

Rymer on Othello

Othello: A Bloody Farce by THOMAS RYMER

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THE FABLE

Othello, a Blackmoor Captain, by talking of his Prowess and Feats of War, makes Desdemona a Senator's Daughter to be in love with him; and to be married to him, without her Parents knowledge; And having preferred Cassio, to be his Lieutenant, (a place which his Ensign Jago sued for) Jago in revenge, works the Moor into a Jealousy that Cassio Cuckolds him: which he effects by stealing and conveying a certain Handkerchief, which had, at the Wedding, been by the Moor presented to his Bride. Hereupon, Othello and Jago plot the Deaths of Desdemona and Cassio, Othello Murders her, and soon after is convinced of her Innocence. And as he is about to be carried to Prison, in order to be punish'd for the Murder, He kills himself.

What ever rubs or difficulty may stick on the Bark, the Moral, sure, of this Fable is very instructive.

1. First, This may be a caution to all Maidens of Quality how, without their Parents consent, they run away with Blackamoors.

Secondly, This may be a warning to all good Wives, that they look well to their Linnen.

Thirdly, This may be a lesson to Husbands, that before their Jealousie be Tragical, the proofs may be Mathematical.

Cinthio affirms that She was not overcome by a Womanish [132] * Appetite, but by the Vertue of the Moor. It must be a good-natur'd Reader that takes Cinthio's word in this case, tho' in a Novel. Shakespear, who is accountable both to the Eyes, and to the Ears, And to convince the very heart of an Audience, shews that Desdemona was won, by hearing Othello talk,

OTHELLO: ----*I spoke of most disastrous chances,
of Moving accidents, by flood and field;*

*of hair-breadth scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach;
of being taken by the insolent foe;
and sold to slavery: of my redemption thence;
and portents in my Travels History:
wherein of Antars vast, and Desarts idle,
rough Quarries, Rocks, and Hills, whose heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak, such was my process:
and of the Cannibals that each others eat:
the Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
do grow beneath their shoulders---* (1. iii. 134-45)

This was the Charm, this was the philtre, the love-powder that took the Daughter of this Noble Venetian. This was sufficient to make the Black-amoor White, and reconcile all, tho' there had been a Cloven-foot into the bargain. [133]

Shakespear in this Play calls 'em the supersubtle Venetians. Yet examine throughout the Tragedy there is nothing in the noble Desdemona, that is not below any Countrey Chamber-maid with us. And the account he gives of their Nobelman and Senate, can only be calculated for the latitude of Gotham.

The Character of that State is to employ strangers in their Wars; But shall a Poet thence fancy that they will set a Negro to be their General; or trust a Moor to defend them against the Turk? With us a Black-amoor might rise to be a Trumpeter; but Shakespear would not have him less than a Lieutenant-General. With us a Moor might marry some little drab, or Small-coal Wench: Shake-spear, would provide him the Daughter and Heir of some great Lord, or Privy-Councillor: And all the Town should reckon it a very suitable match: Yet the English are not bred up with that hatred and aversion to the Moors, as are the Venetians, who suffer by a perpetual Hostility from them,

Littora littoribus contraris.

Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lye; And, certainly, never was any Play fraught, like this of *Othello*, with improbabilities.

The Characters or Manners, which are the second part in a Tragedy, are not less unnatural and improper, than the Fable was improbably and absurd.

Othello is made a Venetian General. We see nothing done by him, nor related concerning him, that comports with the condition of a General, or, indeed, of a Man, unless the killing himself, to avoid a

death the Law was about to inflict upon him. When his Jealousy had wrought him up to a resolution of's taking revenge for the suppos'd injury. He sets Jago to the fighting part, to kill Cassio; And chuses himself to murder the silly Woman his Wife, that was like to make no resistance.

His Love and his Jealousie are no part of a Souldiers Character, unless for Comedy.

But what is most intolerable is Jago. He is no Black-amoor Souldier, so we may be sure he should be like other Souldiers of our acquaintance; yet never in Tragedy, nor in Comedy, nor in Nature was a Souldier with his Character; take it in the Authors own words; [134]

EM:---*some Eternal Villain,
Some busie, and insinuating Rogue,
Some cogging, couzening Slave, to get some Office.*
(IV. ii. 131-3).

