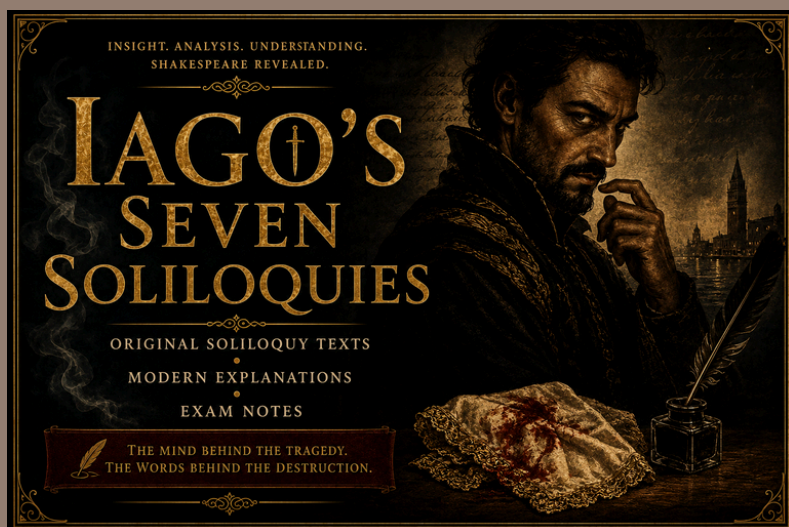


Othello



Iago's Principal Soliloquies

*Original Soliloquy Texts •
Modern Explanations •
Exam Notes*

<https://literaturelens.com/>

Othello



The following passages reproduce the seven principal soliloquies commonly studied in *Othello*. Read each speech first before consulting the explanations and revision notes later in this guide.

Iago's Soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 3 (lines 377-398)

Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
For I mine own gained knowledge should profane
If I would time expend with such a snipe
But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office. I know not if't be true
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well:
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man: let me see now;
To get his place and to plume up my will
In double knavery. How? How? Let's see.
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife;
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.
I have't. It is engendered. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

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Iago's Soliloquy in Act II, Scene 1 (lines 277–303)

That Cassio loves her, I do well believe't:
That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit.
The Moor
— howbeit that I endure him not
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,
And, I dare think, he'll prove to Desdemona
A most dear husband. Now, I do love her too;
Not out of absolute lust
— though peradventure
I stand accountant for as great a sin
But partly led to diet my revenge
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leaped into my seat, the thought whereof
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards,
And nothing can, or shall, content my soul
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife;
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgement cannot cure. Which thing to do
If this poor trash of Venice, whom I leash
For his quick hunting, stand the
putting on,
I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,
Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb
For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too
Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me
For making him egregiously an ass,
And practising upon his peace and quiet,
Even to madness. 'Tis here, but yet confused:
Knavery's plain face is never seen till used.

Othello



Iago's Soliloquy in Act II, Scene 3 (lines 44–59)

If I can fasten but one cup upon him,
With that which he hath drunk tonight already,
He'll be as full of quarrel and offence
As my young mistress' dog. Now my sick fool Roderigo,
Whom love hath turned almost the wrong side out,
To Desdemona hath tonight caroused
Potations pottle-deep; and he's to watch.
Three else of Cyprus, noble swelling spirits —
That hold their honours in a wary distance,
The very elements of this warlike isle —
Have I tonight flustered with flowing cups,
And they watch too. Now 'mongst this flock of drunkards,
Am I to put our Cassio in some action
That may offend the isle. But here they come;
If consequence do but approve my dream,
My boat sails freely both with wind and stream.

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Act II, Scene 3 (lines 326–352 and 371–377)

And what's he then that says I play the villain,
When this advice is free I give, and honest,
Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
Th'inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit. She's framed 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 en fettered to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetitie shall play the god
With his weak function. How am I then a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course
Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows
As I do now. For whiles this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
I'll pour this pestilence into his ear:
That she repeals him for her body's lust,
And by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.
Two things are to be done.
My wife must move for Cassio to her mistress:
I'll set her on.
Myself the while to draw the Moor apart,
And bring him jump when he may Cassio find
Soliciting his wife. Ay, that's the way.
Dull not device by coldness and delay.

