

Othello – iago's speech essay



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Iago’s speech in Act 2 Scene 3, after he offers advice to Cassio about how to retain his military position as part of his cunning plan, serves as an insight into many of Iago’s personality traits.

Shakespeare portrays through the speech, Iago’s lack of moral scruples, his delusional state of mind and his powers of manipulation and foresight. In his soliloquy he confirms the audience’s characterisation of him as a villain but he also questions their judgment through use of oxymoron, contrast, metonymy and rhetorical questions. Iago’s cunning nature is revealed through metaphor and simile. Through these language features, Shakespeare masterfully demonstrates how soliloquies are insightful into the character’s state of mind, plans and character traits. Shakespeare illustrates Iago as a man, bereft of any moral scruple after initiating his plans to achieve retribution. It is not only the malicious side revealed in his speech that is testimony of his lack of a moral compass, but is also reinforced by a conflicting conviction of selflessness and generosity.

His malicious side is highlighted by the characterisation of himself as a “devil” and a “villain”. The use of metonymies evidences his wicked nature. However, this is contrasted with his conviction that he is generous and selfless. This reassurance serves for selfish purposes, trying to cover the guilt he would have suffered from all these evil deeds. The contrast between good and evil is shown by “Devils willing the blackest sins” and “with heavenly shows.

” It is further simplified with the oxymoron “Divinity of hell. Therefore, Iago’s lack of moral scruples is not only portrayed by his malevolent side, but also

through the reassurance of him as a selfless and charitable character for selfish purposes. Iago's belief that he possesses charity and generosity, also shows the delusion in which he wraps himself. This is demonstrated through the rhetorical questions he presents to the audience such as " I play the villain, when this advice is free I give and honest...

the course to win the Moor again? " and also " How am I then a villain to counsel Cassio to this parallel course directly to his good? By breaking the fourth wall, Iago tries to prove to the audience, that he is generous and kind. However, Iago's original intention in " following Othello to serve my turn upon him" and saying " I am not what I am" eventuates in him believing that his advice to Cassio reflects his intrinsic generosity and kindness; ultimately that he is what he is. Therefore, a character trait in Iago that is revealed in his soliloquy is that he shrouds his consciousness in delusion by convincing himself that he is generous and honest, despite the original intention of just appearing generous and honest. Another character trait that is revealed is Iago's manipulative nature and devious foresight , as shown by his observance of people's traits and a vision on how to exploit them. After Iago tells Cassio to talk to Desdomona about retaining his military, he knows that she must talk to Othello on behalf of Cassio because she is " framed as fruitful as the free elements" The simile shows how Iago exploits Desdomona's generosity.

Another character trait that is exploited by Iago is Othello's " weak function" (sexual urge) and his " soul enfeathered to her love. He must take Desdomona's advice of reinstating Cassio in the military because " our general's wife is now the general. " He has played the characters like chess

pieces and lays the final blow by “ pouring the pestilence in his ear. ” His devious foresight is demonstrated when he says that “ her virtue will turn into pitch” and that he will “ make the net that shall enmesh them all.

” The metaphors show iago as the agent saboteur, how he systemically places his pieces where he wants on the board, and then entangles them all. Therefore, the soliloquy shows iago’s manipulative nature and foresighted view. In conclusion, iago’s soliloquy in Act 2 Scene 3 embodies him as a man with no moral compass, a tenuous grip on the realities of life and his manipulative nature. Shakespeare shows how soliloquy gives the audience a clear insight into iago’s mind.

We see that the original intentions of revenge against Othello become more personally attached, from the military to adultery, iago’ mental state degenerates into mild insanity.