Horace Describes a Souldier otherwise:
*Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer.**

*["Active, irascible, unyielding, fierce." From Horace's Art of Poetry (121).
Horace (65-8 B.C.) is here urging consistency and probability in
characterization,
and by illustration remarks that an Achilles should have these military
qualities.]*

Shakespear knew his Character of Jago was inconsistent. In this very Play he pronounces,

*If thou dost deliver more or less than Truth,
-----Thou are no Souldier.*(II. iii. 211-12).

This he knew, but to entertain the Audience with something new and surprising, against common sense, and Nature, he would pass upon us a close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal, instead of an open-hearted, frank, plain-dealing Souldier, a character constantly worn by them for some thousands of years in the World.

Nor is our Poet more discreet in his Desdemona, He had chosen a Souldier for his Knave: And a Venetian Lady is to be the Fool.

This Senators Daughter runs away to (a Carriers Inn) the Sagittary, with a Black-amoor: is no sooner wedded to him, but the very night she Beds him, is importuning and teizing him for a young smock-fac'd

Lieutenant, Cassio. And tho' she perceives the Moor Jealous of Cassio, yet will she not forbear, but still rings Cassio, Cassio in both his Ears.

Roderigo is the Cully of Jago, brought in to be murdered by Jago,[135] that Jago's hands might be the more in Blood, and be yet the more abominable Villain: who without that was too wicked on all Conscience; And had more to answer for, than any Tragedy, or Furies could inflict upon him. So there can be nothing in the characters, either for the profit, or to delight an Audience.

The third thing to be considered is the Thoughts. But from such Characters, we need not expect many that are either true, or fine, or noble.

And without these, that is, without sense or meaning, the fourth part of Tragedy, which is the expression can hardly deserve to be treated on distinctly. The verse rumbling in our Ears are of good use to help off the action.

In the Neighing of an Horse, or in the growling of a Mastiff, there is a meaning, there is an lively expression, and, may I say, more humanity, than many times in the Tragical flights of Shakespear.

Step then amongst the Scenes to observe the Conduct in this Tragedy.

The first we see are Jago and Roderigo, by Night in the Streets of Venice. After growling a long time together, they resolve to tell Brabantio that his Daughter is run away with the Black-a-moor. Jago and Roderigo were not of quality to be familiar with Brabantio, nor had any provocation from him, to deserve a rude thing at their hands. Brabantio was a Noble Venetian one of the Sovereign Lords, and principal persons in the Government, Peer to the most Serene Doge, one attended with more state, ceremony and punctillio, than any English Duke, or Nobelman in the Government will pretend to. This misfortune in his Daughter is so prodigious, so tender a point, as might puzzle the finest Wit of the most supersubtle Venetian to touch upon it, or break the discovery to her Father. See then how delicately Shakespear minces the matter:

ROD. *What ho, Brabantio, Signior Brabantio, ho.*

JAGO. *Awake f what ho, Brabantio,*

Thieves, thieves, thieves:

Look to your House, your Daughter, and your Bags

Thieves, thieves.

BRABANTIO at a Window.

BRA. *What is the reason of this terrible summons? [136]*

What is the matter there?

ROD. *Signior, is all your Family within?*

JAGO. *Are your Doors lockt?*

BRA. *Why, wherefore ask you this?*

JAGO. *Sir, you are robb'd, for shame put on your Gown,*

Your Heart is burst, you have lost half your Soul,

Even now, very now, an old black Ram

Is tuppung your white Ewe: arise, arise,

Awake the snorting Citizens with the Bell,

Or else the Devil will make a Grandsire of you, arise I say. (1.i.79-93)[137].

But besides the Manners to a Magnifico, humanity cannot bear that an old Gentleman in his misfortune should be insulted over with such a rabble of Skoundrel language, when no cause or provocation.

Yet thus it is on our Stage, this is our School of good manners, and the Speculum Vitae.

But our Magnifico is here in the dark, nor are yet his Robes on: attend him to the Senate house, and there see the difference, see the effects of Purple.

