RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF IAGO

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF IAGO

Shakespearean critics have differed widely in their interpretations of the various characters in Shakespeare's plays, and there have been voluminous amounts of material written concerning this subject. However, the problem of characterization is one which perhaps can never be fully exhausted, and for most students of Shakespeare it holds a special attraction.

Of the many Shakespearean characters which one might choose to study, the character of Iago, the villain from Othello, is perhaps one of the most captivating as well as one of the most controversial. In order to clarify this statement, it may be necessary to note that although Iago may receive "second billing" to the hero, Othello, because of a theatre tradition concerning title characters, it is in this capacity only that he is of secondary importance, for through the centuries, critics and actors have recognized him as being of equal importance with Othello, if not overshadowing him completely. Nicoll expresses this when in writing of Othello he says that the play is unique in having two main centers of interest. It is Iago, he says, who drives the plot forward. He appears as much as Othello, and
the play begins and ends with him. George Brandes goes even further in his belief that Othello is a study of wickedness in its might rather than a study of jealousy, for "the cord that connects the master with his work leads not to the character of Othello, but to that of Iago." And to Stoll, Iago is not only the impelling but also the "credibilising" force in the fateful action.

Because Iago is recognized as the "mainspring" of the action, and because his personality is so interestingly complex, the scholar-critics of Shakespeare have expounded numerous interpretations of his character. As Goddard points out, there are three main branches of academic critics—the textual critics, the historical critics, and the theatrical critics. The textual critics believe that the key to character interpretation is in a careful examination of the text of the play, whereas the historical critics feel that we must understand how men lived and thought in Shakespeare's day if we are to understand his characters. And finally, the theatrical critics would remind us that Shakespeare created his characters for actors to portray before an audience, and not to be read. Furthermore, each critic seems to place his major

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1 Allardyce Nicoll, *Studies in Shakespeare*, p. 82.
emphasis on a different part of the whole personality. Consequently, we are faced with the problem of untangling a maze of interpretations which it seems impossible to clarify or reconcile.

With this problem in mind, I shall in this study trace the trends of interpretations, schools of thought, and major influences in interpretations of Iago as manifested in a survey of the writings of Shakespearean critics of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. The emphasis of the study shall be on twentieth-century criticism, with possible established patterns of interpretation and their relation to or deviation from the patterns of the two previous centuries.

So that we may have a richer background, and a deeper appreciation of the problem, however, it may be expedient to turn first to the source of the character, to review briefly the plot of the play, noting the imitative and transforming elements in the dramatist's conception of Iago, and to consider something of the stage history and stage interpretations of the character.

For the story of Othello Shakespeare turned to the Italian writer Cinthio's Hecatommithi, which was first published in Sicily in 1565. As Charlton points out, as a story the Italian novel satisfied all the conditions Shakespeare required in dramatic material. It was a love

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6 H. B. Charlton, Shakespearian Tragedy, p. 138.
story such as might have happened in Shakespeare's own day, and it
told of responsive passions and motives for behaviour in its characters
so that it gave the effect of naturalness. It also handled a problem of
universal interest—the situation created by the marriage of a man and
woman who were widely different in race, tradition, and customary way
of life. It also contained the chief dramatic characters: a Venetian lady,
a black and passionate but noble Moorish general, and a villainous
ensign of the Moor's staff. From this ensign Shakespeare, taking his
idea of the villain's desperate wickedness, created the devilish Iago,
for Cinthio says of the ensign:

    Now amongst the soldiery there was an Ensign, a man of
handsome figure, but of the most depraved nature in the world.
This man was in great favour with the Moor, who had not the
slightest idea of his wickedness; for despite the malice lurking
in his heart, he cloaked with proud and valorous speech and
with a spacious presence the villainy of his soul with such an
art that he was to all outward show another Hector or Achilles.7

The Italian author never lets his readers forget the villainy of
the ensign, for he constantly refers to him as "the wicked ensign." The
wickedness and oiliness of his tongue are illustrated in the following
passage in which he is making his base insinuations against Disdemona:

    'Captain, I replied the Ensign, 'I looked for such reward for
these my faithful offices, none else; but since my duty and the
jealous care I bear your honor have carried me thus far, I do
repeat, so stands the truth as you have heard it from these lips;

7 Furness, op. cit.
and if the lady Disdemona hath, with a false show of love for
you, blinded your eyes to what you should have seen, this is
no argument but that I speak the truth. Nay, this same Captain
told it me himself, like one whose happiness is not complete
until he can declare it to another; and, but that I feared your
anger, I should have given him, when he told it me, his merited
reward, and slain him. But since informing you of what con-
cerns you more than any other man brings me so undeserved
a recompense, would I had held my peace, since silence might
have spared me your displeasure.8

From his source character Shakespeare also took Iago's ability
to dissemble and divert all suspicions from himself. These traits
are shown in Cinthio's passage concerning the ensign's attack on the
captain of the troop:

Thereupon the Ensign, hearing the people come running
up, with some of the soldiers who were lodged thereabouts,
took to his heels to escape being caught; then turning again,
he joined the crowd, pretending to have been attracted by the
noise. And when he saw the Captain's leg cut off, he judged
that, if not already dead, the blow must at all events end his
life; and while in his heart he was rejoiced at this, he yet
feigned to compassionate the Captain as he had been his
brother.9

Such then was the ensign, wicked, oily of tongue, and quick to
dissemble and deceive, from whom Shakespeare created the immortal
Iago, and consequently from whom have arisen some of the problems
of the diverse interpretations of the critics.

However, the problem of interpretation comes not so much from
the ideas concerning Iago which Shakespeare borrowed from the

8Ibid., p. 379. 9Ibid., p. 383.
novelist, as from those which he conceived himself in order to dis-

criminate his villain from the old-time simple, transparent bad man.

The following passage from Cinthio's novel, in which the
ensign's motive for his evil acts is stated, will serve as an excel-
lent means of comparing the simplicity of Cinthio's villain as opposed
to the complexity of Shakespeare's.

Now the wicked Ensign, regardless of the faith that he
had pledged his wife, no less than of the friendship, fidelity,
and obligation which he owed the Moor, fell passionately in
love with Disdemona, and bent all his thoughts to achieve his
conquest; yet he dared not to declare his passion openly, fear-
ing that should the Moor perceive it, he would at once kill him.
He therefore sought in various ways and with secret guile, to
betray his passion to the lady; but she, whose every wish was
centered in the Moor, had no thought for this Ensign more than
for any other man; and all the means he tried to gain her love
had no more effect than if he had not tried them. But the
Ensign imagined that the cause of his ill success was that
Disdemona loved the Captain of the troop; and he pondered
how to remove him from her sight. The love which he had
borne the lady now changed into the bitterest hate, and having
failed in his purposes, he devoted all thoughts to plot the
death of the Captain of the troop and divert the affection of
the Moor from Disdemona. 10

As we have said, Shakespeare's conception of Iago is much more
complex, for he was faced with the problem of motivating Iago's
actions so that the acceptance by Othello of the devilish machinations
would seem natural. In an extraordinary series of ten soliloquies he
permits the audience to overhear the workings of Iago's mind, in which
many different reasons for the villain's intrigue are added to Cinthio's

10Ibid., p. 379.
original motive. Because of Shakespeare's great ability to create a complex, rounded, life-like character from the novelist's "flat," rather melodramatic villain, we find that the character becomes more of a puzzle than if Shakespeare had not transformed his source character.

Since the tragedy of Othello is one of the most familiar of Shakespeare's plays, I feel that only a brief summary of the plot is necessary for clarifying whatever references may need to be made to it in this study.

When the play opens, Iago is confiding to Roderigo that he is staying in the service of the Moorish general, Othello, only so that he might be revenged for having been passed over for promotion. The marriage, without her father's approval, of Desdemona, the daughter of a Venetian senator, Barbantio, to Othello gives Iago an excellent opportunity to begin his trouble making, which he does by persuading Roderigo, who also loves Desdemona, to arouse Barbantio and inform him of his daughter's marriage.

About this time news arrives that Othello is needed in Cyprus, and he is called before the Duke's council to receive his orders. While he is before the council, Barbantio accuses him of stealing his daughter. Othello tells the story of his wooing of Desdemona, and Desdemona vows her love for the Moor, whereupon Barbantio
reluctantly gives his blessings to the union, and Othello departs for Cyprus, leaving Desdemona to follow in the care of Iago.

A storm overcomes Othello's ship, and Iago and Desdemona arrive in Cyprus before Othello, where they are received by Cassio, Othello's lieutenant who had received the promotion which Iago desired.

Iago immediately plots with Roderigo to ruin Cassio. That night as Cassio is on watch, Iago induces him to take some wine. Cassio becomes intoxicated and is easily lured by Roderigo into a drunken brawl which awakens the people of the town and the citadel. Othello, upon learning of the brawl from Iago, dismisses Cassio in disgrace.

Iago, seeing a means of furthering his mischief, urges Cassio to solicit Desdemona to plead for his reinstatement. Cassio goes to Desdemona, and she immediately intercedes for him.

Iago then begins to arouse the jealousy of Othello by insinuating that Desdemona is in love with Cassio. Upon Othello's desire for proof of his wife's disloyalty, Iago tells Othello that Cassio talked of Desdemona in his sleep, and also that Cassio is in possession of a handkerchief which Othello gave his bride when they were first married.

When Othello asks Desdemona for the handkerchief, which she actually had lost and Emilia, Iago's wife, had found, and she cannot find it, he concludes that Iago's intimations are true beyond a doubt.
Iago continues to incense Othello against Desdemona and Cassio until in a frenzy he determines to kill her.

Meanwhile Iago, hoping that both Roderigo and Cassio will be killed, for the former has begun to call for a restitution of the jewels which Iago swindled from him, induces Roderigo to attack Cassio in the streets. In this encounter Roderigo is killed, and Cassio is treacherously wounded by Iago.

Othello, determined now to kill his wife, enters her room and accuses her of giving Cassio the handkerchief. When she asserts her innocence, he is again aroused into a frenzy and smothers her.

Emilia, entering to tell Othello of Roderigo's murder, upon finding Desdemona dead and hearing the Moor's story, asserts her mistress' innocence. Also, realizing for the first time the true nature of her husband, she reveals his guilt in the affair. Iago, upon hearing his wife betray him, kills her and tries to escape. However, he is pursued and taken prisoner, and sentenced to torment and punishment. Othello, learning of the deception of which he has been a victim, and not desiring to live without Desdemona, takes his life.

Thus we see that the tragedy of Othello tells an awful and agonizing story of jealous love, of which the ruthless, terrible, but highly intellectual villain is the mainspring of action. One might expect that even though the critics have been more concerned with the villain than with Othello, the title character would "hold the center of the stage"
and would be acclaimed as the outstanding character in stage productions of the tragedy. But in view of the contrast between the two characters it does not seem surprising that an actor should succeed in causing even a stronger effect with Iago than with Othello, for the reason that in point of propulsion—a continuity of "doing something"—Iago is the better part. Iago acts; Othello is to a great extent acted upon, and were it not that Iago's proceedings keep Othello before the audience's "mind's eye," Iago might be made to absorb all the attention.

In order that we may have an understanding of how the actors' Iago corresponds with the critics' interpretations of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, we will examine briefly the style of acting of one or two of the influential actors of each of the three periods.

It is interesting to note that as the critical interpretations of Iago became more popular and more complex in the eighteenth century, the stage presentations of the character likewise received more attention than previously. After a decline in popularity for a few years, Othello was revived about 1744 or 1745 with a trio of outstanding actors of the time—Charles Macklin, David Garrick, and John Henderson—assuming the character of Iago. Macklin is said to have had such an overpowering and striking personality that it was all he could do to transform it into a channel for the character he was to portray, but
his performance of Iago at the Haymarket Theatre in 1744 was extremely fine, though lacking a little in subtlety. Macklin's Iago had, perhaps for the first time, some academic virtues, for he gave the speech beginning, "If I can fasten but one cup upon him," in which he sets forth his plot against Cassio, plainly and without ornament, whereas formerly it had been the subject of a world of unnatural contortions of face and absurd by-play. According to his biographer, Edward Parry, by thus acting the part he was "laboring with a scheme to bring playing nearer to nature than it used to be." In this innovation he was followed by David Garrick, who also recognized that there had been a tendency to overdo Iago, and make too much capital out of his villainy.

The third of this trio of actors was John Henderson. He was a small man, therefore at a physical disadvantage, as well as at a disadvantage in lacking a good voice. However, he made up for his defects by magnificent elocution, for he was an admirable reciter and reader, and he is said to have been able to deliver a Shakespearean soliloquy better than any other actor before or since.

Although Henderson, unlike Macklin or Garrick, did not adhere to the new trend away from the declamatory style, he did add his

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innovation to the style of acting Iago. He was the first among the actors of the part to speak the rhymed lines with which Iago responds to Desdemona's inquiry concerning what his praise of a "deserving woman" would be as if he were slowly and carefully composing them, and not speaking them as a composition which had been committed to memory. It seems that Henderson was more than reasonably successful, for the experienced journalist and competent critic John Taylor, commenting on Henderson's impersonation of Iago, comprehensively remarked: "He admirably mingled the subtlety of character with its reputed honesty." 

During the nineteenth century Iago was played by such outstanding actors as Edmund Kean, who had established his reputation as an intellectual actor, Edward Davenport, who made an outward show of virtue and sympathy beneath which surged a frightful spirit of malice and devilish delight, and Edwin Forrest, whose performance was said to be more physical than intellectual. However, the Iago of these three great actors was overshadowed by that of Edwin Booth, who became, according to Winter, perhaps the most famous Iago of all times.

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14 William Winter, Shakespeare on the Stage, p. 248.
15 Ibid.
His style was first modeled on that of his father, Junius Booth, but as he matured it underwent a radical change. According to Winter, he repressed the elements of tumult and frenzy and exalted those of intellect, poetry, beauty, and grace. Iago, to Booth, was a man without either heart or conscience who loved evil for its own sake, and who reveled in the commission of it. This conception of Iago, as we shall see later, is typical of the nineteenth century. But Booth also realized that he should inspire that sort of admiration which attends monstrous, glittering, hellish, self-centered strength. It was, says Winter, through the felicity of Booth's embodiment of the character that he aroused this admiration; and he did so not only by technical proficiency of execution at every point, but by a lithe, clear, rapier-like elasticity, both physical and mental. To this, points out Winter, he added a cool, sardonic, involuntary, cruel, veiled humor, which was made to play like a "lambant flame of hell" over the whole structure of the work.

That there was development in Booth's conception of the role is asserted by Henry Austin Clapp, who says that Booth had fitted his performances to his physical limitations, making Iago, at first a light, comfortable villain, and bringing out his human qualities. "Later," says Clapp, "he darkened the hues of his conception, and

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17 Ibid., p. 295.  
18 Ibid., p. 57.
steadily increased its force and profundity. Malice gave place to a satanic malevolence, and there was an absolute self-consistency and an unfailing relation of every point and particular to the total scheme.

