinations or deeds except those imposed by circumstance and his own powers. Iago is such a man.

That he is so, that his present attitudes are not novel, but, on the contrary, reflect long experience in wrongdoing, is clear from the first act. For a special characteristic of such men is their hatred of their neighbour. This hatred, as St Thomas taught, marks the end of a journey of sin, not the beginning. It is not so much the cause of other sins as the result of many, the final climax to a series. Since a man naturally loves what is good, he loves other men whom he sees as good; unnatural hatred comes only after sin has twisted and destroyed the inclination of the will toward good. Only after he has found himself deficient in good does a man hate the good he finds in others. Thus, when Iago, early in the play, affirms in his soliloquies that Othello has 'a free and open nature' and a 'constant, loving, noble nature', but nonetheless asserts his hatred of the Moor, he effectively conveys the impression of himself as a man whose will has long since been hardened to evil. He deepens and confirms this impression when he recalls that the inordinate pride, from which his hatred and envy spring, goes back to the first moment when he 'could distinguish between a benefit and an injury'.

Pride, as the source of all sin, has many children—sins of the flesh, sins arising from human weakness, and, worst of all, sins of malice, spiritual sins. Significantly, Iago's evil deeds are rooted

in the worst, the spiritual sins, vainglory and envy. But these children do not spring to life haphazardly. In practice, says St Thomas, there is a certain order in the progression of man's sins. Pride comes first, and it begets vainglory, which gives birth to envy, from which arises hatred. This is the pattern of evil that appears in the life of Iago. Moreover, the dramatic pattern of his sinful actions developed by Shakespeare harmonizes well with the Thomistic analysis of pride, vainglory, and envy.

St Thomas defines pride as an inordinate love of self, a desire of excellence disproportionate to one's real worth. It comes from a lack of humility which leads one to over-estimate his own worth or excellence, or, having accurately estimated his own goodness, to take the credit for it to himself rather than giving credit to God. Iago displays his inordinate self-love in the first act of the play. In the opening scene he urges his admiration of those who, while outwardly serving others,

> 'Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves'

and when they have gained prosperity,

> 'Do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul,
> And such a one do I profess myself.'

Later, in the third scene of this act, he tells Roderigo that he has never yet found a man that 'knew how to love himself' and he gives as one of the motives for his plot against the Moor and Cassio, the desire to 'plume up' his own will.

St Thomas teaches that the first offspring of pride is vainglory, i.e., a craving for the manifestations of excellence, the name or position of excellence, honours; and the specific and immediate cause of Iago's anger does lie in vainglory. Cassio has been awarded the position of second in command to Othello, a position Iago had desired, and one which his own high opinion of himself assured him he was worthy of:

> 'I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.'

Iago wanted the honour, the public recognition of his worth, more than the actual power of the position. Anger at the public affront to his pride, rather than any concern for money or power, underlies the speech in which he tells Roderigo what has happened. While describing Othello's rebuff to those who sued in his behalf, and berating Cassio because the latter was accorded the honour he himself did not get, he nowhere mentions any regret

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for loss of the material rewards that went with the office. This attitude fits St Thomas's definition of vainglory.

From pride and vainglory, according to the Thomistic analysis, flows envy, i.e., sorrow at another's good because it is thought to lessen one's own good name or excellence. A man easily transforms such sorrow into hatred of the one whose good he regards as his own evil. Driven by such hatred, envious men do not seek to increase their temporal possessions, nor delight in pleasures of the flesh, so much as they attempt to enhance their own ego by bringing to evil those whom they envy. If a man looks upon another's good as a diminution of his own good, then he will regard another's evil as an increase of good for himself, and he will feel that in working to destroy another he is somehow doing good to himself.

So it is with Iago. The success of Cassio has been the failure of Iago; in the latter's mind his own good name or excellence is lessened by the good of the former. Throughout the play it is a desire to diminish the excellence of those whom he envies that gives Iago's passionate hatred its driving force, not any craving for material pleasures or greed of temporal possessions. Indeed, Iago expresses at some length his scorn of those who allow themselves to be dominated by material passions. When Roderigo, overcome by the power of his desire for Desdemona, now lost to him by her marriage to Othello, talks of committing suicide to escape the torment of his passion, Iago encourages him 'to be a man', to remember that passion is 'but a lust of the blood and a permission of the will'. He insists that the reason must rule the passions:

> 'If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts. . . .'

Iago's actions confirm his words. Nowhere in the play does Shakespeare represent him as seeking or gaining any positive temporal good (with the possible exception of Roderigo's money, which is only mentioned once after the first act), or as pursuing carnal pleasures. His ends are perhaps best judged from what he in fact accomplished. This we find expressed in Othello's words at the end of the play:

'Will you, I pray, demand that demidevil
Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?'