So, by and by, we find the Duke of Venice with his Senators in Council, at Midnight, upon advice that the Turks, or Ottamites, or both together, were ready in transport Ships, put to Sea, in order to make a Descent upon Cyprus. This is the posture, when we see Brabantio, and Othello join them. By their Conduct and manner of talk, a body must strain hard to fancy the Scene at Venice; And not rather in some of our Cinq-ports, where the Baily and his Fisher-men are knocking their heads together on account of some Whale; or some terrible broil upon the Coast. But to shew them true Venetians, the Maritime affairs stick not long on their hand; the publick may sink or swim. They will sit up all night to hear a Doctors Commons, Matrimonial, Cause. And have the Merits of the Cause at large laid open to 'em, that they may decide it before they Stir. What can be pleaded to keep awake their attention so wonderfully?

Never, sure, was form of pleading so tedious and so heavy, as this [138] whole Scene, and midnight entertainment. Take his own words: says the Respondent.

OTH. *Most potent, grave, and reverend Sigmors,*

My very noble, and approv'd good Masters:

That I have tone away this old mans Daughter;

It is most true: true, I have Married her,

The very front and head of my offending,

Hath this extent, no more: rude I am in my speech.

*And little blest with the set phrase of peace,
 For since these Arms of mine had seven years pith,
 Till now some nine Moons wasted, they have us'd
 Their dearest action in the Tented Field:
 And little of this great World can I speak,
 More than pertains to Broils and Battail,
 And therefore little shall I grace my Cause,
 In speaking of my self; yet by your gracious patience
 I would a round unravish'd Tale deliver,
 Of my whole course of love, what drugs, what charms
 What Conjuraton, and what might Magick,
 (for such proceedings am I charg'd withal)
 I won his Daughter. (1. iii. 76-94).*

One might rather think the novelty, and strangeness of the case prevailed upon them: no, the Senators do not reckon it strange at all. Instead of starting at the Prodigy, every one is familiar with Desdemona, as he were her own natural Father, rejoice in her good fortune, and wish their own several Daughters as hopefully married. Should the Poet have provided such a Husband for an only Daughter of any noble Peer in England, the Black-amoor must have chang'd his Skin, to look our House of Lords in the Face. [139]

For the Second Act, our Poet having dispatcht his affairs at Venice, shews the Action next (I know not how many leagues off) in the Island of Cyprus. The Audience must be there too: And yet our Bays had it never in his head, to make any provision of Transport Ships for them. [142].

But pass we to something of a more serious air and Complexion. Othello and his Bride are the first Night, no sooner warm in Bed together, but a Drunken Quarrel happening in the Garison, two Souldiers Fight; And the General rises to part the Fray: He swears.

*OTHEL. Now by Heaven,
 My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
 And passion, having my best judgment cool'd,
 Assays to lead the way: if once I stir,
 Or do but lift this arm, the best of you
 Shall sink in my rebuke: give me to know
 How this foul rout began; who set it on,
 And he that is approv'd in this offence,
 Tho' he had twin'd with me both at birth,
 Should lose me: what, in a Town of War,
 Yet wild, the peoples Hearts brimful of fear,*

*To manage private, and domestick quarrels,
In Night, and on the Court, and guard of safety,
'Tis Monstrous, Jago, who began?*
(II. iii. 196-209)

In the days of yore, Souldiers did not swear in this fashion. What should a Souldier say farther, when he swears, unless he blaspheme? action shou'd speak the rest. What follows must be *ex ore gladii*; He is to rap out an Oath, not Wire-draw and Spin it out: by the style one might judge that Shakespears Souldiers were never bred in a [145] Camp, but rather had belong'd to some Affidavit-Office. Consider also throughout this whole Scene, how the Moorish General proceeds in examining into this Rout; No Justice Clod-pate could go on with more Phlegm and deliberation. The very first night that he lyes with the Divine Desdemona to be thus interrupted, might provoke a Mans Christian Patience to swear in another style. But a Negro General is a Man of strange Mettle. Only his Venetian Bride is a match for him. She understands that the Souldiers in the Garison are by th' ears together: And presently she at midnight, is in amongst them.

DESD. *What's the matter there?*
OTHEL. *All's well now Sweeting---*
Come away to Bed---
(II. ii. 243-5)

In the beginning of this second Act, before they had lain together, Desdemona was said to be, our Captains Captain; Now they are no sooner in Bed together, but Jago is advising Cassio in these words.

JAGO. Our Generals Wife is now the General, I may say so in this respect, for that he hath devoted, and given up himself to the contemplation, mark, and devotement of her parts and graces. Confess your self freely to her, importune her; she'll help to put you in your place again: she is so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition, that she holds it a vice in her goodness, not to do more than she is requested. This broken joint between you and her Husband, intreat her to splinter---

(II. iii. 304-13)

And he says afterwards.