Othello



Iago's Soliloquies in Act III, Scene 3 (lines 318–326)

I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin,
And let him find it. Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ. This may do something.
The Moor already changes with my poison.
Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But, with a little act upon the blood,
Burn like the mines of sulphur.

Othello

Iago's Soliloquies in Act IV, Scene 1 (lines 93 –103)



Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,
A housewife, that by selling her desires
Buys herself bread and clothes. It is a creature
That dotes on Cassio
— as 'tis the strumpet's plague
To beguile many and be beguiled by one.
He, when he hears of her, cannot refrain
From the excess of laughter. Here he comes.
As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;
And his unbookish jealousy must construe
Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviour
Quite in the wrong. How do you now, Lieutenant?

Othello



Iago's Soliloquies in Act V, Scene 1 (lines 11 – 22)

Il have rubbed this young quat almost to the sense,
And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain. Live Roderigo,
He calls me to a restitution large
Of gold and jewels, that I bobbed from him
As gifts to Desdemona.
It must not be. If Cassio do remain
He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly: and besides, the Moor
May unfold me to him
— there stand I in much peril.
No, he must die. But soft, I hear him coming.

Othello

Introduction:



**IAGO SPEAKS.
THE AUDIENCE KNOWS.**
His words. His plans. His tragedy.

DRAMATIC IRONY
Iago reveals his plans to us, while others trust him blindly.

OPEN MIND. HIDDEN DANGER.
Unlike other villains, Iago speaks openly—sharing motives, methods, and deceit.

A MASTER MANIPULATOR
Shifting motives. Careful strategies. Devastating results.

SHIFTING MOTIVES
Resentment, ambition, jealousy, revenge—Iago's reasons evolve from act to act.

CALCULATED MANIPULATION
He plants doubts, creates chaos, and poses as the honest friend.

METHODS BEHIND A GREAT VILLAIN
Poisoned words, false evidence, emotional traps, and perfect timing.

7 SEVEN PRINCIPAL SOLILOQUIES
This guide brings together Iago's seven key soliloquies with modern explanations, critical insights, and exam-focused notes.

READ THEM IN SEQUENCE

Motives Awaken → Plans Take Shape → Chaos Begins → False Honesty → False Proof Deployed → Othello Collapses → Self Preservation

EACH SPEECH. ONE STEP CLOSER TO TRAGEDY.

Few Shakespearean characters reveal their minds as openly, or as disturbingly, as Iago. While most villains conceal their intentions, Iago repeatedly steps aside to share his plans with the audience, creating dramatic irony long before Othello and the other characters recognise the danger.

His soliloquies reveal shifting motives, calculated manipulation, and the methods behind one of literature's greatest villains. This study guide brings together Iago's seven principal soliloquies with modern explanations, critical insights, and exam-focused notes.

Read them in sequence to see how each speech moves Shakespeare's tragedy one deliberate step closer to its devastating conclusion.

Othello



How to Read the Soliloquies

Don't read Iago's soliloquies as isolated speeches. Read them as stages in a carefully designed plan. As you move through each one, notice how his motives evolve, how dramatic irony keeps the audience ahead of the other characters, and how recurring images of poison, disease, hunting, and traps reinforce his methods.

Pay attention to the difference between what Iago says publicly and what he admits privately. Above all, look for patterns. Each soliloquy builds on the previous one, revealing how manipulation gradually develops into tragedy.

Teacher's Tip

When I teach this play, I always ask students not to read these speeches as separate quotations. Read them as seven chapters of one plan. Once you see how one soliloquy leads to the next, Iago's strategy becomes much easier to understand, and much easier to write about in exams.

