

Iago's treatment of Othello conforms to Bacon's definition of scientific enquiry as putting Nature to the question. If a member of the audience were to interrupt the play and ask him: "What are you doing?"—could not Iago answer with a boyish giggle, "Nothing. I'm only trying to find out what Othello is really like." And we must admit that his experiment is highly successful. By the end of the play he does know the scientific truth about the object to which he has reduced Othello. That is what makes his parting shot "*What you know, you know*" so terrifying, for by then Othello has become a thing, incapable of knowing anything.

AND WHY SHOULDN'T Iago do this? After all, he has certainly acquired knowledge. What makes it impossible for us to condemn him self-

righteously is that, in our culture, we have all accepted the notion that the right to know is absolute and unlimited. The gossip column is one side of the medal; the cobalt bomb the other. We are quite prepared to admit that, while food and sex are good in themselves, an uncontrolled pursuit of either is not, but it is difficult for us to believe that intellectual curiosity is a desire like any other, and to realise that correct knowledge and truth are not identical. To apply a categorical imperative to knowing, so that, instead of asking "What can I know?" we ask "What, at this moment, am I meant to know?"—to entertain the possibility that the only knowledge which can be true for us is the knowledge we can live up to—that seems to all of us crazy and almost immoral. But, in that case, who are we to say to Iago—"No, you mustn't"?

### Circus Lion

Lumbering haunches, pussyfoot tread, a pride of  
Lions under the arcs  
Walk in, leap up, sit pedestalled there and glum  
As a row of Dickensian clerks.

Their eyes are slag. Only a muscle flickering,  
A bored, theatrical roar  
Witness now to the furnaces that drove them  
Exultant along the spoor.

In preyward, elastic leap they are sent through paper  
Hoops at another's will  
And a whip's crack: afterwards, in their cages,  
They tear the provided kill.

Caught young, can this public animal ever dream of  
Stars, distances and thunders?  
Does he twitch in sleep for ticks, dried water-holes,  
Rogue elephants, or hunters?

Sawdust, not burning desert, is the ground  
Of his to-fro, to-fro, pacing,  
Barred with the zebra shadows that imply  
Sun's free wheel, man's coercing.

See this abdicated beast, once king  
Of them all, nibble his claws:  
Not anger enough left—no, nor despair—  
To break his teeth on the bars.

C. Day Lewis

## *Two Poems by Hilary Corke*

### **The River**

So we went with my father in a two-cylinder Rover  
To Tewkesbury, where we hired a boat (he had been  
A rowing-man in his time). By King John's bridge  
The water-troops were herded by sharp arches;  
We passed by that, and then the widening scene  
Of liquid movement counting her pebbles over.

The banks reclined, with short fat willows leaning  
To leave their long-leaved hair-do's and discuss  
What garters of light were rippling up their thighs:  
The river-skin gleamed broad and luminous,  
Reflecting stilly loose-strife, codlins and cream,  
Till we multiplied their stars with human meaning.

The plash of the oars, the grunt of the rowlocks and  
The hushing ridges the mild water made  
Between my fingers dangling. Overhead  
The sky was an equal river, pent in trees,  
With rare white boats that ran before the breeze  
But no more ruffled or more tenanted.

My father rowed in a vest, with large moustaches  
Drooping safe in the shade of a small straw hat.  
We took our turns at the rudder. And now we see  
Twining Ferry, a quiet white pub with its feet  
In the sleepy Avon water, and flowering rushes  
Spatting the alder ankles, and gaze to greet

Round only one bend more the familiar landing  
Where we shall tie and carefully clamber ashore  
And the rug will be spread and the sandwiches and the apples  
And Corona fruit-drinks appear from a heavenly store  
In a pasture-corner alive with dimples and dapples;  
And the peace of repletion that passeth all understanding.

O and the electric dragonflies like neons  
And the bathe (One Hour after Lunch) as one opened one's eyes  
Far below water into a thick green world  
Of soupy shadowing, and the water-boatmen  
Swimming on stilts and yes! the frog-green furled  
Leafspikes of the arrowhead and the surprise  
Of the mussel-shells with pearls that tiled one tiny  
Beach in an inlet, and then the nettle-thickets  
All round the disused lock with knots of spiny  
Black caterpillars that would be tortoiseshells;  
And the roofless mill, and the notice that said "Beware,  
This bridge is dangerous." Cross it if you dare!