JAGO. *'Tis most easie
The inclining Desdemona to subdue,
In any honest suit. She's fram'd as fruitful,*

*As the free Elements: And then for her
To win the Moor, were't to renounce his Baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soul is so enfetters'd to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list: [146]
Even as her appetite shall play the God
With his weak junction---*
(II. iii. 328-37).

This kind of discourse implies an experience and long conversation, the Honey-Moon over, and a Marriage of some standing. Would any man, in his wits, talk thus of a Bridegroom and Bride the first night of their coming together?

Yet this is necessary for our Poet; it would not otherwise serve his turn. This is the source, the foundation of his Plot; hence is the spring and occasion for all the Jealousie and bluster that ensues.

Nor are we in better circumstances for Roderigo. The last thing said by him in the former Act was,

ROD. *I'll go sell all my Land.* (1. iii. 376).

A fair Estate is sold to put money in his Purse, for this adventure. And lo here, the next day.

ROD. *I do follow here in the Chace, not like a Hound that hunts, but one that fills up the cry: My Money is almost spent. I have been tonight exceedingly well cudgeli'd, I think the issue will be, I shall have so much experience for my pains, and so no Money at all, and with a little more wit return to Venice.* (II. iii. 352-7).

The Venetian squire had a good riddance for his Acres. The Poet allows him just time to be once drunk, a very conscionable reckoning! [147].

Cassio having escaped the Storm comes on shoar at Cyprus, that night gets Drunk, Fights, is tum'd out from his Command, grows sober again, takes advice how to be restored, is all Repentance and Mortification: yet before he sleeps, is in the Morning at his Generals door with a noise of Fiddles, and a Droll to introduce him to a little Mouth-speech with the Bride.

CASSIO. *Give me advantage of some brief discourse
With Desdemona alone*

. EM. *Pray you come in,
I will bestow you, where you shall have time
To speak your bosom freely*
(III. i. 52-5)

So, they are put together: And when he had gone on a good while speaking his bosom, Desdemona answers him.

DES. *Do not doubt that, before Emilia here,
I give thee warrant of thy place; assure thee,
If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it,
To the last article---* (III. iii. 19-22).

Then after a ribble rabble of fulsome impertinence. She is at her Husband slap dash:

DESD. *Good love, call him back.*
OTHEL. *Not now, sweet Desdemona, some other time*
. DESD. *But shall't shortly?*
OTHEL. *The sooner, sweet, for you.*
DESD. *Shall't be to'night at Supper?*
OTHEL. *No, not tonight.*
DESD. *To-morrow Dinner then?*
OTHEL. *I shall not dine at home,
I meet the Captains at the Citadel.*
DESD. *Why then to morrow night, or Tuesday morn,
Or night, or Wednesday morn?* (III. iii. 55-62).

After forty lines more, at this rate, they part, and then comes the wonderful Scene, where Jago by shrugs, half words, and ambiguous reflections, works Othello up to be Jealous. One might think, after [148] what we have seen, that there needs no great cunning, no great poetry and address to make the Moor Jealous. Such impatience, such a rout for a handsome young fellow, the very morning after her Marriage must make him either to be jealous, or to take her for a Changeling, below his Jealousie. After this Scene, it might strain the Poets skill to reconcile the couple, and allay the Jealousie. Jago now can only actum agere, and vex the audience with a nauseous repetition.

Whence comes it then, that this is the top scene, the Scene that raises Othello above all other Tragedies on our Theatres? It is purely from the Action; from the Mops and the Mows, the Grimace, the Grins and Gesticulation. Such scenes as this have made all the World run after Harlequin and Scaramuccio.

Othello the night of his arrival at Cyprus, is to consummate with Desdemona, they go to Bed. Both are rais'd and run into the Town amidst the Souldiers that were a fighting: then go to Bed again, that morning he sees Cassio with her; She importunes him to restore Cassio. Othello shews nothing of the Souldiers Mettle: but like a tedious, drawling, tame Goose, is gaping after any paultrey insinuation, labouring to be jealous; And catching at every blown surmize. [149]

JAGO. *My Lord, I see you are moved.*

OTH. *No, not much moved.*

Do not think but Desdemona is honest.