Othello



Seven Soliloquies at a Glance

Taken together, Iago's seven principal soliloquies trace the complete development of his scheme. The first establishes his resentment and desire for revenge.

The next transforms suspicion into strategy as he begins exploiting Othello's trusting nature. Two speeches in Act II show him creating disorder before presenting himself as an honest adviser.

In Act III, the handkerchief becomes the perfect instrument for turning suspicion into apparent proof. By Act IV, Iago no longer needs to invent evidence. Othello's jealousy now works for him.

The final soliloquy reveals that self-preservation has replaced every earlier motive, leading Iago to sacrifice even Roderigo. Read in sequence, these speeches reveal not isolated acts of villainy but the gradual construction of Shakespeare's tragedy.

Othello



What Makes Iago's Soliloquies Unique?

Iago's soliloquies occupy a unique place in Shakespeare's drama because they make the audience partners in deception without making them participants in it.

Each speech grants privileged knowledge that no other character possesses, creating dramatic irony from the opening acts until the catastrophe at the end. We understand the truth while watching honest characters place their trust in the very man who intends to destroy them.

The speeches are equally remarkable for their shifting explanations. Iago offers many motives- professional resentment, jealousy, revenge, ambition, wounded pride, and suspicion- but never settles on one convincing explanation.

Instead, he continually reshapes his story, forcing readers to question whether he fully understands himself or simply invents reasons to justify his actions.

These soliloquies also reveal Iago as a master of self-fashioning. He presents different versions of himself to different audiences: loyal ensign, trusted friend, honest adviser, and private schemer. Even when he appears most candid, his words invite scepticism rather than certainty.

Perhaps that is why critics continue to debate Iago centuries after Othello was first performed. His speeches explain his methods with extraordinary clarity, yet they never completely explain the man behind them. That unresolved mystery remains one of Shakespeare's greatest artistic achievements.

Othello



How to Study Iago's Soliloquies for Exams

Many students try to memorise every line of Iago's soliloquies, but that is rarely necessary. Instead, focus on what each speech achieves in the play. Ask yourself how Iago's thinking changes, what new stage of his plan begins, and how Shakespeare prepares the audience for what follows.

Pay close attention to key quotations rather than long passages. Learn how a single line, such as **"I am not what I am"**, **"Divinity of hell!"**, or **"Trifles light as air"**, supports ideas about deception, jealousy, appearance versus reality, and dramatic irony.

When writing essays, avoid simply retelling the plot. Explain how Shakespeare's language, imagery, symbolism, dramatic irony, and use of soliloquy shape our understanding of Iago.

The strongest answers connect quotations, dramatic methods, and themes instead of summarising events.

Othello

Exam Advice:

One mistake I often see in exam scripts is that students explain what happens but forget to explain how Shakespeare creates the effect. Examiners reward analysis of dramatic methods, not just retelling the story.

Final Teacher's Reminder:

If you understand why each soliloquy changes Iago's plan, you've already understood most of Shakespeare's dramatic design in Othello.

Quick Reference

Act	Key Purpose	Remember
1.3	Begins revenge	Iago's motives
2.1	Creates plan	Jealousy
2.3	Destroys Cassio	False Honesty
2.3	Corrupts virtue	"Divinity of hell"
3.3	Handkerchief	False Proof
4.1	Othello collapses	Dramatic Irony
5.1	Removes loose ends	Self-preservation

Final Revision Checklist

Before your exam, make sure you can explain each of the following:

- ✓ Iago's motives
- ✓ Manipulation and deception
- ✓ Dramatic irony
- ✓ Appearance vs Reality
- ✓ Jealousy
- ✓ The handkerchief
- ✓ Iago as an unreliable narrator
- ✓ "Motiveless Malignity"
- ✓ How each soliloquy advances the plot
- ✓ Why Shakespeare gives Iago so many private speeches