Booth himself is quotable on the manner in which Iago should be acted. In one of the memorable notes which he contributed to the Furness Variorum in 1885, the actor of Iago is thus advised:

_Do not smile or sneer or glare—try to impress even the audience with your sincerity. 'Tis better, however, always to ignore the audience; if you can forget that you are a "shrew" you will be natural. The more sincere your manner, the more devilish your deceit. I think the "light comedian" should play the villain's part, not the "heavy man"; I mean the Shakespearean villain's. Iago should appear to be what all but the audience believe he is. Even when alone, there is little need to remove the mask entirely. Shakespeare spares you that trouble._

After the peak which Iago as a stage role reached during the nineteenth century with Booth's portrayal, it seems to have greatly lost in popularity, and contrary to the amount of critical interpretations of the character in the twentieth century, there are few accounts of outstanding contemporary performances of the part.

Iago has been played in this century by Brian Ahern, Kenneth McKenna, and most recently by Jose Ferrer, but probably the outstanding acting of the villain thus far in the twentieth century was

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20 Ibid.
George Hayes' performance at the reopening of the Old Vic Theatre in London in 1924. The Spectator in its review of this portrayal of Iago says:

It is the greatest part in Othello. Iago is the most puzzling and the most difficult to interpret; but the difficulty is a challenge to a good actor. Mr. Hayes swallowed the part whole; there were no inconsistencies in his acting, and he did not, thank heaven, show at all that a good deal of hard thought must go into the lines before anything but a black-mustached villain is made of Iago. 21

According to the reviewer in The Spectator, Hayes began with such a beautifully lively and good natured spontaneous air that there is no wonder his fellows thought him the "pleasantest of companions and the loyallest of friends." He looked meditative at times, when no one was about, but even so he seemed on the whole to be pretty contented with himself. He set his plots, it seemed, more for complete lack of moral scruple than from downright villainy, but as he became more and more involved he grew alarmed and gloomy. He was ill at ease with himself all the time; he could not withdraw from his wickedness, and he seemed to feel doom around him, which caused him to be the attractive companion only by fits and starts. At the crisis he became savage and exultant. Then for the rest of the play, he was dumb, sullen, and stoical. 22

22 Ibid.
It was such a noteworthy performance that members of the audience remarked that it was Iago, not Hayes. The Spectator article in conclusion says:

Perhaps the acting of Mr. Hayes did not make the part "intellectually" much clearer. Coleridge describes one of Iago's soliloquies as "motive hunting of a motiveless malignity," and how a villain can be motiveless is still a heavy problem. Mr. Hayes does not help us to decide what Shakespeare's own explanation was: he seems too naturally right for that; he is Iago, and he is the problem. 23

Thus we see that in most instances Iago, although perhaps not intended by Shakespeare to be the leading character, has triumphed over Othello in the opinion of the critics, and as a stage role has been the favorite with actor and spectator alike.

Now that we have examined briefly the source of the character, the plot of the play, and a bit of the actors' interpretations, all of which are a part of the background for the problem of the literary criticism, we shall devote the remainder of the study strictly to the interpretations and trends of interpretations of the critics, beginning with those of the eighteenth century, and including those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

23 Ibid., p. 678.
CHAPTER II

EARLY CRITICISM

During the eighteenth century, the plays of Shakespeare became a popular study for critics and scholars. In the writings of this period, generally, are found the first influential character interpretations of Shakespeare's controversial characters.

However, the scholars seemed rather hesitant about trying to solve the riddle of Iago's character, or they were relatively uninterested in the villain, for there are only a few writers—and those in the latter part of the century—who treat the subject.

One of the best-known writers of the eighteenth century, Johnson, in writing briefly of Iago's cool malignity, describes him as being "subtle in his designs, and studious at once of his interest and his vengeance." The gradual progress which Iago makes in Othello's conviction, and the circumstances which he employs to inflame the Moor are, according to Johnson, so artfully natural, that though it may not be said of Othello as he says of himself, that he is "a man not easily jealous," yet we cannot but pity him when we at last find him in extreme perplexity.

Johnson also calls to mind the idea that there is always danger lest wickedness conjoined with abilities, such as Iago had, should steal upon esteem, but he concludes his discussion by saying that the character of Iago is so conducted that he is from the first scene to the last, hated and despised.

George Steevens, in *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, gives an account of Rymer's censure of Iago's character when he says:

> To entertain the audience with something new and surprising, against common sense and nature, he [Shakespeare] would pass upon a close, dissembling, false, ungrateful rascal, instead of an open hearted, frank, plain-dealing soldier, a character constantly worn by them for some thousand of years in the world.  

Warburton, in defending Shakespeare and Iago against Rymer's remarks, shows considerably more knowledge of the play, the character, and Shakespeare's intentions in creating Iago. He agrees that Rymer's statement has the appearance of sense, since it is founded on the rules of nature and Aristotle, which dictate that each character should have manners typical of the age, sex, and conditions. According to the rule, a soldier should be brave, generous, and honorable. But Warburton says that since there are many other soldiers

\[2\] Ibid., p. 201.

represented in *Othello*, Iago is brought in as an exception, and should not therefore be considered unjust or unnatural.4

In 1796 at Exeter, England, a volume of *Essays by a Society of Gentlemen* appeared, in which is found *An Apology for the Character and Conduct of Iago*.5 The anonymous writer urges as palliations of Iago's conduct, first, his being supplanted, through Othello's "insensibility and unkindness," by Cassio. The writer then appeals to the officers of the British army to know whether Iago's hostility were not excusable. Second, he suspects Othello's relations with Emilia, and third, and quite original, the writer says that Iago, having a right to expect a promotion, had lived more profusely than he would otherwise have done, and had involved himself in difficulties, or as Emilia expresses it, had "scanted his former havings." Fourth, the writer points out that Iago suspected that Cassio had "played him false at home," and fifth, Iago was by no means convinced of Desdemona's virtue and purity, for his suspicions of his wife had aroused in him a general aversion to the female sex. Thus, the author of the essay concludes that if vengeance can be vindicated by an accumulation of injuries, Iago's, though exorbitant, was just.6

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5Horace Howard Furness, ed., *Othello*, *A New Variorum*, p. 408.

From the three works of the eighteenth century discussed, we see that most of the interpretations of Iago were rather general in scope, and did not deal with the controversial questions about his character, which were to become important in the following century. Also, there seemed to be somewhat of a trend toward justifying Iago's deeds, which was to have its antithesis in the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century, the study of Iago became extremely popular, and definite schools of interpretations came into existence. The studies of this century are more complete and more introspective than those of the preceding one, and the questions of Iago's having motives for his deeds as opposed to his acting only for the enjoyment of doing evil, of his passion or lack of passion, or of his controlling intellect are much discussed.

August Wilhelm Schlegel, whose writings have been called the "first aesthetical criticism of Shakespeare," in writing of Iago, says that a more artful villain was never portrayed. He haunts Othello with his evil genius, and with his light insinuations, he leaves him no rest. The repugnance inspired by his aims becomes tolerable only from the attention of the spectator or reader being directed to his means. He

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is cool, discontented, morose, and arrogant where he dares to be so, but humble and insinuating when it suits his purposes.

Schlegel further describes him as being a complete master in the art of dissimulation, for he is thoroughly skilled in rousing the passion of others, and of availing himself of every opening which they give him. He is as excellent an observer of men as anyone can be who is unacquainted with higher motives of action from his own experiences, and there is always some truth in his malicious observations. Thus, Schlegel says, that while the Moor bears the "nightly color of suspicion and deceit only on his visage," we see that Iago is completely black within.

Coleridge, who has influenced many of his successors in their interpretations of Iago's character, conceived of the ancient as a passionless fiend, governed only by intellect. Coleridge points out that the true feeling of Iago's mind is the dread of contempt, habitual to those who encourage in themselves, and have their keenest pleasure in, the expression of contempt for others. This is perhaps responsible for Iago's expression of high self opinion, when he says:

And by the faith of man,
I know my place, I am worth no worse a place.

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9 Ibid.
We see, too, that Iago had contempt for whatever did not display intellectual power, for he says:

Virtue? A fig! 'tis in
Ourselves that we are thus or thus.  

This speech illustrates the passionless character of Iago, who is guided by will in intellect. According to Coleridge, however, this is typical of the villain, who reversed the order of things, putting intellect first, where it should follow human passion. Therefore, this superior intellect being his only conscience, he did not hesitate to ruin a friend in the moment of felicity, because he was not promoted as he expected.  

Coleridge, in writing of Iago's lack of motivation, says:

Iago's soliloquy--the motive hunting of a motiveless malignity--how awful it is! While he is still allowed to bear the divine image, it is too fiendish for his own steady view,--for the lonely gaze of a being next to the devil, and only not quite devil--and yet a character which Shakespeare has attempted and executed without disgust and without scandal.  

After the time of the writings of Coleridge, we find many critics of the century whose interpretations of Iago are based on that of Coleridge. Among those are Edward Dowden, George Brandes, William Hazlitt, and H. N. Hudson, who might be said to constitute a Coleridge school of interpretation.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]  
\[\text{Ibid.}\]  
\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 388.\]
Edward Dowden describes Iago as Shakespeare's one "absolute irredeemable villain." He is irredeemable, first, because he has lost all faith in the existence of goodness. With his keen intellectual facilities, and manifold culture in Italian ways, he lives and thrives in a world from which all virtue and beauty are absent. Second, he is irredeemable because, as Coleridge also mentions, all passions are dead within him except perhaps those which gather about himself. Dowden would have us see no weak point in his panoply of disbelief and egoism. He is unshakeable in his vice, using men and women as but tools in his hand--tools which he despises in the use.

Dowden further interprets Iago as one who "could not be captured and constrained to heroic suffering and rage." He says there is something Shakespeare would have us understand of Iago that is "more inimical to humanity than suffering--" namely, an incapacity for noble pain. According to Dowden:

To die as Othello dies is indeed grievous, but to live as Iago lives, devouring the dust and stinging, this is more appalling.

Concerning Iago's motivation or lack of motivation, Dowden, citing the lines from the play in which Iago refused to give Othello

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14 Edward Dowden, *Introduction to Shakespeare*, p. 78.


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.
any reasons for his heinous conduct, follows Coleridge in saying that Iago had no motives for his acts. Dowden says:

Shakespeare would have us believe that there is a passion of goodness with no motive but goodness itself, so there is a dreadful capacity in the soul for devotion to evil independently of motives, or out of all proportion to such motives as may exist. Iago is the absolute infidel; he is devoid of all faith in beauty and in virtue. . . . Iago finds it right and natural to live in a world in which all men are knaves or fools and all women are that which Desdemona is unable to name.18

The next critic of the Coleridge school, George Brandes, analyzes Shakespeare from a philosophical rather than a realistic standpoint, for he speaks of Othello as a "tragedy of life," and writes of Shakespeare as having seen Iago in his own life.

Through his study of Iago, Brandes sets out to disprove what he believes to be a popular misconception—namely, that Othello is simply the tragedy of jealousy. Naive readers and critics fancy that Shakespeare at a certain period of his life determined to study one or two interesting and dangerous passions, and put people on their guard against these passions. Following this intention, they say, he wrote Hamlet, a play on the dangers and evils of ambition, and Othello, a tragedy of jealousy. However, says Brandes, what Shakespeare wants to realize in Othello is neither jealousy or credulity, but simply and solely the tragedy of life.19 Brandes says:

18Edward Dowden, Shakespeare, His Mind and Art, pp. 212-213.

Othello is much less a study of jealousy than a new and more powerful study of wickedness in its might. The cord that connects the master with his work leads not to the character of Othello, but to that of Iago.\footnote{Ibid., p. 434.}

Brandes believes that Iago personifies one unbalanced part of the diverse segments which compose human nature, and thus human life. Brandes says that Shakespeare met Iago in his own life, and saw portions and aspects of him on every hand. As a result of this there is in this one character, Iago, more depth and more penetrating knowledge of human nature than in the whole of some of the other of Shakespeare's plays.\footnote{Ibid.}

Brandes especially adheres to the Coleridge school of thought in one phase of his interpretation, for he says that Iago is lacking in apparent motive. Brandes says that through his monologues, he is incessantly giving himself reasons for his hatred. Elsewhere in Shakespeare's monologues we may learn what the person really is, but not with Iago. This "demi-devil" is always trying to give himself reason for his malignity, and is always half fooling himself by dwelling on a motive which he himself only partially believes.

If Brandes would attribute any motive to Iago, it would be only the motivation of working toward his own advantage. As an example of this aim, he cites the fact that Iago's craft was not set to work...
until Cassio's appointment over him. Also, Iago, for his own personal gain, fools Roderigo out of his money and jewels.

This instance also calls to Brandes' mind another of Iago's traits. He is always masked in falsehood and hypocrisy. The mask he has chosen is the most impenetrable one--that of rough outspokenness, and of the straightforward, honest bluntness of the soldier who does not care what others think or say of him. He never flatters Desdemona, Othello, or Roderigo. He is the free, outspoken, honest friend.

Following his belief that Iago lacks motivation for his deeds, Brandes attributes his acts of evil to the pleasure he gets in hurting others, and the delight he gets in seeing adversity and anguish of others. He is the personification of eternal envy which merit or success in others never fails to irritate. He embodies the detestation for others' excellences, which shows itself in obstinate disbelief, suspicion, or contempt, and he harbors an instinct of hatred for all that is open, beautiful, bright, or good.\(^{22}\)

However, Brandes believes that an ordinary human capacity for love or hatred, springing from a definite cause, would degrade and detract from Iago's supremacy in evil. At the end of the play, he is sentenced to torture because he will not give an explanation to Othello.

\(^{22}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 435.\)
Hard, and in his way proud, he naturally would keep his lips tightly closed under torture. But, since he lacked a human motive, even if he had wanted to speak it would not be in his power to give an explanation. Brandes says:

_We watch the working of the venom on the simple hearted man [Othello] and we see how the very success of the poisoning process brutalizes and intoxicates Iago more. But to ask whence the poison came into Iago's soul would be a foolish question and one to which he himself could give no answer._

In speaking to Iago of Othello in the final scene, Emilia reveals the thought under shelter of which Iago has lived—other people do not believe that such a being as Iago exists. She says:

_Disprove this villain, if thou be'st a man._

_He says thou told'st him that his wife was false._

_I know thou didst not; thou'rt not such a Villain._

_Speak for my heart is full._

Perhaps Iago was wise in his choice of shelter, for it is hard for normal people to conceive of such a villain—masked in hypocrisy, doing evil without motive, and enjoying watching others suffer.

William Hazlitt, though deviating slightly from the absolutism of Coleridge's "motive hunting of a motiveless malignity," interprets the character basically like Coleridge, for he finds no external motivation, but rather, attributes Iago's acts to a love for power, which Hazlitt calls another name for love of mischief. This love of power

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23 Ibid., p. 436.  
24 Ibid.
or mischief, he attributes to Iago's intellect, and thus he arrives at one of his major contentions concerning Iago's character.

Hazlitt categorises Iago as belonging to a class of characters whose heads are as acute and active as their hearts are hard and callous. In other words, he is an instance of diseased intellectual activity, with an almost perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or maybe with a preference for the latter because, "It falls more readily in with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts and scope to his actions." 25

Hazlitt does not agree with Brandes in that Iago works only toward his own advantage, for Hazlitt sees him as one who is nearly as indifferent to his own fate as he is to that of others. Rather than by self-advancement, he is ruled by a diseased intellectual passion, of which he himself is the dupe and the victim. As substantiation for this idea, Hazlitt mentions the fact that Iago runs all sorts of risk for very trifling and very doubtful advantages.