JAG. *Long live she so, and long live you to think so.*

OTH. *And yet how Nature erring from it self,*

JAGO. *I, There's the point: as to be bold with you,*

Not to affect many proposed Matches

Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,

Wherein we see, in all things. Nature tends,

Fye, we may smell in such a will most rank,

Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural

(III. iii. 228-37)

The Poet here is certainly in the right and by consequence the foundation of the Play must be concluded to be Monstrous; And the constitution, all over, to be most rank,

Foul disporportion, thoughts unnatural.

Which instead of moving pity, or any passion Tragical and Reasonable, can produce nothing but horror and aversion, and what is odious I and grievous to an Audience. After this fair Mornings work, the Bride enters, drops a Curse.

DESD. *How now, my dear Othello,*

Your Dinner, and the generous Islanders

By you invited, do attend your presence.

OTH. *I am to blame.*

DESD. *Why is your speech so faint? Are you not well.*

OTH. *I have a pain upon my Fore-head, dear.*

(III. iii. 283-8)

Michael Cassio came not from Venice in the Ship with Desdemona, nor till this Morning could be suspected of an opportunity with her. And 'tis now but Dinner time; yet the Moor complains of his Forehead.

He might have set a Guard on Cassio, or have lockt up Desdemona, or have observ'd their carriage a day or two longer. He is on other occasions phlegmatick enough: this is very hasty. But after Dinner we have a wonderful flight: [150]

OTHEL. *What sense had I of her stoln hours of lust?
I saw't not, thought it not, it harm' d not me:
I slept the next night well, was free and merry,
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips---*
(III. iii. 342-5).

A little after this, says he,

OTH. *Give me a living reason that she's disloyal.*
JAGO. *I lay with Cassio lately,
And being troubled with a raging Tooth, I could not sleep;
There are a kind of men so loose of Soul,
That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs,
One of this kind is Cassio:
In sleep I heard him say: sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves:
And then, Sir, wou'd he gripe, and wring my hand,
Cry out, sweet Creature; and then kiss me hard,
As if he pluckt up kisses by the roots,
That grew upon my Lips, then laid his Leg
Over my Thigh, and sigh'd, and kiss'd, and then
Cry'd, cursed fate, that gave thee to the Moor.*
(III. iii. 413-30)

By the Rapture of Othello, one might think that he raves, is not of sound Memory, forgets that he has not yet been two nights in the Matrimonial Bed with his Desdemona. But we find Jago, who should have a better memory, forging his lies after the very same Model. The very night of their Marriage at Venice, the Moor, and also Cassio, were sent away to Cyprus. In the Second Act, Othello and his Bride go the first time to Bed; The Third Act opens the next morning. The parties have been in view to this moment. We saw the opportunity which was given for Cassio to speak his bosom to her; once, indeed, might go a great way with a Venetian. But once, will not do the Poets business; The Audience must suppose a great many bouts, to make the plot operate. They must deny their senses, to reconcile it to common sense: or make it any way consistent, and hang together. [151]

Jago had some pretence to be discontent with Othello and Cassio: And what passed hitherto, was the operation of revenge. Desdemona had never done him harm, always kind to him, and to his Wife; was his Country-woman, a Dame of quality: for him to abet her Murder, shews nothing of a Souldier, nothing of a Man, nothing of Nature in it. The Ordinary of New gate never had the like [155] Monster to pass under his examination. Can it be any diversion to see a Rogue beyond what the Devil ever finished? Or wou'd it be any instruction to an Audience? Jago cou'd desire no better than to set Cassio and Othello, his two Enemies, by the Ears together; so he might have been revenged on them both at once: And chusing for his own share, the Murder of Desdemona, he had the opportunity to play booty, and save the poor harmless wretch. But the Poet must do every thing by contraries: to surprize the Audience still with something horrible and prodigious, beyond any human imagination. At this rate he must out-do the Devil, to be a Poet in the rank with Shakespear.

Soon after this, arrives from Venice, Ludovico, a noble Cousin of Desdemona, presently she is at him also, on the behalf of Cassio.

DESD. *Cousin there's fallen between him and my Lord
An unkind breach, but you shall make all well.*

LUD. *Is there division 'twixt my Lord and Cassio.*

DESD. *A most unhappy one, I wou'd do much
To attone them, for the love I bear to Cassio.*
(IV. i. 219-20,225-7).