It is the very lack of any obvious material motive that bewilders Othello. All of Iago's energies focus on the destruction of Cassio and Othello, not for the sake of material gain to himself, but for the sake of loss to them. He identifies their loss as in itself his gain. Because their good is a diminution of his own, his own good will grow if he can somehow lessen or destroy theirs altogether. So strong is this feeling that he gives it as a reason for murdering Cassio, whose death he says would be his gain because

'If Cassio doth remain
He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly. . . .'

These lines contain in poetic form a theologically accurate example of envy as St Thomas describes it.

Pride and envy, according to Thomistic doctrine, are the sins of the Devil. Neither carnal pleasures nor greed of temporal possessions move him. He is not a fornicator, or a drunkard, or anything like that. He attempts, rather, to diminish the excellence of men whom he envies by bringing them to sin. He cannot force men to sin, however, he can only persuade, or propose to them objects of the appetites. Pursuing these objects in response to the urging of their appetites, men may allow their passions to so dominate their reason and will that they commit acts contrary to right reason or the law of God, i.e., sins.

These methods of the Devil, whose special sins he owns, and whom he invokes as the 'Divinity of Hell', and whose demons he claims as partners and models, are the methods Iago uses to achieve the ends of his own envy. He entices, he does not force, Cassio and Othello to wrongdoing. He realizes as well as the Devil that when men's passions rule their intellects, 'the blood and baseness of our natures . . . conduct us to most preposterous conclusions'. Consequently, he sets before Cassio and Othello objects of the appetites, and he persuades, but they act of their own wills. Discussing with Roderigo his plans for accomplishing the disgrace of Cassio, Iago tells the former that Cassio 'is rash and very sudden in choler', and he explains how he intends to take advantage of that weakness in Othello's lieutenant. In the end, it is Cassio's love of drink and refusal to control his temper that do result in his downfall. Although Iago arranged the opportunity,

Cassio committed the wrong because he allowed his anger to master his reason.

In the same way, Othello succumbs not to Iago but to his own passion. The latter plots to

> '. . . put the Moor
> At least into a jealousy so strong
> That judgment cannot cure.'

But Iago does not force his victim. In the beginning he did not incite Othello to jealousy even by giving him a real or fictitious cause for it. He merely presented the opportunity for it by suggesting the object of it. The careful reader of the critical scene (the third in the third act) will note that in the first instance Iago does no more than propose to Othello the possibility that Desdemona has betrayed him. He carefully refrains from saying that he believes that she has done so. He presents no evidence of wrongdoing. Yet Othello, after leaving Iago at this point for a short while, and thinking over what the latter has said, returns to him 'eaten up with passion', crying for proof of Desdemona's faithlessness. To a man in such a state, however, anything is proof. Iago knows and says,

> 'Trifles light as air
> Are to the jealous confirmations strong
> As proofs of Holy Writ.'

Consequently, he now offers in evidence a story of having heard Cassio talk in his sleep about his love for Desdemona, and a further statement that he had seen Cassio with one of Desdemona's handkerchiefs, a gift to her from Othello. His reason dulled by his passion, Othello finds conviction in these statements and exits, saying,

> 'I will withdraw
> To furnish me with some means of death
> For the fair devil.'

He has seized the object of jealousy offered by Iago, not because he was compelled by reasonable proof or otherwise, but because jealousy was part of his nature. Emilia puts it well:

> 'They are not ever jealous for the cause
> But jealous for they are jealous! 'Tis a monster
> Begot upon itself, born on itself.'

Thus Othello was the victim, not so much of Iago, as of his own

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inordinate emotions, which he, like Cassio, has allowed to rule his reason and will.

St Thomas's theological description of the effects of sin, of the progression of pride, vainglory, envy and hatred, and of the Devil's methods of operation, clarifies and deepens our understanding of Iago's sin-twisted personality, distorted and hardened to evil by long-continued wrongdoing, and the interlocking pattern of his sins, pride and vainglory, vainglory and envy, envy and hatred. It would appear, then, that however puzzling to some moderns the character of Iago may be, it and his methods would have seemed clear and consistent to St Thomas and to those who held views similar to his. Whether or not he knew the works of St Thomas directly, Shakespeare's attitudes must in the nature of things have been largely the product of the intellectual heritage of his times. That heritage was for Englishmen still fundamentally Christian, and Englishmen in general certainly would have found no great difficulty in accepting the dramatic representation of men as driven by the Devil and their own inordinate passions to vicious extremes of evil. In fact, to those who believe (as all Christians then did) in sin and the Devil, the difficulty would come in being asked to accept any other picture.

Moreover, while Shakespeare's development of the character of Iago is entirely consistent with the Christian view of man, the history of the last century of criticism shows how difficult it is to reconcile it with any other view. In that case, it is probable that the Christian view is the right view, the one intended by Shakespeare. What is true of Iago is probably also true of other characters and other plays. It is time for critics to study Shakespeare through the eyes of his own age not only with respect to the social, economic, political, literary and linguistic elements in his work, but also with a full knowledge and appreciation of the philosophic and theological attitudes of the Christianity he knew, a Christianity, as this study indicates, not far removed, in general outline at least, from the principles laid down by St Thomas Aquinas.

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