These trifling advantages eventually add up to a measure of success, however, and from this success in his treachery a certain gaiety in Iago's character arises. He enjoys his success heartily, and from it takes incentive to carry on his evil works. 26

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26 Ibid.
Hazlitt also sees Iago as an "amateur tragedy of real life." Instead of employing his invention on imaginary characters, he takes the bolder and more desperate course of getting up his plot at home, casting the principal parts among his nearest friends and connections, and rehearsing it in downright earnest, with steady nerves and unabated resolution. He goes about this plot without even a touch of human kindness. His mind digests only passion. He seems to resent the good in other people as well as the good opinions entertained of his own integrity.

Hazlitt agrees with the majority of other critics in that he sees Iago's hypocrisy as one of his chief characteristics. He calls him "proportionally guarded, insidious, dark, and deliberate." His profound dissimulation and artifice are especially noticeable in the third act when he first enters upon the execution of his design, saying to Othello:

Iago: For Michael Cassio,  
I dare be sworn I think that he is honest.  
Othello: I think so too.  
Iago: Men should be what they seem;  
Or those that be not, would they might seem none!  
Othello: Certain, men should be what they seem.  
Iago: Why then, I think Cassio's an honest man.

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28 Ibid.  
29 Ibid.  
30 Ibid.
The deep workings of treachery under the mask of love and honesty, the anxious watchfulness, the cool earnestness, and the passion of hypocrisy seen by Hazlitt in each of Iago's lines, receive their last touch in Iago's burst of pretended indignation at Othello's doubts of his sincerity when he says: "O grace! O Heaven forgive me." 31

Hazlitt feels that Iago is more detestable when he has nothing to do than in instances such as the previously mentioned one, when he has business on his hands, and his mind is at work. In his idleness we see only the hollowness of his heart. For an example, Hazlitt cites his indifference when Othello falls into a swoon. His actions here are perfectly diabolical. Because of this Hazlitt says of his character in general:

It would hardly be tolerated even as a foil to the virtue and generosity of the other characters in the play, but for its indefatigable industry and inexhaustible resources, which divert the attention of the spectator from the end he has in view to the means by which it must be accomplished. 32

The last critic of the Coleridge school whose interpretation of Iago will be examined is that of H. N. Hudson, who takes issue against the critics who, he says, because of inattention to the early developments of the play, have supposed that Iago acted from revenge, and then as no adequate motive for such revenge could be found, the character has been thought unnatural. Hudson believes that Iago cannot

31 Ibid.
32 Furness, op. cit., p. 412.
be rightly interpreted at all without very special reference to what is unfolded in the first act, for there it is that we are to look for the first principles or seminal ideas of the character. Hudson says: "As a man's actions are the proper index of his character, so his character is the light whereby the index is to be read."\(^3^3\) That Iago has no external provocation to the part he acts does not necessarily make him unnatural, for he may have an innate passion for mischief which is so strong that it supersedes all such provocations. The main passions and proceedings, Hudson believes, take their start from Iago. From what he does in the first act, it is plain enough that his actuating principle lies not in revenge, but in a certain original malignity of nature.

There is both pride of purse and pride of intellect in Iago's exercising of his faculties on Roderigo, but it is plain that Iago, with a pride of intellectual mastery far stronger than his love of lucre, cares less for the money than for the fun of wheedling and swindling others out of it.

Roderigo, if not preoccupied with vices, at least is empty of virtues. Iago has but to work upon his unfortified parts. But the Moor has no such openings. The villain can reach him only by turning his honor and integrity against him. To the end of the play, in his practices upon Othello, so that his accusations of others may stand clear

of distrust, he prefaces them by accusing himself. Thus he affects to disqualify his own judgment touching the matter he has in mind.

For example, he says to Othello:

> I confess, it is my nature's plague
> To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
> Shapes faults that are not.\(^{34}\)

Acting, too, as if he spared no pains to be right, yet still feared he was wrong, his very opinions carry the weight of facts which have forced themselves upon him against his will.\(^{35}\)

Healthy, natural mind is marked by openness to impressions, and inspirations from without so that social, moral, and religious sentiments give law to the inner man.\(^{36}\)

But, says Hudson, Iago despises them all. His creed is that yielding to any inspirations from without shows an ignoble want of mental force. His mind is utterly unimpressible; it receives nothing and yields to nothing, but "cuts its way everywhere like a flint."\(^{37}\)

In one of his speeches Iago says, "I have looked upon the world for four times seven years."\(^{38}\) This ascertains his age to be twenty-eight, though we are apt to think of him as a much older man. Hudson calls to our attention the fact that Shakespeare, in making him young, marks him as having an instinctive faculty and aptitude for diabolical machinations, and infers that his virulence of mind is something innate.

\(^{34}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{38}\) *Ibid.*
and not superinduced at all by harsh and bitter usage. His youth also goes far to explain the trust which others repose in him, for they cannot suspect one so young of being either skilled in villainous craft, or soured by the experiences of the world. 39

Like Coleridge, Hudson believes that Iago's satisfaction seems to stand in a practical reversal of moral distinctions, such as causing his falsehood to do the work of truth, or another's truth to do the work of falsehood. To make virtue pass for virtue, and evil for evil, is no triumph, but to make one pass for the other is a triumph indeed.

We can scarce conceive any wickedness into which such a lust and pride of intellect and will such as Iago has, may not carry a man. Hudson says of this intellect: "He has an insatiable itching of mind which finds relief in roughing it through the briers and thickets of diabolic undertakings." 40

As to the question of motivation, Hudson agrees with Coleridge in saying that Iago has no motives, for natures such as his spin their motives. Hudson goes on to point out that Iago had no cause for revenge except that Othello and Cassio were happier and nobler than he. The only wrong that he thought they had done him was the fact of their having the virtues and honors that moved his envy. For this, he plots to be revenged by working their ruin through the very gifts for

39 Ibid. 40 Ibid., p. 472.
which he envied them. Meanwhile, he amused his reasoning powers by inventing a sort of ex-post-facto motive for his purposes, through the same wicked busy-mindedness that suggested the crime which prompted him to play with the possible reasons for it. 41

Turning from the Coleridge school of interpretation, we come to the writing of Maginn, who in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the eighteenth-century writers, tends to justify Iago in the performance of his diabolical acts. Maginn points out that Iago is the sole exemplar of studied personal revenge in Shakespeare's plays, and that this revenge can be justified by the fact that he had been affronted in the tenderest point, for he felt that he had strong claims on the office of lieutenant to Othello.

Maginn further justifies Iago by saying that in Iago's country, none of the scruple or principles which restrain English gentlemen existed. Least of all were they to be found in the motley armies of adventurers. Thus, Iago could not be expected to be very scrupulous as to his method of compassing his revenge. Also, just when his heart was filled with rage, and his head busily, but vainly, occupied in devising means for avenging himself on the man by whom rage was excited, Ate, the Goddess of Mischief, supplied him by the marriage of Othello, with all that the deepest malignity could desire. 42

41 Ibid., p. 473.  
42 Furness, op. cit., p. 417.
In contrast to the tolerance shown to Iago's deeds by Maginn, A. C. Swinburne sees him as the most perfect evil doer, the most potent demi-devil of man's creation. He, agreeing with Hudson, says that Iago has within him a sense or conscience of power which is incomparable, and that genuine and thorough capacity for human passions such as lust or hate would diminish and degrade the supremacy of his evil. In summarizing this passionless power, Swinburne says that it puts Iago "almost as far above or beyond vice as he is beneath or beyond virtue. This it is that makes him impregnable and invulnerable."43

The last nineteenth-century writer whose interpretation of Iago is to be considered is A. M. Spence, who, in an article in Poet Lore, takes a different and rather unusual approach to the study of Iago and his conscience.

He says that if Iago is a sort of inhuman creation, never stirred or warned by an inward monitor, then he cannot be held guilty of moral transgressions. However, from the text of the play, we know that Iago knew good from evil, and that he also knew that some men

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43 Algernon Charles Swinburne, A Study of Shakespeare, p. 179.
choose the course of virtue, though he expressed sarcastic contempt for such a choice.

On the other hand, in his relationships with Roderigo and Othello, he shows no conscience. Also, his soliloquies show no feeling of compunction. Even when he has drawn the cords of his cunningly contrived net about his unsuspecting victims, and fate takes him in hand to undo him, he shows no remorse for his work.

But, in spite of this, Spence believes that at one point he does show evidence of conscience. It is ironical that this nearest approach to remorse is caused by the creature whom he almost disregarded in his schemes--Emilia.

On the exposure of his villainy, the ghost of his murdered conscience, stirring his self-love, makes him wince under her adverse criticism. Spence says that it is through her affection and devotion, qualities unsuspected by her husband, that in him this fear of exposure is aroused. Because of this fear of exposure, Iago feels some inward disturbance on forecasting his line of action, even though his uneasiness, intensifying into remorse, may not be for his evil deeds, but for their disastrous recoil on his own head.

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From this study of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century critics' interpretations of Iago, we see that in the generalities of the eighteenth century writings no definite line of interpretation or school of critics can be seen. However, these critics did recognize Shakespeare's mastery in character creation, although they were inclined to justify the diabolical actions of the villain as though he were a real person rather than the creation of a dramatist.

Almost completely ignoring the writings of their predecessors, the nineteenth-century critics wrote more specifically on the motivations, passions, and intellect, which constituted the problems of interpretation of Iago's character.

The most influential critic of the period was Coleridge, who along with his followers, Dowden, Brandes, Hazlitt, and Hudson, conceived of Iago as a motiveless, passionless fiend.

Some few critics, however, such as Swinburne, Spence, and Maginn, while recognizing Iago's super-intellectual villainy, rebelled against Coleridgean influence, and attributed to Iago such a motive as revenge for Cassio's preferment.

But, regardless of the diverse interpretations of Iago expounded by the critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, on one subject all the critics are agreed—Shakespeare's insight into character, and his genius for transferring this insight into the words and actions of his characters is fully illustrated in his most villainous villain—Iago.
CHAPTER III

TWENTIETH-CENTURY CRITICISM

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Shakespearean character study consistently grew in popularity and importance, and by the beginning of the twentieth century it was in one of its most flourishing periods. Even to the present time it has continued to receive much attention from the critics, with the studies on Iago second perhaps only to those of Hamlet.

The critics who have written interpretations of Iago's character in the twentieth century can be divided into three chronological groups, according to the influence under which they wrote. Of course there are deviations in each group, which will be noted when they are discussed, but generally the interpretations fall into the divisions of the early writers, the writers of the second, third, and fourth decades, and the post-war writers.

In the works of the earliest writers of the twentieth century, such as John Masefield, William Ernest Henley, and W. H. Hadow, there is evidence of a reaction against the influence of such nineteenth-century writers as Coleridge and Swinburne. In the second, third, and fourth decades of the century, many critic-scholars adhered to the
interpretations of A. C. Bradley or Elmer E. Stoll, while some "non-conformists" expounded what might be called a literal interpretation of the villain. During the period following World War II, the ever-increasing popularity of subjects such as psychology, medicine, religion, and economics has been responsible for interesting and unique approaches to interpretations of Iago.

W. H. Hadow inaugurated the reactionary twentieth-century interpretations with the appearance of his article "Iago" in the *Living Age* of 1900. Hadow strongly disagrees with Coleridge's "motiveless malignity," and with Swinburne's "artist in tragedy," for he says that both ideas seem to imply that Shakespeare abandoned human nature. Hadow offers the alternative that Iago may be the consistent villain of flesh and blood rather than an impossible combination of mere malice and hypocrisy.

At the outset of the play, it is clear that Iago has never been found out in any act of treachery or mischief, and though he is an accomplished hypocrite, the ten years which, according to Hadow, he has been in the service is a long period for a successful masquerade.

True, he is wholly and inherently selfish, intent on his own advancement, and unscrupulous as to the means of securing it; and there are two qualities that Iago has which Hadow sees as inseparable from a certain form of selfishness. The first is a superficial good-nature which likes popularity and is quite ready to purchase it by gift
and service so long as they involve no serious cost. The second is an instinctive dislike of the sight of pain, except where the temper is aroused by anger, fear, or jealousy. This is not, however, says Hadow, because of pity or compassion, but because of a personal feeling of discomfort which is a spurious counterfeit of these. Because the world takes little pains to distinguish counterfeit from sterling, such persons are accredited with a sympathetic disposition.¹

Hadow points out that at first Iago has virtue enough to win the liking and esteem of his fellows, for he has the traits of bravery and geniality, and even has a faint sort of kindliness and good nature. The beginning of his downfall arises from the desire to avenge a wounded self-love and a wronged self-interest. Of the two plans which he proposes, only one, the displacement of his rival, is clearly seen by him. The other he can neither understand nor foresee, for his intellect has limitations. When his plot is once begun, every step forces him to go further, until he reaches a point where for fear of his life, he dares not recede or hesitate. Hadow believes that the fact that he is driven at last into the extreme of wickedness must be admitted, but he contends that Shakespeare has made him not a mere personification of evil, but a possible human being with human qualities and motives.²

¹ W.H. Hadow, "Iago," Living Age, CCXXVII (September 12, 1900), 674.
² Ibid., pp. 675-680.
We find further opposition to the nineteenth-century writers in the work of W. H. Hallet, who, in agreeing with Hadow, says that Shakespeare, in order to keep Othello from looking foolish, had to show in Iago a man with human qualities. In order to do this, Shakespeare gives us a villain in whom Othello's friends and intimates believe—a man who they are ready to swear is honest, even though he is foulmouthed and outrageously cynical. 3

Hallett submits no ground whatever for asserting that Iago is motiveless. He feels that those critics who deny Cassio's preferment and Iago's suspicions of his wife as sufficient reasons for causing the Ancient to nourish an implacable hatred, are ignorant of the history of crime, for criminals do things on what seems to other people quite inadequate grounds. 4

Hallett also refutes the theory that Iago is of superhuman wickedness beyond the conception of living man, for he says if Iago is superhuman, the tragedy becomes a fairy tale and loses all of its value.

Hallett closes his article with the following extracts from an analysis of the character of a very great man:

He was singularly destitute of generous sentiments. . . . he has not the merit of common truth and honesty. He is unjust . . . egotistic and monopolising. . . . He is a boundless liar. . . . His theory of influence is not flattering: "There are two

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4 Ibid., 284.
levers for moving men--interest and fear. Love is a silly infatuation, depend upon it. Friendship is but a name. I love nobody. "" He was thoroughly unscrupulous. He would steal, slander, assassinate, drown, and poison, as his interest dictated. He had not generosity; but mere vulgar hatred; he was intensely selfish; he was perfidious. . . . His manners were coarse. . . . In short, . . . you were not dealing with a gentleman, but with an impostor and a rogue. 5

Thus wrote Emerson of Napoleon. He might, says Hallett, have been writing of Iago.