By this time, we are to believe the couple have been a week or two Married: And Othello*s Jealousie that had rag'd so loudly, and had been so uneasie to himself, must have reach'd her knowledge. The Audience have all herd him more plain with her, than was needful to a Venetian capacity: And yet she must still be impertinent in her suit for Cassio, well, this Magnifico comes from the Doge, and Senators, to displace Othello.

LUD. *Deputing Cassio in his Government.*

DESD. *Trust me, I am glad on't.*

OTH. *Indeed.*

DESD. *My Lord.*

OTH. *I am glad to see you mad.*

DESD. *How, sweet Othello.*

OTH. *Devil.*

DESD. *I have not deserved this.*

OTH. *O Devil, Devil---*

Out of my sight. [156]

DESD. *I will not stay to offend you.*

LUD. *Truly, an obedient Lady.*
I do beseech your Lordship call her back.

OTH. *Mistress.*

DESD. *My Lord.*

OTH. *What would you wish her Sir?*

LUD. *Who, I, my Lord?*

OTH. I, you did wish that I would make her turn.

Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,
And turn agen, and she can weep, Sir, weep.
And she is obedient, as you say, obedient:

Very obedient---

LUD. *What strike your Wife?*

(IV. i. 233-7, 240, 243-53, 269).

Of what flesh and blood does our Poet make these noble Venetians? the men without Gall; the Women without either Brains or Sense? A Senators Daughter runs away with this Black-amoor; the i Government employs this Moor to defend them against the Turks, so resent not the Moors Marriage at present, but the danger over, her Father gets the Moor Cashier'd, sends his Kinsman, Seignior Ludovico, to Cyprus with the Commission for a new General; who, at his arrival, finds the Moor calling the Lady his Kinswoman, Whore and Strumpet, and kicking her: what says the Magnifico?

LUD. *My Lord this would not be believ'd in Venice,*
Tho' I shou'd swear I saw't, 'tis very much;
Make her amends: she weeps.

(IV. i. 238-40).

The Moor has no body to take his part, no body of his Colour: Ludovico has the new Governour Cassio, and all his Countrymen Venetians about him. What Poet would give a villanous Black-amoor this Ascendant? What Tramontain could fancy the Venetians so low, so despicable, or so patient? This outrage to an injur'd Lady, the Divine Desdemona, might in a colder Climate have provoked some body to be her Champion: but the Italians may well conclude we have a strange Genius for Poetry. In the next Scene Othello is examining the supposed Bawd: then follows another storm of horreur and outrage against the poor Chicken, his Wife. [157] Some Drayman or drunken Tinker might possibly treat his drab at this sort of rate, and mean no harm by it: but for his excellency, a My lord General, to Serenade a Senator's Daughter with such a volly of scoundrel filthy Language, is sure the most absurd Maggot that ever bred from any Poets addle Brain.

Yet to make all worse, her Murder, and the manner of it, had before been resolv'd upon and concerted. But nothing is to provoke a Venetian; she takes all in good part; had the Scene lain in Russia, what cou'd we have expected more? With us a Tinkers Trull wou'd be Nettled, wou'd repartee with more spirit, and not appear so void of spleen.

DESD. *O good Jago,
What shall I do to win my Lord agen?*
(IV. ii. 149-50)

No Woman bred out of a Pig-stye, cou'd talk so meanly. After this, she is cali'd to Supper with Othello, Ludovico, &c. after that comes a filthy sort of Pastoral Scene, where the Wedding Sheets, and Song of Willow, and her Mothers Maid, poor Barbara, are not the least moving things in this entertainment.

The last Act begins with Jago and Roderigo; Who a little before had been upon the huff: [158]

ROD. *I say it is not very well: I will make my self known to Desdemona; if she will return me my Jewels, I will give over my suit, and repent my unlawful sollicitation, if not, assure your self, I'll seek satisfaction of you.*
(IV. ii. 197-200)

Roderigo, a Noble Venetian had sought Desdemona in Marriage, is troubled to find the Moor had got her from him, advises with Jago, who wheedles him to sell his Estate, and go over the Sea to Cyprus, in expectation to Cuckold Othello, there having cheated Roderigo of all his Money and Jewels, on pretence to presenting them to Desdemona, our Gallant grows angry, and would have satisfaction from Jago; who sets all right, by telling him Cassio is to be Govenour, Othello is going with Desdemona into Mauritania: to prevent this, you are to murder Cassio, and then all may be well.

