

lago's soliloquies essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

' Iago's soliloquies are the key to our understanding to both his motives and his methods'. How far do you agree with this? In your answer you should discuss the methods he employs and the motives he offers. Try also to demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which Shakespeare uses the soliloquies to present a character Of all the characters in Othello, Iago is the most complex and intriguing to the audience. His reasoning behind the cunning plot which he develops throughout the play is portrayed by Shakespeare primarily in Iago's soliloquies. By allowing the audience an insight into Iago's thought process regarding the ' web' he weaves, Shakespeare is able to convey the motives which Iago has for his deceit and also explores the motives which he develops and employs in order to ' ensnare' the other character, as well as showing what methods will be used for this.

However, it is not Iago's soliloquies alone which allow the audience to realise his inner thoughts and plots, his interaction with other characters is also a factor which enable us to do this, along with Shakespeare's use of asides. Iago's first soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 3 (lines 377-398) is the first opportunity for the audience to begin to understand the mechanics of Iago's thoughts. Previous to this soliloquy, the audience have already seen how Iago is manipulating Roderigo into his plot, telling him ' thou shalt enjoy her', exploiting his knowledge of Roderigo's love for Desdemona. Iago explicitly states ' I hate the Moor', although the underlying reason for his hatred is that Cassio has been given the job which he wanted himself, he also reveals ' that ' twixt my sheets/H'as done my office', here Shakespeare is showing how Iago believes Othello has slept with his wife Emilia, which can be seen

another motive behind Iago's want to betray Othello's trust in him. In this first soliloquy it is also outlined how Cassio will be the central figure to Iago's scheming plot.

He describes Cassio as having 'a smooth dispose' showing how his method will be to exploit Cassio's genuinely charming nature in order to 'abuse Othello's ears/ That he is too familiar with his wife'. Thus, this initial soliloquy shows Iago's motives, to avenge Othello for supposedly sleeping with his wife and regarding Cassio 'to get his place', along with the methods which he will use for this – taking advantage of Othello's 'free and open nature'. Iago's methods are further developed in Act 2, Scene 1, where after observing Cassio take Desdemona by the hand he states 'With as little a web as this I will ensnare a great fly as Cassio...

such tricks as these strip you out of you lieutenancy'. Here Shakespeare reinforces the idea that Iago will construct the innocent relationship between Cassio and Desdemona as sordid in order to gain the position which Cassio holds. However, another possible reason for Iago's want to cause conflict between Othello and his wife is presented by Shakespeare later in the scene in Iago's second soliloquy. He states about Desdemona 'Now I do love her too', although he states 'not out of absolute lust' it is possible that this is a minor motive in his mind although the most prominent motive remains 'to diet my revenge'. In the line 'whom I trace/ For his quick hunting' Shakespeare employs a hunting term, which highlights how Iago is treating the other characters as though they are animals.

This could be viewed as one of his methods for putting his plan into action – by dissociating himself from the people he plans to exploit and putting himself in a superior position, Iago may be making it easier for himself to carry out such a dangerous plot. Yet another possible motive for Iago's behaviour is revealed in the line 'I fear Cassio with my nightcap too', Shakespeare is showing how he believes that not only Othello, but also Cassio may have slept with Emilia. Obviously if he believes these things to be true then it is an explainable motive for what he plots. As the plot develops, so do Iago's methods which can be identified in his soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 3. Iago construes a situation which results in Cassio being dismissed from his role as Lieutenant.

As this was his main ambition the audience may expect that Iago's plotting will finish here, yet this is not the case. Instead, he convinces Cassio that Desdemona will be able to plead for his job to Othello, 'This broken joint between you and her husband entreat her to splinter'. This part of his method can be viewed as cleverly put together, as although he appears to be attempting to aid Cassio, he is instead manipulating the situation in order to make it appear to Othello that Desdemona has emotions for Cassio when she pleads for his job. Iago is able to cement his conniving plot once Emilia has given him the handkerchief which Othello had given Desdemona as a token of his love.

Shakespeare allows the audience insight into what Iago plots to use the handkerchief for through use of a short soliloquy in Act 3, Scene 3. He describes his use of the handkerchief as 'confirmations strong/ As proofs of Holy Writ', showing how he believes that by 'in Cassio's lodging lose this

napkin' and allowing him to find it there will prove as confirmation to Othello that Cassio is sleeping with Desdemona. Again, this soliloquy provides the audience with the knowledge of methods which Iago uses in order to manipulate the characters which surround him. Iago states 'The Moor already stabs with my poison' showing not only how Iago is aware of the damage which he is doing to the Moor – which was one of his motives all along in the name of revenge – but the line 'Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons' is also one of interest.

The repetition of 'poison' in this line echoes the one before it, and can be seen to suggest that one of Iago's methods is to exploit Othello's jealousy in order to create his own 'poison' through which he will achieve what he wants. It can be seen that it is principally through Shakespeare's use of soliloquies for the character of Iago that Iago's methods and motives regarding his sinister plot are revealed to the audience. Throughout Iago's motives remain the same and it is only through his earlier soliloquies and interaction with characters that these are revealed, whereas his method in seeking to satisfy his motives is developed continuously over the play as the opportunities for exploitation are presented to him. Thus, as the majority of insight which the audience has comes from the soliloquies created by Shakespeare, it is to a large extent that the view 'Iago's soliloquies are key to our understanding of both his motives and his methods' can be agreed with.