John Masefield, in writing of Iago, interprets him as a man of intellect who has been warped out of humanity by the world's injustices, for he broods over Cassio's preferment, and schemes to be revenged. 6

In this first point concerning Iago's character, Masefield follows his immediate predecessors, Hadow and Hallett, in giving Iago motives. In his next idea, he echoes a theory which was asserted by George Brandes in his writings of the nineteenth century, for Masefield believes that Shakespeare, looking at life, was baffled by what he saw. Consequently, he found in Iago an image like life itself--a power and an activity prompted by something secret and silent. 7

In the writings of William Ernest Henley, we find another example of the reaction against nineteenth-century interpretations. Henley,

5 Ibid., p. 286.


7 Ibid., p. 184.
especially disagreeing with Brandes, believes that through the use of the soliloquy Shakespeare makes Iago entirely credible. He says:

Despite the majestic assurance and completeness of his presentation as a chief actor in the play, we should not know him as we do if we were denied the privilege of sitting with him in the privy chamber of his thoughts, and taking our fill and more of those terrible mental practices by which he seeks, in the dry light of an excellent and daring intelligence, to reconcile his action with his conscience, his processes with his results, and half in earnest, half in jest as it were to excuse himself before his soul.  

Henley, however, agrees with his nineteenth-century predecessors when he conceives of Iago as a piece of pure intellect who is high in resolve, cruel of heart, and swift and resolute of hand. However, like the rest of his kind, Iago, says Henley, is wholly the creature of the event which he is managing. He starts by "guying" an aged and respectable Senator on a most delicate point of honor, and he ends as the fully or partially guilty murderer of Othello, Desdemona, Roderigo, and Emilia, with a bad wound in his body, the assurance of being tortured to death, and the knowledge that Cassio is Governor of Cyprus. For all his vocabulary and brains, the contempt for elementary human law, which he made eminent, masters him, and leaves him "the most wretched slave this side of Eternity."  

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9 Ibid., p. 459.
Tucker Brooke, in his interpretation of Iago, is reminiscent of the romantic writings of the eighteenth century, for he believes that Shakespeare imagined Iago to be a man of warm sympathetic qualities, begetting confidences in all of his acquaintances.  

Brooke points out that the adjective inevitably applied to Iago is honest, which is also the regular epithet of Sir John Falstaff. From this, Brooke goes on to make an interesting comparison of the two characters as a means of romanticizing Iago.  

First, Brooke says that Iago, like Sir John, has "heard the chimes at midnight and been merry once or twice," for only a seasoned habitue of the taverns could talk as Iago talks in the brawl scene or sing as he sings. Also, in Iago's intellectual attitude Brooke sees reminiscences of Falstaff's way of thinking. His famous words on honor are virtually paraphrased in Iago's definition of reputation when he says to Cassio:

I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving; you have lost no reputation at all unless you repute yourself such a loser.  

10 Tucker Brooke, Essays on Shakespeare and Other Elizabethans, p. 49.  
11 Ibid.  
12 Ibid., p. 50.
Brooke also mentions that one of Falstaff's most charming propensities—the trick of mischievously teasing the complaining victim, and drawing him on from irritation to positive anger for sheer pride of intellectual superiority—is shared by Iago, and by no other character in Shakespeare.

They are, furthermore, according to Brooke, Shakespeare's two great studies in materialism. Mentally and morally they are counterparts. That they affect us so differently is because of the difference between the comic and tragic environment, and the difference in their ages. Falstaff, with his load of years and flesh, is a static force, while Iago has looked upon the world for only four times seven years.\(^\text{13}\)

Brooke sees Iago as no more of a born devil than Falstaff. He, too, might have gone merrily on drinking and singing, and consuming the substance of two generations of Roderigos, until he too waxed fat and inert and unequivocally comic. His diabolism is an accident thrust upon him early in the play, when in seeking to convince Roderigo of his hate for Othello he convinces himself likewise, and suddenly finds himself in the depths of his own egoism, vaguely conscious that he is being used for the devil's purposes, but incapable either of shaping the

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 52.\)
direction or checking the progress of his drift. He merely clings to the plot that offers such relief to his narcotized sensibilities. For Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, who were less touchy than we about the particular ideals he shatters, Brooke thinks Iago was distinctly attractive. He says that today we need a spectroscope, for our perception of Iago is blurred by the glow of sympathy we feel for Othello and Desdemona. But in so far as we can eliminate these two luminous figures from our view, we can see what Brooke fancies was the poet's original idea—"the tragedy of Iago, the charming soldier who swallowed the devil's bait of self-indulgence, grew blind to ideal beauty, and in his blindness overthrew more than his enemies." According to A. C. Bradley, the next critic whom we shall study, there are two groups of false interpretations of Iago's character. The first group, of which Maginn of the nineteenth-century critics and Hallett and Masefield of the early twentieth-century critics are prominent members, contains views which convert Iago into an ordinary villain, thus reducing Shakespeare to the common place. They interpret Iago as simply a man who has been slighted and revenges himself; or a husband who thinks that he has been wronged and is determined to make his enemy suffer; or an ambitious man determined to ruin his successful rival. These, according to Bradley,

14 Ibid., pp. 53-54.  
15 Ibid., p. 56.
are the more popular views. The second group, of which Coleridge is the founder, holds to the belief that Iago is a being who hates good simply because it is good and does evil purely for itself.

Bradley admits that the last of these interpretations is much nearer the truth than the first, but feels that it too is the product of imperfect observation and analysis. Consequently, Bradley approaches his interpretation of the character by first considering how Iago appeared to those who knew him in the play.

From the play, we may gather that Iago was a Venetian soldier who had seen a good deal of service and had a high reputation for courage. We are ignorant of his origin, but it may be assumed that he was not of gentle birth or breeding, for he does not strike one as a degraded man of culture. His manner was that of a blunt, bluff soldier, who spoke his mind freely and plainly. He was often hearty, but he was also often rather rough and caustic in his speech. He was aware of this characteristic in himself and admitted that he was "nothing if not critical," and that it was his nature "to spy into abuses." In admitting these traits, he characteristically exaggerated his faults.

"Honest" is the word most commonly used by everyone who speaks of Iago. It is applied to him some fifteen times in the play, not to

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17 Ibid., p. 214.

18 Ibid.
mention some half-dozen where he employs it in derision of himself.\textsuperscript{19}

He appeared to be, however, one of those sterling men who, in disgust say cynical things which they do not believe, and then the moment trouble arises put into practice the very thing that they had spoken against.

Such seemed Iago to the people about him. Bradley, too, believes that he presented much the same appearance to his wife. There is no sign that Emilia's marriage was unhappy or that she even suspected the true nature of her husband. No doubt she knew more of him than others, but it also seems clear that his defects had not seriously impaired her confidence in him or her affection for him. She knew that he was not quite so honest as he seemed, for he had often begged her to steal Desdemona's handkerchief, but she thought her husband odd and wayward, and looked on his fancy for the handkerchief as an instance of this, never dreaming that he was a villain.

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.\textsuperscript{20}

Bradley draws several conclusions from the contrasting personalities represented in Iago. First, he feels that Iago's powers of dissimulation and of self-control must have been prodigious. He was able

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.} \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 216.
to find a certain relief from the discomfort of hypocrisy in his caustic or cynical speeches which, frequently being misinterpreted, only heightened confidence in his honesty. Next, from the success of his hypocrisy one might infer that he was by no means a man of strong feelings and passions, and thirdly, Bradley concludes that Iago was not by nature malignant nor morose, but that on the contrary he had a good nature. Finally, Bradley infers that before the crime which we see, Iago had never been detected in any serious offence. Bradley describes him as follows:

He was one who had pursued a selfish but outwardly decent life, enjoying the excitement of war and of casual pleasures, but never yet meeting with any sufficient temptation to risk his position and advancement by a dangerous crime. But we see him when he has been at last tempted to let loose the forces within which eventually bring him to destruction.

Bradley belongs to the school of thought which places emphasis on interpreting Iago from the understanding of the "inner man." In examining his conceptions of the inner personality of Iago we find that Iago had very remarkable powers of intellect and of will, for he never betrayed his true nature, and he seemed to be master of all the emotions that might affect his nature. For example, when Othello took him by the throat, he merely shifted his part with his usual...

\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 218.
instantaneous adroitness, and when he was attacked and wounded at the end of the play, he was perfectly unmoved.

His creed was that "absolute egoism is the only rational and proper attitude, and that conscience of honor or any kind of regard for others is an absurdity." He declared that he had never yet met a man who knew how to love himself; and his one expression of admiration in the play is for servants. Keeping this creed in mind, one must admit, says Bradley, that his desires were comparatively moderate and his ambition weak. But what Iago lacked in ambition, he more than made up for in sensitivity, for he was very conscious of anything that touched his pride of self-esteem. This was why the appointment of Cassio provoked him, and it was the reason of his jealousy of Emilia. He did not care for his wife; but the fear of another man's getting her and exposing him to pity or derision as an unfortunate husband was more than he could take.

The next characteristic which Bradley expounds upon is that of Iago's lack of passion. The most popular view of Iago's chief reasons for his action holds that he was incited by the desire for advancement and a hatred for Othello. Bradley says, however, that the difficulty about this view is that it attributes to Iago a passion which cannot be found in the Iago of the play. Passion in Shakespeare's plays is usually

\[22\text{Ibid., p. 219.}\]
easy to recognize, but we see no vestige of a passion, unsatisfied or
gratified, in the villain from Othello. The only thing to which any pas-
sion at all might be attributed is Iago's own statement, "I hate Othello,"
and upon remembering the worth of his statements, Bradley says we
should discredit this.23

Bradley partially agrees with Coleridge in interpretation, for in
discussing Iago's motives, he denies that a desire for revenge because
he had not been advanced by Othello or because he was a husband
wronged by Othello was the principal factor in the cause of his actions.
These motives, which he gave himself, disappear as the play progresses,
usually being mentioned once and then forgotten. He was merely trying
to justify himself, searching for reasons for his action even as Hamlet
searched for reasons for delay.

Bradley, however, in analyzing the character more completely
than Coleridge, points out that his actions might be explained by the
fact that Iago had certain traits of character that made him what he was—
a keen sense of superiority, a contempt of others, an aversion to good-
ness in men, an annoyance at having always to play a part, a conscious-
ness of exceptional but unused ingenuity, an enjoyment of action, and
an absence of fear. To do something in which he could use all these
qualities would be a supreme pleasure—something involving triumphant

23 Ibid., p. 224.
exertion of his abilities and the excitement of danger. That some-
thing was his plot against Othello, and once he had embarked upon
his course it was impossible for him to turn back. Thus he
carried it through with all the zest of an artist. His action was
to him an intriguing plot, and in the conception and execution of it
he experienced such a joy of artistic creation that he appears for
moments not as a consummate schemer, but as a man absolutely
infatuated and delivered over to certain destruction. 24

S. A. Brooke, in writing of Iago's motives, echoes
Bradley when he says that even when Iago is in the midst of his
scheme for torturing Othello, no one can understand why. He him-
self cannot tell. Hate seems to be his native air, and the desire
to torture stings him within. He seeks to explain; he searches
for his motives, and finds this motive and that motive, but,
according to Brooke, not one of them explains what is in his heart--
or serves as an adequate reason for the devilish pleasure he has
in torturing Othello and egging him to kill Desdemona. 25

Nicoll, in his interpretation of Iago, is a disciple of Bradley
in that he too places emphasis upon the "inner man." In analyzing


Iago's nature, the first thing which Nicoll notes is that, in comparison with the other characters, Iago is a highly intellectual man. He towers above all the rest with his fertile, acute, and normally far-sighted brain power. Nicoll would have us notice, however, that at the same time he is of plebian descent, and has obviously had no education. His intelligence is native, not cultivated. Partly because of jealous envy, partly because of the consciousness of his own capability, he is inclined to rate his native intelligence over cultured refinement, and therefore, says Nicoll, he is in an unenviable situation. 26

Nicoll further shows Bradley's influence when he says that Iago is to be considered, not as an individual of overwhelming villainy, but as a "pitiful plaything of circumstance, warped in nature and in his evil bringing others to misery and ruin." 27

Nicoll adds to Bradley's interpretation of Iago a sense of opportunism where personal gains are concerned. For Iago there are but two classes of men—the honest fools and the cynical, wise knaves. Nicoll makes it clear that this does not mean that Iago follows evil for its own sake. Rather, he finds that obsequiousness and the formal semblance of virtue are often more profitable than

26 Allardyce Nicoll, Studies in Shakespeare, p. 94.
27 Ibid.
any amount of knavery. So long as his pose of honesty is a paying one, Iago is content to persevere in it; but whenever he finds that his "honesty" has carried him as far as it can, he feels that it is time to cast it off.

Nicoll, being not only a Shakespearean critic, but a scholar of the theatre as well, naturally thinks of Iago in terms of dramatic propriety. Concerning this he says:

Iago's end is the best part of his life as we see it presented in the play, and the courage he displays there must have been introduced by Shakespeare for some definite purpose—perhaps to raise an element of sympathy in the audience for this villain.\(^{29}\)

Nicoll explains that this view of Iago as a character to be pitied is based primarily upon an examination of his own words in the play, but it is strengthened by two other considerations. First, Iago is a full-length portrait. To interpret him as a melodramatic villain shatters the structure of the play. If on the other hand, Nicoll points out, we think of Iago as a youth of outwardly blameless life with every appearance of honesty, but with a true Machiavellian doctrine of his own which makes him deny the usual morality of men, we begin to see how the various figures fit into the tragic unity. The matter of tragic unity raises Nicoll's second point, for he says that we can hardly witness a drama with

\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 99. \(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 103.
harmonious and undivided attention when all our emotions of detesta-
tion, hate, and disgust are called out against a principal character in
the drama. 30

Nicoll then concludes his interpretation by saying that he
believes the conception of Iago which he has outlined gives him a def-
inite position in this play of "deception and self deception." 31

The next interpretation of Iago to be examined is that of Elmer
Edgar Stoll, one of the best-known Shakespearean scholar-critics of
the twentieth century. His interpretation is complex, and embodies
original theories as well as shows Coleridgeian influences, the combi-
nation of which makes it seem incongruous unless carefully studied.

One of the first ways in which Stoll classifies Iago is as a devil
in the flesh. Stoll holds to the opinion that psychology or even a plau-
sible motivation is not indispensable to a character. It is logical then
to suppose that though Iago is one of Shakespeare's most remarkable
creations, he is not to be treated as a definite psychological entity.
Thus, we can conceive of him as a devil who plays the part of an honest
and friendly fellow before the other characters and, except momentarily,
shows the devil in himself only to the spectators. When he is out from
under his mask, the whole process of his thinking is clearly that of a
human devil. When he says, "I hate the Moor," and then in so many

30 Ibid., pp. 103-104. 31 Ibid., p. 104.
words, "Let me find some reasons for it," he is whipping himself on or else he is merely deceiving himself. Later he conjures up a lust for Desdemona which he avows is partly to "diet his revenge." From all this an audience would not find it difficult to see the pure devilishness in his schemes. Yet the psychologists insist on providing him with various motives, such as a craving for activity and sensation, an artistic taste for intrigue, a delight in a sense of superiority and the pain of his victim only as proof of his power.\(^2\) Of this Stoll says:

\begin{quote}
These are traits of his rather than his motives, and of them he is aware. To the psychologists he is a mate for their Hamlet with pretexts conjured up to overcome an 'inner resistance;' and with even a 'safety valve--' caustic and cynical speech to relieve him of the discomfort of his hypocrisy. Of such resistance or discomfort, either, there is no discernible evidence. . . . At bottom Iago is moved by simple hatred, which he flatly avows at the outset and reiterates again and again; he revels in villainy and welcomes the help of all the tribe of hell. . . . The accumulation of inadequate motives, and the acknowledged uncertainty and flimsiness of his suspicions, but show the hellishness of his purpose.\(^3\)
\end{quote}

On the other hand, the sentimentalists make him out as a victim of circumstances and environment, or as a person honest and friendly by nature who was the most popular man in Venice.