Had Roderigo been one of the Banditi, he might not much stick at the Murder. But why Roderigo should take this for payment, and risque his person where the prospect of advantage is so very uncertain and remote, no body can imagine. It had need be a supersubtle Venetian that this Plot will pass upon. Then after a little spurt of villany and Murder, we are brought to the most lamentable, that ever appeared on any Stage. A noble Venetian Lady is to be murdered by our Poet: in sober sadness, purely for being a Fool. No Pagan Poet but wou'd have found some Machine for her deliverance. Pegasus wou'd have strain'd hard to have brought old Perseus on his back,

time enough, to rescue this Andromeda from so foul a Monster. Has our Christian Poetry no generosity, nor bowels? Ha, Sir Lancelot! ha St. George! Will no Ghost leave the shades for us in extremity, to save a distressed Damosel?

But for our comfort, however felonious is the Heart, hear with what soft language, he does approach her, with a Candle in his Hand: [159]

OTH. *Put out the light and then put out the light;
If I quench thee, thou flaming Minister,
I can again thy former light restore*
(V. ii. 7-9)

Who would call him a Barbarian, Monster, Savage? Is this a Black-amoor?

Soles occider & redire possun---

The very Soul and Quintessence of Sir George Etheridge.
One might think the General should not glory much in this action, but make an hasty work on't, and have turn'd his Eyes away from so unsouldierly an Execution: yet is he all pause and deliberation: handles her as calmly: and is as careful of her Souls health, as it had been her Father Confessor. Have you prayed to night, Desdemona? But the suspence is necessary, that he might have a convenient while so to roul his Eyes, and so to gnaw his nether lip to the spectators. Besides the greater cruelty---*sub tarn lentis maxillis**

* [Suetonius, Tiberius XXI, 2: Augustus remarks that Rome is doomed to be devoured slowly by Tiberius.]

But hark, a most tragical thing laid to her charge.

OTH. *That Handkerchief that I so lov'd, and gave thee,
Thou gav'st to Cassio.*

DESD. *No by my Life and Soul:
Send for the man and ask him.*

OTH.---*By Heaven, I saw my Hankerchief in his hand---*
---*I saw the Handkerchief.*

(V. ii. 51-3, 65, 69)

So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about an Handkerchief? Why was not this call'd the Tragedy of the Handkerchief? What can be more absurd than (as Quintilian

expresses it) in parvis litibus has Tragog dias movere? We have heard of Fortunatus his Purse, and of the Invisible Cloak, long ago worn thread bare, and stow'd up in the Wardrobe of obsolete Romances: one might think, that were a fitter place for this Handkerchief, than that it, at this time of day, be worn on the Stage, to raise every where all this clutter and turmoil. Had it been Desdemona's Garter, the Sagacious Moor might have smelt a Rat: but the Handkerchief is so remote a trifle, no Booby, on this side Mauritania, cou'd make any consequence from it. [160]

We may learn here, that a Woman never loses her Tongue, even tho' after she is stifl'd.

DESD. *O falsly, falsly murder'd.*

EM. *Sweet Desdemona, O sweet Mistress, speak.*

DESD. *A guiltless death I dye.*

EM. *O who has done the deed?*

DESD. *No body, I my self, farewell.*

Commend me to my kind Lord, O farewell.

(V. ii. 120,124-8)

But hark what follows:

OTH. *O heavy hour!*

Methinks it shou'd be now a huge Eclipse

Of Sun and Moon, and that the affrighted globe

Shou'd yawn at Alteration.

(V. ii. 101-4)

This is wonderful. Here is Poetry to elevate and amuse. Here is sound All-sufficient. It wou'd be uncivil to ask Flamstead [*first royal astronomer*], if the Sun and Moon can both together be so hugely eclipsed, in any heavy hour whatsoever. Nor must the Spectators consult Gresham Colledge, whether a body is naturally frighted till he Yawn agen. The Fortune of Greece is not concern'd with these Matters. These are Physical circumstances a Poet may be ignorant in, without any harm to the publick. These slips have no influence on our Manners and good Life; which are the Poets Province.