Stoll has expounded upon these two schools of thought in order to strengthen his claim of Iago as a devil in the flesh, for he says:

\begin{quote}
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 232.
\end{quote}
Neither psychologists or sentimentalists sees what was evident to the earlier critics—and indeed what the dramatist has made sufficiently plain, not only by the characterization itself, but by the villain's own avowals at the outset and the hero's and Lodovico's recognition at the end— that under all the appearances of humanity, Iago is little or nothing short of a demon.  

Stoll's next contention is that Iago is an emotional fiend, though in human form. In this phase of his interpretation Stoll feels that Iago most resembles the ancient Fate, for like Fate he is malignant, motive-less and inscrutable. He is mocking and ironical. Also like Fate, he holds the reins all in his hands, and near the end, disposes of everybody. Stoll further explains his emotions by saying:

In his sub-zero antipodean region, he is, when roused almost as intense as Othello and far more various, in this respect comparable to Hamlet. Like him, he has both humor and wit, both prose and poetry, and much of the time wears a mask— plays the honest man and is dishonest, plays the passionate man and is cold and calculating, though with a coldness deadly and devouring as a fire.

Following the line of thought that Iago, the "human fiend," is an emotional character rather than psychological, Stoll feels that there is no reason for the idea of self-deception or the subconscious in his character. In the first place, Stoll says, the subconscious is too intangible for almost any dramatic art, and it is certainly out of keeping with Shakespeare. In the second place, the soliloquy is the clue given to the audience and must be the truth. In it, even the liar must

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34 Ibid., p. 234.  
speak the truth and it knocks the props from under Shakespeare's dramatic framework to say that Iago's soliloquies are lies. They are rather, according to Stoll, conscious pretexts and are labeled as such in his first soliloquy.

Stoll also makes much of Iago's hypocrisy, just as most of the critics preceding him have done. As a particular example of this trait Stoll has chosen the following passage in which Iago is egging Roderigo on against Othello:

Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains,  
Yet, for necessity of present life,  
I must show out a flag and sign of love,  
Which is indeed but sign. That you shall surely find him  
Lead to the Sagittary the raised search  
And there will I be with him.  

Stoll goes on to explain that he feels that Iago's hypocrisy is no discomfort to him. The conscience darkly working within him is no more than a mere familiarity with true moral values. He puts himself in the wrong by virtue of his own self-consciousness. Neither his irritation at the goodness of others nor his "motive hunting" in his early soliloquies is a sign of uneasiness or aversion to hypocrisy.

Previously we have seen Iago as the devil in the flesh, or as a hypocrite, but Stoll also calls to mind the Iago on the watch. He is a

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 385.
good companion, polite, expansive, familiar, and with Cassio, is
genial and open-hearted. He addresses Cassio as 'man,' and later as
'good lieutenant.' Roderigo he calls 'sir,' and then as he becomes more
cdescending, 'noble heart.'

Before they drink, Iago sings. Of this Stoll says:

It is a surprising but appropriate trait in Shakespeare's
ampler yet subtler conception of the diabolical incarnation that
he should break into a rollicking, traditional and unobjectionable
alehouse ditty, with a wicked purpose, indeed, but with hearty
satisfaction in the singing itself. A jolly 'good fellow' is the
honestest sort of disguise. But this is another point at which
Iago's feigning is but an extension or exaggeration of his natural
disposition, and, as usual, he profits by it in his effect upon us.

Stoll also in a very interesting manner analyzes Iago as a comic
caracter. This seems a little unusual, but if we will remember the
interpretation given the villain by Tucker Brooke, we will see that
Stoll is not alone in this conception. Stoll first calls our attention to
the fact that Iago's humor is involved in the "optique du theatre." This
as applied to those characters who are feigning may seem to belong to
comedy, but Stoll feels that it is important in the acting of villains
and intriguers even in tragedy.

In describing Iago as a comic character Stoll says:

From the beginning Iago is comic as well as tragic. . .
He is a humorist in his own right, apart from hypocrisy and play-
acting. More than most Shakespearean characters and than any

40 Ibid., pp. 258-259.
other Machiavel, he has a philosophy, a point of view; still less would Roderigo appreciate the 'twisted wit'. . . the cool and complacent inversion of all moral values in 'these fellows have some soul,' whereas they haven't any, or in 'By the mass, tis morning, pleasure and action make the hours seem short.'

To this type of humor an audience would be responsive, and it is only because readers believe laughter and humor to be kindly, says Stoll, they are not responsive too.

Toward the end of the play we see a gaiety in destruction. After Iago's grip on Roderigo has tightened, he can unmask his ghastliness fairly completely as he says to Roderigo:

Iago: O, no, he goes into Mauritania and takes away with him the fair Desdemona unless his abode be linger'd here by some accident wherein none can be so determinate as the removing of Cassio.

Roderigo: How do you mean removing of him?

Iago: Why by making him incapable of Othello's place--knocking out his brains. 42

Stoll states that this scene certainly shows a gaiety in destruction, and consequently the audience laughs as it shudders.

On the controversial question of Iago's motives Stoll says that those which he gives are inadequate. Most of them he touches on but once and he acts not at all like one stung with resentment, fired by ambition, or consumed with hatred as critics such as Kittredge and

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41 Ibid., pp. 267-268. 42 Ibid., p. 268.
Tannebaum have interpreted him. Stoll points out that he takes no particular pleasure in Cassio's place once he has it, and his glee at the success of his intrigue is not that of an injured husband getting even. He has motives, but he acts as if he had none. Stoll asks the question: Shall we discard them and like the critics get him new ones of our own? In answering his own question he states:

In so doing we discard Shakespeare. Rather, let Iago run his course regardless of motive, like Aaron, Richard, or Marlowe's Barabas, the badge of whose lineage he bears, being a Machiavel or stage villain who is utterly given over to evil and shrinks at none.  

Stoll feels that Shakespeare intended that Iago be moved by simple hatred, which he flatly avowed at the beginning and reiterated again and again. In no doubt at all about his hatred, he gave these various trumped-up reasons to explain and enforce it. Nothing else dramatically or even psychologically could have been so adequate as this method when the play depended on a villain who swept not only the hero, but everybody else who got in his way, into his net.  

Motivated then by this hatred, as he goes along with his plot, Stoll cites how the villain's ascendancy more and more establishes itself. He gives rein to his deep inclinations and taunts and torments more than he jests. He plays more frankly with foul imaginations.

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43 Elmer Edgar Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, p. 387.
44 Ibid., pp. 114-115.
His deadly coldness and frigid, acrid wit conspicuously appear. Finally, there is no banter or joking. He devilishly goes on with his intriguing and destroying until, still in a Satanic vein, he brings himself to his end. Then Othello asks the wonder-stricken question:

Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body? 45

Iago pulls himself up to his height and retorts:

Demand me nothing; what you know, you know.
From this time forth I never will speak word. 46

Stoll feels that for Iago as a stage figure and as a character this is the proper and complete end. It is a bad end manifestly—not one of relief from tedium which should be his if he were the mere idealist or disillusioned worldling that he has been taken for. Neither is it an end of moral awakening. It is bold and bad, but of its sort there could not be one better, for as Stoll says:

Neither praying nor replying Iago rises above the vulgar valedictory blasphemies and imprecations of Barabas, the Guise, and Aaron. This impenitent and contumacious spirit is necessary to the logic of the conception, not only as handed down by tradition, but as previously presented in the text. 47

Here in his final scene the villain, according to Stoll, seems to be drawn according to the modern principles of criminal psychology: he lacks a

46 Ibid.
47 Elmer Edgar Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters, p. 272.
moral sense, and feels no penitence or remorse. This is not, however, because he, like the ordinary murderer, considers himself good and others evil or unjust. It is best explained by the fact that he is at enmity with good and wedded to evil. At heart he is defiant and unde-luded, and though haughty and impenitent, he maintains his dignity. 48

Stoll cites the incident of how Iago, as played by the elder Booth, as he was borne off the stage wounded and in bonds, gave Othello a look which he describes as:

A stare in which hate seemed both petrified and petri-fying. Not perhaps but certainly, for how could the evil spirit, in league with hell and night and deliberately denuded of all motives but deadly point blank hatred, make his exit in any other way? 49

Schücking, except in his theory concerning the soliloquies, which will be discussed later, is much like Stoll in his interpretation of the villainous ancient. He says that the ability of the dramatist to raise his figures to a super-human level, which in other instances is his strongest point, here threatens to become the cause of his failure, for the effect borders on the inhuman. 50

Schücking points out that Iago has remained pretty much the same as the source character. No human quality has been added to soften

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Levin L. Schücking, Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays, p. 63.
the picture. He is a devil, inexpressibly mean in his detraction of everything that is noble. He is malicious and pleased at the misfortunes of others, envious, hard, and unmoved by pity, but at the same time cunning, shrewd and calculating.

About motivation, Schücking says:

The poet has from the outset painted his character in such colors that there is hardly any necessity to supply him with special motives against Othello. 51

Schücking points but, however, that Shakespeare showed Iago's special motives to be frustrated ambition, envy and desire for revenge. Many critics such as Coleridge, Brandes and Bradley refused to take these motives for the truth because his conduct does not correspond to the motives.

The "old expositors," beginning with Coleridge, thought that Iago's essential depravity made him hunt for reasons in order to palliate his actions to himself. Schücking, however, believes that stirrings of conscience in this sense are unknown to Iago, and he does not require palliations. 52

Schücking admits that there seems to be neither a sufficiently grave insult or a sufficient check to his ambition to account for his choosing such a fiendish method of revenge, and moreover, he says, the gratification of these two feelings in the further course of the action

is overshadowed by his love of intrigue and his delight in his own malignity.

According to Schücking, no one should receive the impression that Iago is an avenger of his supposedly outraged honor. Rather, we see him acting obviously out of wickedness, and impelled by an evil disposition that makes him envious, malicious, and distrustful.\(^53\)

It is at this point in his interpretation that Schücking disagrees with Stoll, for he explains that if he holds that the reasons alleged by Iago for his actions do not strike him as the real impelling forces, he does not thereby wish to represent them in any way as subjective imaginations of Iago. The monologue, in this and other instances of the same kind, is intended to give aids to the understanding of the action, not to light up the character by adding new and interesting touches to it. Schücking therefore concludes that Iago's actions are on the whole provided by Shakespeare with an excess of motives. He says that this is a thing to which we are accustomed in ordinary life. When we state too many reasons for our acts or omissions, one counter-acts the other, and in the end none of them appears quite credible. It is a similar mistake which Shakespeare commits here.\(^54\)

Now we come to a group of critics who, rather than showing the influence of either Bradley or Stoll, give a literal interpretation

\(^{53}\)Ibid., p. 210. \(^{54}\)Ibid., p. 213.
of Iago, in that they feel that the motives set forth by Iago in his soliloquies are adequate to account for his actions.

Parrott, in writing of Iago's motivation, points out that it has a twofold aspect. First, we must consider Iago's dominating sense of superiority to his friends, and second, his desire to demonstrate his superiority by making them his puppets. Parrott believes that if his motives are regarded in this light, they will seem perfectly adequate to account for his inception of the plot. After all, wounded pride and lust should not be regarded as weak impulses to action. Parrott says that we must further remember that Iago entered upon this intrigue without planning for its full and fatal consequences, for there is no hint that he contemplated the murder of both Cassio and Desdemona.Apparently all that he could foresee was Othello's actions which would secure his immediate ends.

Parrott sums up his idea of Iago by saying:

It is plain, I think, to anyone who regards the play as a whole, that Iago, with all his gifts, was a limited and unimaginative intelligence. As a soldier he must have been a brilliant tactician, but a wretched strategist.

This opinion, as stated by Parrott, has influenced the interpretations of several critics of the early 1940's who will be discussed later.

55 Hardin Craig, Shakespeare, p. 946.
56 Ibid.
For a literal view on the characterization of Iago, which seems aimed at disproving the interpretations of the nineteenth century, and heartily disagreeing with Stoll and Bradley, one might turn to S. A. Tannenbaum, who in a sense justifies Iago while attacking Othello.

Tannenbaum recalls for us that the nineteenth-century critics made Othello a hero who was lofty, noble, generous and free from contriving. The tragedy was the result of his unsuspecting nature. His trust in his "honest" ancient and his frankness and sincerity made him an easy victim.

In defending Iago against the nineteenth-century critics Tannenbaum is especially concerned with Coleridge's interpretation, for he says:

But Othello the adulterer and the betrayer of honest Iago would have been to most nineteenth-century critics, a despicable creature. . . . Coleridge, perceiving this, proceeded to convert Iago into a devil and strip him of adequate motivation for his villainy. And so Iago's soliloquy became the 'motive hunting of a motiveless malignity,' even though a soliloquy has always been regarded as the dramatist's way of giving his audience details which he wants them to regard as true and which he cannot impart to them convincingly otherwise. 57

Tannenbaum goes on to explain that, first, Iago reveals to the audience that he is exploiting Roderigo financially for his own sport and profit. Then he reveals that he is thinking of accomplishing two purposes: to get Cassio's place and to be revenged on Othello.

From the above evidence, we may presume that Tannenbaum, contrary to Coleridge, takes Iago's soliloquy as the truth, thereby giving him adequate motivation.

The second characteristic which Tannenbaum attributes to Iago is that he is human and intelligible, as opposed to the "fiend" which some critics have called him. Tannenbaum reasons that an innocent, noble, generous Othello who would succumb to the subtlety and craft of a fiend would be an object of contempt or pity rather than of intelligent sympathy. This would defeat the purpose of the tragedy. 58

The essence of Tannenbaum's interpretation of Iago is that Shakespeare was not interested in creating a bloodless and passionless puppet as so many critics seem to think. Rather, Tannenbaum says: "His creations breathe the breath of life. There is good and ill mingled in various proportions. None is perfect. They smell of mortality." 59 This, Tannenbaum concludes, gets rid of the idea that Iago is a fiend, "for such a creature could have existed only in a poet's fantasy." 60

The last of the group of "literalists," Kittredge, in writing of Iago's motives, says that it would be strange if Iago were left without a motive since Othello is in plan and structure a tragedy in which the hero is passive and the force that opposes him is the power which controls him. 61

Following this belief, Kittredge emphatically states that Iago's motive is set forth with passionate vigour. He says: "He is actuated by resentment for injustice, and there are few motives to which men so instantly respond."

Cassio has the place which Iago expected and to which Kittredge feels that he seems to have had the better claim. At all events Cassio's behavior in his office is far from meritorious, and Iago's military record is unassailable. There is further ground for resentment in the fact that Cassio is a foreigner.

There is no difficulty then, as Kittredge states,

...in finding a motive for Iago, and this motive is not only human, but has a kind of foundation in reason and justice. In Iago's cankered nature, resentment for real or fancied injury brought with it boundless possibilities of crime. But Shakespeare has combined this with the motive that he found in Cinthio—lust; and to this he has added the suspicion that Othello is Emilia's lover.

Kittredge also points out that it is a common error among critics to assume that Iago's whole course of villainy is deliberate. Until the end of the first act he has no definite scheme in mind—only a general desire to be revenged. His plans take shape gradually, and their progress is carefully indicated. Kittredge sees this to be indicative that the villain is a deliberate opportunist who modifies his plans to fit each emergency. His wish is to supplant Cassio and to torment Othello, but

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62 Ibid. 63 Ibid., p. 1217.
he contemplates no tragic issue; nor is it clear to him until the third scene of Act III that both Cassio and Desdemona must die. Then, says Kittredge, he realizes that nothing else can prevent the exposure of his perfidy.  

In August Goll's article "Criminal Types in Shakespeare," we find what are, as far as can be ascertained, some original views on the character of Iago. Goll first says that no ordinary human logic can explain Iago's criminality. He has no injury to avenge, or no enmity to satisfy, or no inferiority to excuse him.

Goll realizes that Iago feels that he has been slighted, but he points out that considering the fact that he is only twenty-eight years of age, and has a keen intellect and a good reputation, he could, in a short time, have obtained a post similar to Cassio's.

Nor, says Goll, does he avenge himself because of being cast aside by Desdemona. There is only a single instance when he intimates that his mind has centered on Desdemona.

According to Goll, we must look away from any normal motive. As Shakespeare presents Iago we are confronted with the contradiction of how one, while proving to be worse than imaginable, enjoys the absolute confidence of his associates. Goll resolves this contradiction by explaining:

64 Ibid.
In the interminable mass of half-truths, dissimulations, and half lies that society hears, people find relief when now and then an individual does not hide his heart, but speaks his mind.\textsuperscript{66}

This is the sort of person Iago appears to be in the eyes of his friends.

In proceeding from Iago as he appears to Iago as he is, Goll says that he belongs to a class of "antipathetic cynic" criminals, whose hearts are controlled by their own egoism, and who have no conception of altruism. To Iago, specifically, the deep sympathetic tie between man and woman is nothing more than the expression of sensuality. Everything grand and exalted is nothing but affectation and lies.

In this light, Goll believes that it is easy to see that Iago wants to destroy the Moor because he is no longer first in importance to Othello. Also, he wants to destroy Othello's happiness.\textsuperscript{67}

In discussing his hate and persecution of Desdemona, Goll says that indirectly it is seen that he always imagines "sexual outcroppings" in others. The impulse that rules him he takes for granted rules everybody else to the same extent. That is why common courtesy in woman in his eyes is nothing but a "prologue to the history of lust."\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., p. 36
\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., p. 40
\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., p. 42.
But he would like most of all, says Goll, to take Desdemona for himself. If this is not possible, he must find satisfaction by seeing her ruined mentally and mistreated physically.

Goll further states that to keep up his many illicit relations Iago is in constant need of money. Consequently, he cuts down Emilia's havings and ruins Roderigo by borrowing from him and cheating him outright.

In Goll's opinion, it is clear that the physical machinery that motivates Iago, composed as it is of deeply lying instincts and hazy feelings, operates far below conscious existence. The surface indications reveal only unrest and some sort of hesitancy.

But when at last the mask is torn off before Emilia, the one who is closer to the miscreant than any other person, her mind becomes filled with terror and disgust because she, as perhaps the only one in the world, sees the link connecting Iago as he is and Iago as he appeared to be. The wild beast has always been there, and she cries out:

Villainy, villainy, villainy! I think upon't: I think: I smell't. O, villainy! I thought so then: I'll kill myself for grief; O, villany, villany!

In Hazelton Spencer's writings on Iago we find reflections of the writers of the early part of the twentieth century such as Henley

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69 Ibid.  
70 Ibid., p. 43.  
71 Ibid., p. 51.
and Hallett, in that Spencer believes that Coleridge not only ignored the expository function of the soliloquy, but discounted the professional jealousy explicitly mentioned in the opening scene. Also, says Spencer, Coleridge discounts the sexual jealousy which Shakespeare takes over from his source, adding Iago's suspicion of Othello with Emilia though he subordinates Iago's passion for Desdemona. According to Spencer, both motives are powerful incentives in real life, and while the second is despicable in this case, the first is not wholly ignoble.

Spencer could be classified as a member of what Stoll calls the "sentimentalists," for he believes, in essence, that Iago is led to his damnation by some uncontrollable fate. As he points out, there is nothing in the play to indicate that Iago sees at the outset where his vague idea of making trouble is going to lead him. The amazing success of his improvised plans encourages his self-confidence, and involves him more deeply than he has expected. In the end he finds himself fighting for his life. Horrible therefore as Iago's villainous course proves to be, Spencer believes we begin the play with a sympathy for him.

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\(^{73}\) Ibid.
In regard to the arguments that the plot of *Othello* is absurd because such a person as Othello would not act upon unsupported allegations, Spencer says perhaps it would be dubious as a novel, but in a play one must consider the conventions of the theatre.

Neither villainy or gullibility needed on the Elizabethan stage the motivation we expect in a contemporary psychological novel. Back of the Shakespearean villain lay centuries of English stage villainy. There were the Devils of medieval mystery plays, and the bad angels of morality plays, neither of which needed motivation. For an audience habituated to the machinations of a villain as essential to the plot of a serious play, a study of the cause of his conduct was little called for. 74

As for gullibility, Spencer points out that while the villain may or may not be foiled in the end, there is no point in introducing him unless at least one important character is going to be at least temporarily taken in by him. In a plot like that of *Othello*, it is the hero's business as a character in the play to be deceived.

Furthermore, says Spencer, Shakespeare has taken pains to make every step in Iago's scheming and every response of Othello plausible at the moment. And, as Spencer points out:

In the theatre where incessant attention is required of the audience as it is not of a reader, a convincing whole can be created out of a series of plausible moments. 75

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74 Ibid., p. 322.
75 Ibid., p. 323.
Parrott's reference to Iago as a tactician rather than a strategist seems to have had considerable influence, for two writers of the nineteen forties refer to the villain in those terms.

The first of these, John McCloskey, says that Iago's downfall is brought about not so much by the principle that a moral evil "corrupts the heart and undermines the judgement," as by the fact that Iago fails as a strategist, brilliant though he may be as a tactician, because his plot is pieced together as events proceed instead of having been planned in advance as a unified campaign. He is opportunistic enough to meet situations as they arise, but he cannot successfully anticipate events. Even as a soldier then, says McCloskey, who applies the actions of the military sphere to private life, he fails.

The next writer who shows evidence of having been influenced by Parrott, is Thomas Bowman, who in disagreeing with Stoll, regards Iago as an unusually malignant and harmful member of the human kingdom rather than a personification of the "powers of darkness." Bowman contends that Iago does not have the infallibility of incarnate evil. He makes unprofitable as well as profitable decisions in

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77 Ibid.

furthering his aims. As an illustration of this deficiency as a strategist, Bowman points to his making Emilia an accessory to appropriating the handkerchief when he is aware of her garrulousness. A demi-devil, says Bowman, would not have been so erring. 79

If we look at Iago from the formalistic point of view, keeping the moralities in mind, we can see him as the equivalent of the Vice who manipulates all the action until he is exposed at the end, or we may think of him as typical Machiavellian, all intrigue, egoism, and "virtue," who enjoys evil for its own sake. He has been called a villain out to justify himself against a set of circumstances that have combined to oppress him. Although literary historians have seen him in all three aspects, Theodore Spencer in his interpretation of Iago thinks of him as being compounded of three concepts of human nature that were familiar to Shakespeare and his age. The first is the concept of the evil man as an individualist, and the second, which is connected with the first, is the concept of the evil man as the incomplete man or the man who does not contain all the psychological levels that should make up a human being. The third is the concept of the difference between outer show and inner fact. 80

79 Ibid., 469.
In explaining his first concept, the evil man as an individualist, Spencer says that Othello's nobility and his control of his passion were directed to good purposes until the evil Iago got hold of him. Spencer says of Iago:

He is a man without passion; he is an embodiment of one layer of human activity which has no relation to any other layers; he is separated from ordinary human beings on both sides of his nature, the lower and the higher. He has no lust to link him with the animals and he has no capacity for seeing himself in relation to the state or the universal order of things. He is an unscrupulous individualist.  

Spencer's second concept, the evil man as the incomplete man, we find best expressed by Iago's speech to Roderigo in which he speaks of virtue and love, saying:

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; whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect of scion.  

The last phrase gives him away. From it, it is obvious that he actually knows nothing about love or lust. What he pretends to know of emotion he has merely borrowed from the talk and experiences of others. Lust is something that as a man of the world he has heard about, and so he

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81 Ibid., p. 123.

82 Ibid., p. 134.
attributes it to everybody, even himself since he wants to be like other people. He is in a sense an "emotional eunuch." 83

In expounding upon his third concept of Iago, the difference between outer show and inner fact, Spencer in a sense agrees with Coleridge's well-known phrase about Iago's soliloquies. Spencer feels that although we do not have to think of Iago as an abstract personification of evil, he does in the reasons that he gives for his villainous actions try to see himself in relation to ordinary human motives and behavior. The explanations which he gives, one after another, for his hatred of Othello are partly to make his behavior seem plausible, and partly to assure himself that he is justified. Of course none of these reasons are convincing in the opinion of Spencer.

As a further difference between appearance and reality in Iago, one may look to his early speeches to Roderigo when he describes himself as a thorough-going egoist. This is the familiar Elizabethan villainy, but Iago, developing it, goes on to tell us that the outward appearance he gives to the world bears no relation to the reality inside.

He says:

Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.  
In following him, I follow but myself;  
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,  
But seeming so, for my peculiar end;  
For when my outward action doth demonstrate

83 Ibid.
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to pick at. I am not what I am. 84

Thus we see how Spencer arrived at his interpretation of Iago
as being compounded of three concepts of human nature, and also how
he may have come to the conclusion that Shakespeare's vision of evil
probed very deep when he conceived Iago, for Spencer says that the
frightening thing about the Ensign is that from a point of view, he repre-
sents the Renaissance idea of the man whose reason controls his pas-
sions and yet he still is wholly bad. 85

In Edith Sitwell's interpretation of Iago, we see traces of the
influences of both Bradley and Stoll.

Like Stoll, she sees Iago as an inhuman creation, who never
speaks "above a mortal mouth." 86 In describing the villain she says:

Iago appears in a shrunken shape, with a dulled and hooded
eye, as the first tempter appeared in Eden. . . . He is a sub-
terranean devil. . . . His voice comes to us muffled by the
earth of the world and of his nature. . . . That is why it sounds
so small. But it is none the less deadly. Though ineffably
tainted by the world's evil he is so shut off from the world of
men--he who is shaping their lives--that he cannot reach them
by any words save those with a jet of poison in them. 87

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84 Ibid., p. 85.
85 Ibid.
86 Edith Sitwell, A Notebook on William Shakespeare, p. 104.
87 Ibid.
Sitwell points out the one phrase in which she believes that Iago acknowledges that he has sprung from a race of devils. In answer to Othello's

I looke downe towards his feet; but thats a fable
If that thou bee'st a divell I cannot kill thee. 88

comes Iago's

I bleed sir; but not killed. 89

Thus, according to Sitwell, we see Iago's race, his birth-place, and his home, for he is saying, "You see, he is right, I am a devil." 90

Sitwell, like Bradley, believes that Iago is passionless, and that this may be one reason why he wishes to injure mankind, who possesses the power to suffer and to feel—the power which he lacks. He seems to have a curiosity to see what will be the movements under pain of those extraordinary beings of an alien world in which there are passions and nobilities.

Sometimes, according to Sitwell, he even tries to emulate these feelings, as when he pretends to himself and Emilia that he knows jealousy. But even then, says Sitwell, the pretense breaks down, and we see the face behind his mask: it is that of pride. Or, as another example, in the first scene when he says of Othello, "Though I doe hate him as I doe hell-pains," Sitwell feels that he is disguising from

88 Ibid. 89 Ibid. 90 Ibid.
us that those pains are his climate. He is used to them, and they do not touch him as they would those who have hearts to be consumed. She says: "He would, indeed, hardly know the difference between those pains and the pleasures of heaven. For he is not a damned soul. He is a devil."\textsuperscript{91}

H. B. Charlton, in his interpretation of Iago, concurs with Bradley rather than Stoll, for he feels that Iago has to enter the community of the human race. He must have his own personality and his own aesthetic gratification in the structure of his evil creations.\textsuperscript{92}

Charlton interprets Coleridge's motiveless malignity to mean that Iago's evil-doing lacked intelligible causality in any rational response to the occasion. But Charlton believes, as Bradley before him believed, that Iago's malignity is propelled from within. He acts as he does to satisfy the cravings of his own person; and he tries to fashion circumstance to the form in which it will satisfy his own aesthetic and amoral nature.\textsuperscript{93}

Like Charlton, Frank Prentice Rand also disagrees with Stoll's interpretation of Iago, for Rand sees Iago as a human being motivated by jealousy. Rand calls our attention to the fact that by deed and by

\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., p. 105.
\textsuperscript{92}H. B. Charlton, \textit{Shakespearian Tragedy}, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., p. 140.
the First Folio editors he was designated a "villain." By his associates he was accepted as a rough but ready soldier in the field, a lively and witty man about town, bluntly outspoken but trustworthy, "honest Iago." 

Rand says that this obviously was not the real man, and he feels that we may to some degree see the real Iago through his soliloquies. The soliloquy was a convenient way to let the audience know a character's thoughts; therefore Rand says:

Thus when Iago talks to himself about the next step in his trickery, we await the event with confidence, but when he gets onto the subject of his motives we wonder if he knows what he is talking about. It seems best to disregard such enigmatical expressions. But this is not fair and is unnecessary. Iago actually explicitly states one motive and implies another and the two are not incompatible. 

The stated motive is jealousy. Iago speaks of jealousy of Othello twice. When speaking to Roderigo, he says:

I hate the Moor;  
And it is thought abroad that twixt my sheets  
'Has done my office. I know not if it be true.  
Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,  
Will do as if for surety. 

And later while speaking to Roderigo again he says:

95 Ibid., 156.  
96 Ibid.
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards. 97

It should be borne in mind that Iago is temperamentally both
envious and suspicious and as subject to jealousy as Othello. For
example, Rand cites what Iago tells Roderigo about his feeling toward
Cassio when he says:

He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly. 98

Thus Shakespeare must have wanted his readers to think either that
Iago is actually jealous, or that he is making an effort to make himself
think that he is.

The implied motive, says Rand, is sheer cussedness, but Iago
wears an ingratiating mask. This of course makes acceptable theatre.
But, there are times when even the liar must speak the truth, and must
lay aside his mask.

This brings up the question of Iago's honesty or dishonesty in his
search for motives. Are his conscious pretexts deliberate lies? Rand
in answering this question would have us realize that Iago may not be
as bright as he thinks himself to be, or as bright as we have thought
of him, but he must be too smart for such lies. He may not be
entirely satisfied with his justification, but it is reasonable to think
that he regards it as justification.