Rather may we ask here what unnatural crime Desdemona, or her Parents had committed, to bring this Judgment down upon her; to Wed a Black-amoor, and innocent to be thus cruelly murder'd by him. What instruction can we make out of this Catastrophe? Or whither must our reflection lead us? Is not this to envenome and sour our spirits, to make us repine and grumble at Providence; and

the government of the World? If this be our end, what boots it to be Vertuous? [161].

Desdemona dropt the Handkerchief, and missed it that very day after her Marriage; it might have been rumpl'd up with her Wedding sheets: And this Night that she lay in her wedding sheets, the Fairey Napkin (whilst Othello was stifling her) might have started up to disarm his fury, and stop his ungracious mouth. Then might she (in a Traunce for fear) have lain as dead. Then might he, believing her dead, touched with remorse, have honestly cut his own Throat, by the good leave, and with the applause of all the Spectators. Who might thereupon have gone home with a quiet mind, admiring the beauty of Providence; fairly and truly represented on the Theatre.

But from this Scene to the end of the Play we meet with nothing but blood and butchery, described much-what to the style of the last Speeches and Confessions of the persons executed at Tyburn: with this difference, that there we have the fact, and the due course of Justice, whereas our Poet against all Justice and Reason, against all

Law, Humanity and Nature, in a barbarous arbitrary way, executes and makes havock of his subjects, Hab-nab, as they come to [162] hand. Desdemona dropt her Handkerchief; therefore she must be stifl'd. Othello, by law to be broken on the Wheel, by the Poets cunning escapes with cutting his own Throat. Cassio, for I know not what, comes off with a broken shin. Jago murders his Benefactor Roderigo, as this were poetical gratitude. Jago is not yet killed, because there never yet was such a villain alive. The Devil, if once he brings a man to be dipt in a deadly sin, lets him alone, to take his course: and now when the Foul Fiend has done with him, our wise Authors take the sinner into their poetical service; there to accomplish him, and do the Devils drudgery.

Philosophy tells us it is a principle in the Nature of Man to be grateful.

History may tell us that John an Oaks, John a Stiles, or Jago were ungrateful; Poetry is to follow Nature; Philosophy must be his guide: history and fact in particular cases of John an Oaks, or John of Styles, are no warrant or direction for a Poet. Therefore Aristotle is always telling us that Poetry is . . . more general and abstracted, is led more by the Philosophy, the reason and nature of things, than History: which only records things higlety, piglety, right or wrong as they happen. History might without any preamble or difficulty, say that Jago was ungrateful. Philosophy then calls him unnatural; But the Poet is not, without huge labour and preparation to expose

the Monster; and after shew the Divine Vengeance executed upon him. The Poet is not to add wilful Murder to his ingratitude: he has not antidote enough for the Poison: his Hell and Furies are not punishment sufficient for one single crime, of that bulk and aggravation.

*EM. O thou dull Moor, that Handkerchief thou speakest on,
I found by Fortune, and did give my Husband:
For often with a solemn earnestness,
(More than indeed belonged to such a trifle)
He beg'd of me to steal it.
(V. ii. 228-32).*

Here we see the meanest woman in the Play takes this Handkerchief for a trifle below her Husband to trouble his head about it. Yet we find, it entered into our Poets head, to make a Tragedy of this Trifle.

Then for the unraveling of the Plot, as they call it, never was [163] old deputy Recorder in a Country Town, with his spectacles in summoning up the evidence, at such a puzzle: so blunder'd, and bedoulted: as is our Poet, to have a good riddance: And get the Catastrophe off his hands.

What can remain with the Audience to carry home with them from this sort of Poetry, for their use and edification? how can it work, unless (instead of settling the mind, and purging our passions) to delude our senses, disorder our thoughts, addle our brain, pervert our affections, hair our imaginations, corrupt our appetite, and fill our head with vanity, confusion, Tintamarre, and Jingle-jangle, beyond what all the Parish Clerks of London, with their old Testament farces, and interludes, in Richard the seconds time cou'd ever pretend to? Our only hopes, for the good of their Souls, can be, that these people go to the Playhouse, as they do to Church, to sit still, look on one another, make no reflection, nor mind the Play, more than they would a Sermon.

There is in this Play, some burlesk, some humour, and ramble of Comical Wit, some shew, and some Mimickry to divert the spectators: but the tragical part is, plainly none other, than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour. [164]. .