97Ibid. 98Ibid., 157.
Rand contends that scholars who subscribe to the concept of "motiveless malignity" have been hard put to establish Iago as a human being at all. They have tried, however. Rand says that some have called attention to his mental fallibility, his gross materialism, and his craving for power. Others have mentioned a certain irritability and an occasional hesitancy to act, while still others mention him as an incorrigible actor eventually intoxicated by his own success. Rand goes further by saying that if he is masking himself with jealousy, there is another indication of his human existence. It seems that he does not like to see himself as he is. In other words, he has a conscience. Under his cussedness there is a sense of right and wrong and at least a passing desire for justification in his own sight.99

It is difficult for Rand to think of Iago as having always been a masked malignity, for he says:

He could hardly have been the Iago we know when Emilia married him, or during the years when he was becoming honest Iago to the Venetians. He may have been born with a predisposition, but the cancerous growth was presumably gradual and its outbreak sudden. The immediately contributing cause may have been jealousy.100

Rand goes on to say that it is not surprising that Iago's ill will takes the form of spite, for that is the sort of person that he is. In the first scene Shakespeare gives Iago a real grievance, in consequence of

99Ibid., 159-160.
100Ibid., 160.
which he despises Cassio and hates the general. If this is not jealousy, says Rand, it is something like it.

Whether in respect to Othello and Emilia Iago has a grievance, he does not know, and says so. Of course, he is hardly one to be surprised or shocked by adultery, but jealousy does not depend upon that; it is much more likely to stem from an outraged sense of lordship, pride, and possessiveness. And even if Iago might have winked at misbehavior by Emilia with some Venetian of noble blood, he may still very well have been infuriated at the thought of her relationship with a Moor. Therefore, unless one insists that Iago is not human, it is hard to contend that jealousy is above him.

In spite of the fact that Rand sees Iago primarily as a jealous person, he also can see him as a villain and a character subject to unmitigated contempt. For even Iago realizes that what he is up to is treacherous and could never be confided to anyone—not even his gullible but forthright wife. This may have been partly because he was secretly ashamed of his jealousy, but this would not mean that he was not jealous, nor that he was not a villain.

Rand realizes, however, that the formula of jealousy will not solve all of the riddles of Iago's characterization, for he sees Iago as a varied if not multiple personality. To consider him jealous does not preclude considering him many other things besides. To declare him
human is not a simplification. It is because he is human that he is subject to jealousy; and it is because of this jealousy that he appears to be utterly ruthless. For, as Rand sees it:

To see jealousy through the comparable but contrasting experiences of Othello and Iago is to see it in focus as the most desperate and devastating passion of man. 101

As previously mentioned, the wide interest in psychology, medicine, and economics has influenced critics and writers to interpret literature in the light of their interest in these subjects. This has been responsible for diverse and unique deviations from the traditional interpretations of Iago.

Martin Wangh, in interpreting Iago's character in the light of Freudian psychology, dispels the theory which began with the eighteenth-century writer of an anonymous article in Essays by a Society of Gentlemen and has continued to be expounded by such recent writers as Kittredge and Tannenbaum, that Iago was motivated only by Cassio's preferment and Othello's relationship with Emilia. According to Wangh, the combination of such motives is irreconcilable. Consequently he concludes that the apparent motive is not the basic motive.

Wangh explains that jealousy grown to the proportion of paranoia is a clinical condition sufficient to effect the murder of Desdemona, but it is Othello whom Shakespeare depicts as the person afflicted. Wangh

101 Ibid., 161.
presents the view that the prime sufferer is Iago. It is he who is jealous of Desdemona and who hates her, for he loves Othello. This love, says Wangh, is never expressed in words, but its opposite is repeatedly stressed. From the beginning it is clear that Iago has only disdain for women.

In discussing the precipitating factors in Iago's psychopathology, Wangh points out that there seem to be no conflicts before the action. Only when the marriage is about to be consummated does Iago create an uproar. This action is repeated twice during the play, and each time it has the similar effect of disturbing the marital sexual relationship.

So far, says Wangh, we may assume only that a triangle exists. From all appearances Desdemona may be the object of Iago's affection. This may be simply an instance of competitive jealousy. But, Wangh, points out, if Iago is motivated by projective jealousy, the object of that jealousy should be his wife; and the manner of revenge should be to get even with Othello or to kill him. Since neither of these happens, we are left with delusional jealousy as the final possibility.

Delusional jealousy, as defined by Wangh in accordance with Freud's theories, represents an acidulated homosexuality and rightly

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102 Martin Wangh, "Othello: The Tragedy of Iago," Psychoanalytical Quarterly, XIX (June 16, 1950), 204.

103 Ibid., 205-206.
takes its position among the classical forms of paranoia. As an attempt
at defense against an unduly strong homosexual impulse it may, in a
man, be described in the formula, "I do not love him; she loves him."\textsuperscript{104}

Wangh calls attention to the repetition of Iago's declaration of
his hatred of Othello. However, he says, before accepting the expres-
sion of hate as paranoid, he has ruled out the possibility that there is
a rational basis for Iago's hatred. And in completing the previously
mentioned formula, Wangh points out that the evidence that Iago denies
his love by projecting the part into a woman is overwhelming, for
Iago's assertions that Desdemona loves the Moor are numerous.\textsuperscript{105}

Furthermore, says Wangh, Iago is driven to separate the pair,
and the wish being father to the thought, he accomplishes it by assert-
ing that Desdemona and Othello must tire of each other and that
Desdemona must love Cassio.

This shift from Othello to Cassio resembles a need to suspect
the woman in relation to all the men Iago himself is tempted to love.\textsuperscript{106}

Wangh also brings up Iago's lie about Cassio's dream, the first
purpose of which is to goad Othello into further jealousy. But, accord-
ing to Wangh, his fantasy is also an invention to satisfy his own uncon-
scious strivings. Wangh explains that lies have psychoanalytic inter-
est similar to fantasies and dreams. A lie told about a dream

\textsuperscript{104}Ibid., 206. \textsuperscript{105}Ibid., 207. \textsuperscript{106}Ibid.
combines two of these categories. In this instance it is accurate to consider the dream to be a lie and the lie a dream, thus a homosexual wish fulfillment. 107

Another writer in whose work we can see the influences of psychology is Harold C. Goddard, who accounts for the creation of Iago thus:

A character with a double personality in an earlier work may appear as two characters in a later one. The imaginative energy that created Hamlet did not cease functioning when Hamlet himself expired. With the deep conflict within him of masculine and feminine traits, he is a sort of unfulfilled promise of the Platonic man-woman. It is as if the tension between these poles of his nature sought an equilibrium too unstable to be maintained, so like a cell that bifurcates, Hamlet in the next world—that is, in Othello—divides into Desdemona and Iago. 108

Goddard explains that Hamlet is a paradoxical mixture of good and evil. Iago is close to pure evil; and Desdemona is close to pure good. Hamlet's most endearing traits are Desdemona's. His darker and more detestable ones—his suspicion, coarseness, sarcastic wit, critical intellect, sensuality and revenge—are all Iago's. 109

In discussing Iago's motives, Goddard seems to adhere to the ideas first expounded by Coleridge and later echoed by Bradley and others, in saying that the reasons Iago assigns for his hatred in the

107 Ibid., 210.
109 Ibid.
course of the play are not true motives. Goddard, adding a modern
turn to this old theory, believes that they are merely symptoms of a
deep underlying condition. According to Goddard, the psychology of
Iago is that of the "slave-with-brains" who aspires to power, yet at
heart is a slave. Emilia voices this when she calls Iago "some cogg-
ing cozening slave."  

Goddard conjectures that only some situation
or event early in Iago's life that produced a profound sense of injust-
tice or inferiority could have produced this twisted nature. Whatever
he began by being, however human his first motives, he ends by being
"an image of Death revenging itself on Life through destruction."

All critics have recognized Iago's intellect, and Goddard in
echoing this trait, says that Iago is perhaps the most terrific indict-
ment of pure intellect in the literature of the world. Goddard, how-
ever, originates a new thought on the matter of intellect in his suppo-
sition that Iago, if he had been of more limited intellect, might have
been literally a pyromaniac. At least, says Goddard, he exhibits
traits of that type of criminal, including a secret joy in being on the
scene of the conflagration he has kindled. But Goddard would have us
understand that if Iago is a moral pyromaniac, it is only morally that
he is mad, and whatever may be said of the fires he kindles in others,

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110 Ibid., p. 461.
111 Ibid.
the fire in his own veins is an icy fire, a union of intellect and hate, which generates cold revenge— the most annihilating of all alliances.

In his article "Dr. Iago and His Potions," Robert Heilman in an original interpretation of Iago establishes the fact that Iago's medical role is interesting. He points out that it comes naturally to our speech habits to call Othello in the last three acts a sick man. In one scene he has a literal illness; in two other scenes he suffers from a malaise on the borderline between the psychic and physical. According to Heilman these scenes are interrelated, and the ligaments that bind them are instructive.

When Othello falls into a trance in Act IV, Iago acts literally as a physician, diagnosing the case in the following way:

My lord is fall'n into an epilepsy. This is his second fit; he had one yesterday.

When Othello comes to, Iago proffers a combination of encouragement and chiding which resembles the psychic part of the medical function.

The doctor to whom Othello has entrusted himself does not exhibit his medical instinct in one case only. He shows an eye ever alert to human distemper. He notes Cassio's "infirmity"; he calls

112Ibid., p. 463.

113Robert Heilman, "Dr. Iago and His Potions," Virginia Quarterly Review, XXVIII (October, 1952), 570.
Roderigo a "sick soul"; and he defines Bianca's trouble, "the strumpet's plague." \(114\)

In each case Iago is clearly using his "patients." As Heilman points out, he is not healing Roderigo's wounds but making his general condition worse; he is not curing Cassio, but playing upon his infirmity; his prescription for Cassio's recovering his position compounds the existent fracture. This is not new; nor is it new that Iago pretends one thing and does another. But when we see that his pretenses are expressed in images and literal statements which convert him into the physician, we have an additional clue to his sinisterness. It is, says Heilman, more than a vaguely bad man pretending to a vague good; it is the trouble maker and the destroyer masking himself as the healer and the preserver.

Heilman calls to our attention that early in the play while Iago is at his task of administering potions, he defines his role when he says to Roderigo:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Make after him, poison his delight,} \\
\text{Proclaim him in the streets. Incense her kinsmen,} \\
\text{And though he in a fertile climate dwell,} \\
\text{Plague him with flies.} \quad \text{115}
\end{align*}
\]

With the words "poison" and "plague" Iago announces his trademarks, for throughout the play he knowingly administers poison and spreads

\(114\) Ibid., 573. \(115\) Ibid., 574.
a plague. And this, says Heilman, is the universal paradigm of evil, not just a fashion in villainy.

Shakespeare gives Iago unusual mastery and skills. He endows the villain with a vestige of moral controls, but with all the trappings of a profession in which those are axiomatic. Iago, according to Heilman, is given "charm," and "bedside manner"; he entertains gaily, and most of all he elicits confidence. In general, he has every gift needed by a physician, including intelligence.

Heilman sees Iago initially as an aggrieved human being who, whatever his own ills, can still minister to the ills of others. Then the physician gradually alters and reveals the poisoner; and at last the poisoner unfolds and there at the center is the asp. The last step--the transfusing of poisoner into asp--is a fine climax, says Heilman, for the reptile image with its irresistible association with treachery and debasement marks the evil-doer's ultimate loss of humanity.

Another interpretation of Iago's character which shows medicinal influences is Kenneth Burke's article, in which he writes on the cathartic nature of Iago's role. Burke reminds us that the Greek word katharma means that which is thrown away in cleansing, or the refuse, hence, says Burke, worthless fellow.

\[116 \text{Ibid., 575-576.} \quad 117 \text{Ibid., 576.} \quad 118 \text{Ibid., 581.}\]
With this term in mind, Burke notes that there are two main cathartic functions in Iago. The first regards the tension centering particularly in sexual love as property and ennoblement, since in reviling Iago the audience can forget that his transgressions are theirs. Burke sees in Iago, Othello, and Desdemona a tragic trinity of ownership, in that the property is human affections. Burke explains that Desdemona is owned vicariously by Othello, and Iago represents the threat implicit in such cherishing.\footnote{119}{Kenneth Burke, "Othello: An Essay to Illustrate a Method," \textit{The Hudson Review}, V (1951), 165-170.}

The next of Iago's cathartic functions which Burke sees is in regard to the audience's need of finding a visible localization for uneasiness in general, whether shaped by superhuman forces or by human forces interpreted as superhuman.\footnote{120}{Ibid., 170.}

These functions, says Burke, merge into another purely technical function. For if Iago had been one bit less rotten and unsleeping in his proddings, this play could not have continued at such a pitch. Until very near the end when things seem to move "of themselves," as the author needs but to actualize the potentialities already massed, Iago has goaded the plot forward step by step for the audience's villainous entertainment and filthy purgation.\footnote{121}{Ibid.}
In another article by Robert Heilman, we find a completely new and different approach to the study of Iago—through his economics.

Heilman calls our attention to the lines Iago addresses to Othello in his homily on values, such as "Good name...is the...jewel of their souls," or "Who steals my purse steals trash." These, says Heilman, are closely integrated into the drama and imply much of the character of Iago.

In Heilman's opinion, there are two stylistic lifelines between Iago's speech and the drama as a whole. First, Iago uses familiar terms such as jewel, makes poor or enriches to express the value of a good name. Furthermore, the play is sprinkled with such economic terms as riches, gold, sell, buy and prize, all of which constitute a precise unsentimental vocabulary for keeping before the reader the problem of values and of gain and loss.

The second link which Heilman sees is the verbal stratagem whose remarkableness is almost overshadowed by the use of familiar images of theft such as steals, filches, or robs. The previously mentioned images of economics and those of theft go well together, says Heilman, and offer Shakespeare a subtle way of leading the audience through action in the field of financial affairs without their knowing it.123

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123 Ibid., 556-557.
Heilman realizes that to call Iago the "Economic Man" would over-emphasize one aspect of him and under-emphasize others. But he believes that the term suggests the kind of self-revelation which Iago makes in the inner drama of exchange and values. This self-revelation begins in the opening scene in which Shakespeare gives Roderigo the utmost dramatic usefulness by providing us, through Iago's deception of him, with another view of Iago as deceiver and hence strengthening our sense of his technical competence as manipulator.

Up to now, says Heilman, Iago has been a man with an apparent grievance and a heart for revenge, but now the revenger is sinking into the calculating parasite. Iago says in a soliloquy:

Thus do ever make my fool my purse.
For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane
If I would time expend with such a snipe
But for my sport and profit. 124

Here Iago is literally pursuing "purse" and "profit" and his economics come into much sharper focus.

Heilman points out that Iago speaks and acts in two economic realms. The first of these, economics of character, is illustrated when he calls Roderigo "this poor trash of Venice," and the second, moral economies, is illustrated by his conversion of Roderigo's material poverty into moral poverty when he says, "How poor are they that have not patience."

124Ibid., 558.
Heilman, in looking into Iago's economic history, contends that it shows him to be both vulgar and vicious. He is not the picaro, but a plain thief, who has not the shadow of a motive to rob Roderigo. What we see is pure malice. If we assume this, the whole Roderigo line of action takes on a new dramatic utility, for as Heilman points out, if he acts without motive on Roderigo it is probable that he acts so toward Othello. Thus, in a way Heilman justifies Coleridge's "motiveless malignity." 125

On the subject of Iago's thefts Heilman says:

For the spiritual gracelessness of Iago, who is at once demonic and vulgar, Shakespeare has found an excellent dramatic formulation in the maneuvering of the thief. For Iago there are "thefts and thefts." His value and judgement not only shows the discernment of which he is capable but defines the perfection of thiefhood. For the finest pleasure, he must not merely rob, but must steal a thing of the highest value—not men's trash but the jewel of their souls. 126

In the Roderigo action, we see Iago as the petty, vulgar thief—the purse snatcher. This, says Heilman, shows his cash value side. But everywhere else he is the subtler thief, as when he "steals" the good name of Cassio and Desdemona, and the happiness of Othello.

Heilman further conceives of Iago as having a doubleness of character which partly explains his "terrifyingness." On one hand he employs a cynicism by which he reasons away the reality of the immaterial; on the other hand he has the intelligence to grasp the

125 Ibid., 560.  
126 Ibid., 566.
value to men and women of such an abstraction as a "good name." He is, says Heilman, at once the common grabbler and the diabolical thief of the spirit.

Heilman feels, however, that we need not doubt that Iago uses only short-term economics, for he is a plunger in psychological pleasures, and an emotional spendthrift who is ultimately a poor cost accountant. In this theory, Heilman might well have been influenced by Parrott, for he too believes that Iago by his failure to plan ahead, and his failure to see his own impoverishment and the loss of his good name, inherent in stealing from others, was using "short term economics" or "poor strategy."

The last interpretation of Iago to be discussed is that of Paul Siegel, who reflects influences of Stoll, with an added religious coloring.

Siegel points out that critics have seen in Othello a noble soul caught in the foils of a diabolical, cunning being, who brings him to doubt one in whom he had complete trust and faith, but they have failed to see the symbolic force of the play. To the Elizabethans, says Siegel, Desdemona, who in her forgiveness and perfect love is Christ-like, would have represented Christian values. Iago, who in his hatred and negativeness is reminiscent of Satan, would have represented

\[1^{127}\text{Ibid., 571.}\]
anti-Christian values. Furthermore, says Siegel, if we read Othello with our eyes open to the use of analogy and to the religious implications of such words as devil, damned, hell, heaven, and sin, the play becomes concerned not only with the loss of everything on earth that Othello held dear, but with the damnation of his soul as well.

And, the person who is responsible for Othello's damnation is the villainous Iago. Siegel, rephrasing Stoll, sees Iago as a serpent in Othello's Eden, who at the sight of the happy Moor and his bride expresses with a Satanic malice his intention of destroying their harmony. When Iago succeeds in getting Othello to accept his views about Desdemona and to accept him as his servant, he has Othello completely under his evil power. This, says Siegel, is a terrifying reminder of the fall of Adam into the hands of Satan.

However, Siegel points out, Othello cannot rest easily in his pact with the devil. But each time he voices his regret, or is about to succumb to Desdemona's sweetness, Iago is there to remind him of his dedication to revenge, and to overcome the influences of Desdemona as the bad angel overcomes the good angel in the old morality plays.

Just, says Siegel, as the devil does not concentrate upon the temptation of only one person, Iago does not try his wiles only upon

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Othello, but on Desdemona, Cassio, and Roderigo as well. Desdemona refuses allegiance with him, and Cassio, after having atoned for his weaknesses, at the conclusion gains an even higher place than the one he had lost, just "as all sons of Adam who repent from their sins gain a higher place than they lost when they sinned in Adam." Roderigo, however, succumbs to Iago's ability to use his sensual desires, and he is led to damnation.

According to Siegel, Iago's seeming victory is seen to be like all victories of the devil, a pyrric victory. Although he triumphs over Othello, it is demonstrated that his values cannot triumph. Also, there is in a sense, says Siegel, an element of dramatic justice which helps to reconcile us to the damnation of Othello, for we see "a divine power passing merited judgment upon all." Siegel says:

He Iago is indeed betrayed by the treachery of Emilia, who had been devoted to him, a treachery that is in reality a higher loyalty—as she says "Tis proper I obey him, but not now" and has "engines," instruments of torture, ingeniously contrived "cunning cruelty that torment him much and hold him long," devised for him.

These torments, concludes Siegel, are merely the extreme continuation of torments he has suffered in life, and the temporal prelude to the eternal torments of hell to which he returns.

After having examined the character interpretations of Iago expounded by the three groups of critics into which the twentieth

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129 Ibid., 1076.  
130 Ibid., 1077.  
131 Ibid., 1077.
century can be divided, we see that each group has followed definite trends and influences.

The earlier writers of the century seem to have been influenced by a reaction against the austerity of the nineteenth-century critics, with revolts against Coleridge's "motiveless malignity" especially noticeable. In this reactionary writing of critics such as Henley, Hallett and Hadow, we find the theory that Iago, as he expresses in his soliloquies, is truly motivated to perform his diabolical acts by Cassio's preferment, and Othello's intimacies with Emilia.

During the second, third, and fourth decades of the century, we find that the interpretations of Iago were influenced chiefly by two leading critics, Bradley and Stoll, who by taking some parts of the interpretations of their predecessors of the nineteenth century and adding to them, came up with rather detailed and complete analyses.

Bradley, while not completely accepting Coleridge's idea that Iago is a being who hated good simply because it is good and does evil purely for itself, does accept this as being nearer the truth than the idea that Iago is simply a man who has been slighted and must revenge himself. However, Bradley believes in looking into the "inner man," and by so doing concludes that Iago's actions may be explained by his keen sense of superiority, contempt of others, and enjoyment of action.
Critics of the century who were largely influenced by Bradley include S. A. Brooke, Nicoll, and Charlton, with Edith Sitwell showing some Bradley influences, though she is predominantly like Stoll.

Stoll in many respects agrees with Coleridge in his interpretations. As we have seen, he conceives of Iago as a passionless fiend bordering on the inhuman, who has no motivation except pure hatred. Stoll also believes that Iago's soliloquies are merely trumped-up reasons to explain his hatred.

Critics who have taken their interpretations largely from ideas expounded by Stoll include Schücking and Sitwell, with Schücking adhering strictly to Stoll's interpretation except for the soliloquies, which he believes are employed by the dramatist to give Iago an excess of motives.

A group of critics who deviated from the ideas of Bradley and Stoll includes Tannenbaum, Kittredge, and Parrott, each of whom attributes Iago's actions to the motives set forth in his soliloquies, and each of whom is little concerned with the inner workings of his personality. Of these three writers, Parrott, who conceived of Iago as a brilliant tactician but a wretched strategist, has wielded the most influence, with later writers such as John McCloskey and Thomas Bowman echoing his idea.
In the writings of the third group of critics of the twentieth century—the post-war critics—we find some scattered traces of traditional interpretations as set forth by previous eminent critics, but there is no definite line of interpretation or school of influence which can be traced. Rather, these critics were influenced by current interest in subject which seem only remotely applicable to Shakespeare, or indeed to the field of literature in general.

Of these currently popular subjects psychology, which has been related to the interpretation of Iago through the writings of Martin Wangh and Harold C. Goddard, has been responsible for some of the most individual and unorthodox interpretations.

The interest in another currently popular field—medicine—has been manifest through the interpretations of Kenneth Burke and Robert Heilman, of whom the latter also correlated the third of the subjects of current interest—economics—with an interpretation of Iago. Finally to the works of these writers we add the writing of Paul Siegel, in which is manifest a religious influence.

From all of these studies of the critics of the twentieth century, we can see that it would be impossible to incorporate their various opinions into one or even two all-inclusive interpretations of Iago's character. This, however, does not necessarily mean that each critic could not be correct in his views, for interpretation, once
difficulties of medium are disposed of, is mainly a study in emphasis, and in a character so artfully designed as Iago, there are numerous points for emphasis, many of which the critics of the twentieth century brought out for the first time.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Upon the first glance at the numerous interpretations of Iago's character expounded since the eighteenth century, when Shakespearean character interpretations first became popular, we are overwhelmed with what seems to be an irreconcilable group of interpretations. When we find ourselves caught in this maze, at times we may say as Christopher North said—the character "is a riddle." But after having examined closely the interpretations as expounded by the critics of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, with special emphasis upon the twentieth-century interpretations and their relation to or deviation from those of the two preceding centuries, we see that there are definite schools of interpretations, trends of thought, and influences on interpretations, which greatly simplify the problem of Iago, and some of them can be followed through the years to the interpretations of the present century.

The writings having the least amount of influence on subsequent interpretations of Iago were those of the eighteenth century, for whereas writers such as Johnson and Warburton may receive credit for fostering an interest in Shakespearean character study, their
actual interpretations of Iago were very general in scope and failed to recognize the controversial points in his character which were so widely discussed in future centuries. However, there was a trend of thought even in these general interpretations—Shakespeare was lauded as being the perfect character creator, and Iago was excused for his hostility by various methods of reasoning.

The critics of the nineteenth century, like those of the eighteenth, recognized Iago as a character created through Shakespeare's ability to transfer his insight into character into words and actions. But on the point of the actual interpretation of the character of Shakespeare's most villainous villain, the nineteenth-century critics were strongly opposed to the "justification policy" of the preceding century. Rather, they, analyzing the character more completely and delving into his motives, passions, and intellectual machinations, adhere to the theory that Iago is a motiveless, passionless fiend. The chief exponent of this theory is Coleridge, whose conception of Iago's soliloquies as "the motive hunting of a motiveless malignity," influenced writers of the nineteenth century such as Dowden, Brandes, Hazlitt, and Hudson. These writers, who show Coleridgean influence in almost every phase of their interpretations, constitute the first definite school of interpretations which can be traced among writers who have expounded theories on Iago.
Some few critics of the nineteenth century, however, such as Spence and Maginn, did not rebel against the ideas set forth by eighteenth-century writers, and while recognizing Iago's super-intellectual villainy, they justify the villain's deeds by giving him a motive such as Cassio's preferment, and by saying that he was led further into his diabolical actions than he had intended.

Both of these trends of interpretations—the one set by Coleridge and the one following eighteenth-century ideas—were to greatly influence the critics of the twentieth century. Coleridge, however, was to be the dominant nineteenth century influence on the twentieth century critics, for he was to affect their criticism in both a positive and negative manner.

With the advent of the twentieth century came a flourish in studies of Iago. Many new and original theories were expounded, but there were still numerous interpretations showing influences from critics of the previous centuries.

The first group of writers of the twentieth century, which has previously been designated as the early writers, is composed of Hallett, Henley, and Hadow. Their theory, which seems to come as a reaction against the Coleridgean theory, originated in the eighteenth century, for they believe that Iago, as he expresses in his soliloquies, is logically motivated to perform his evil deeds.
A fourth member of this group of early writers, Masefield, while following his immediate predecessors in giving Iago motives, also shows some influence from the Coleridgean school, for like Brandes, he believes that Shakespeare saw in Iago an image like life itself.

The final member of the group of early writers of the twentieth century, Tucker Brooke, in his comparison of Iago with Sir John Falstaff, follows the eighteenth-century tendency to justify and romanticize the villain.

The second group of writers of the twentieth century, as an entire group, show no dominant influence from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. Rather, these writers of the second, third, and fourth decades of the century were predominantly influenced by two leading critics of their own century, Bradley and Stoll, who by taking parts of the interpretations of the writers of the preceding century and modifying or adding to them developed the most complex theories which have been advanced up to the present time.

Bradley's interpretation of the villain is the genesis of a school of interpretations which places emphasis on the "inner man," and which believes that Iago's actions may be explained by the fact that he has been at last tempted to let loose certain forces which were closed up within him.
In his theory concerning Iago's motivations Bradley partially agrees with Coleridge, for although he does not accept Coleridge's idea that Iago is motivated simply by a desire to do evil, he does deny that a desire for revenge was the principal factor in causing his villainy.

Critics of the century whose writings manifest Bradley's influence include S. A. Brooke, Nicoll, and Charlton. Only Brooke shows any influence traceable to the Coleridgean school of the nineteenth century.

Stoll, however, largely agrees with Coleridge, for he conceives of Iago as a devil in the flesh who is governed by intellect rather than passion, and who is motivated by pure hatred. As for Iago's soliloquies, Stoll sees them merely as excuses that the villain has thought up to justify his hatred of mankind.

Critics who have taken their theories on Iago's character largely from ideas expounded by Stoll include Schücking, Sitwell, and Theodore Spencer. Schücking follows Stoll's interpretation except for the ideas on the soliloquies which he sees as the dramatist's device for giving Iago an excess of motives. Spencer transfers Stoll's ideas into his own conception of Iago—that the villain is compounded of three concepts of human nature that were familiar to Shakespeare and his age: the concept of the evil man as an individualist, the concept of the evil
man as the incomplete man, and the concept of the difference between outer show and inner fact.

The influence of the eighteenth-century critics and those of the nineteenth century who did not follow Coleridge was not entirely lost on the writers of the second, third, and fourth decades of the twentieth century, for a group of critics who deviated from the ideas of Coleridge, Bradley, or Stoll includes Tannenbaum, Kittredge, Rand, and Parrott. These writers, like the early writers of their own century, attribute Iago's actions to the motives set forth in his soliloquies, and are little concerned with his "inner complexities." Of these writers the most influential is Parrott, who thought of Iago as being a brilliant tactician but a wretched strategist, for his idea has been echoed in the theories of later writers such as John McCloskey and Thomas Bowman.

The last group of writers of the twentieth century--the post-war writers--show the least influence from the eighteenth or nineteenth century of any of the three groups into which the twentieth century may be divided. We find some scattered traces of traditional interpretations in this period, but there is no definite trend in thought or school of influence which can be traced from the preceding centuries. Rather, the writings of these critics manifest the influence of a current interest in popular subjects such as psychology, medicine, economics, and religion.
Martin Wangh, in interpreting Iago's character in the light of Freudian psychology, does not adhere to any of the ideas of the traditional interpretations; rather in his belief that Iago was motivated by his love of Othello instead of by Cassio's preferment or Othello's relationship with Emilia, he dispels a traditional theory which began in the eighteenth century and has continued to be expounded by twentieth century writers such as Kittredge and Tannenbaum.

Goddard, who also interprets Iago from a psychological standpoint, believes that Iago acts as he does because some situation or event early in his life produced in him a profound sense of injustice or inferiority. Echoing Coleridge and Bradley, he says that the reasons Iago assigns for his hatred are not true motives, but are merely symptoms of a deep underlying condition.

The influence from the field of medicine is shown in the interpretations of Kenneth Burke and Robert Heilman. Burke sees a cathartic nature in Iago's role, whereas Heilman sees him as assuming the role of a physician, from which he becomes a poisoner and finally an asp. Both of these conceptions of the villain are original and show no influence from previous writers.

Heilman, in another article on Iago, relates economics to the study of the villain's character. In this article Heilman shows evidence of having been influenced by Coleridge's "motiveless malignity," and by Parrott's idea of the villain as a poor strategist.
The last writer of the post-war era, Paul Siegel, in his interpretation of Iago echoes Stoll with an added religious coloring, for he sees Iago as a Satan representing anti-Christian values.

After having traced the major influences and the schools of thought in interpretations of Iago, we must conclude that the problem of characterization is not nearly so puzzling as it first seems, for instead of being faced with as many interpretations as there are critics, we see that the writings of each generation of critics, with the exception perhaps of the post-war writers, manifest the influence of the eighteenth century in justifying the villain's actions, the nineteenth century in depriving him of all motives, or the twentieth century in analyzing each complex part of his personality. Consequently the voluminous amounts of material written in interpreting Iago's character should not frustrate us or deter us from our enjoyment of Iago as a great character, or from enjoyment of Shakespeare as his creator. Rather, they should add to our appreciation of the character's individual tone and manner, his expression, and his manifestation of Shakespeare's life-giving touch which made Iago alive and immortal.
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