**Discuss Shakespeare’s presentation of Iago in the first two acts of Othello**

Iago is a character in Othello who acts as the catalyst for the tragedy that is rife throughout the play. Good opening.Whilst he clearly believes that his actions are justified in order to achieve the success he craves, his blatant manipulation of the other characters (all whilst deceiving them into thinking his of a good nature) causes the audience to wonder whether or not he is just inherently evil. The play itself opens with Roderigo, a character who is supposed to be seen as slightly foolish, accusing Iago of lying. Iago of course denies this in disproportionately more lines than Roderigo which we later find out is not the truth. Iago’s excessive lines here however, shows how powerful his manipulation is and the audience can therefore see how he is an evil character. Good keeping of character as a construct in the foreground. Good clear opening.

This concept can first be furthered by Iago’s interactions with women. Whilst its true that Elizabethan women were not regarded with the same respect as their male counterparts, the difference between Cassio communicating with them emphasises Iago’s evident misogyny. This is made particularly clear in act2 scene1 where Iago describes the women as “players in your housewifery and housewives in your bed” or essentially implying that they are disobedient when it comes to their domestic duties and reserved in the sexual sense. This clarifies Iago’s perceptions of women and what he believes to be their purpose. Its clear that the women themselves feel undervalued by him with Emilia, his own wife, using the metaphor of being “food” to feed men’s hunger before being discarded or ‘belched’. Despite this she still claims to do “nothing but to please his fantasy” which shows how his bad treatment only further manipulates her into yearning for his affection. Excellent point and analysis.In contrast we see Cassio treating both women with respect, describing Desdemona as “riches of the ship” and referring to Emilia as “mistress” which is Shakespeare’s way of demonstrating how women *should* be treated and stressing how inadequately Iago treats them in comparison. Yes. Good use of contrast.

Furthermore, Iago’s excessive racism towards Othello is demonstrative of his evil nature. Whilst it was common to be apprehensive and even discriminatory against people of African descent in the Elizabethan era, Iago’s constant use of epithets such as “moor” and “black ram” shows a particular vehemence towards the protagonist. Good use of high register and the language of drama. Whilst other characters in the play acknowledge Othello’s high status and valence, Iago is one that remains jealous and desperate to try and remove him from his achieved reputation. This racism is essentially what spurs Othello on to believe in Iago’s plan and later on kill Cassio and Desdemona. He plants the idea of Desdemona being superior to Othello by insinuating that people usually prefer their own “clime, complexion and degree” State where in the play or plot this occurs. This sparks a sense of self-doubt in Othello, with him saying “I am black, and have not the soft part of conversation that chamberers have”. It can be said that Othello’s harmatia was purely being insecure and too trusting, which therefore leads him to believing in Iago’s lies.

What could perhaps be seen as the evillest most evil aspect of Iago’s character, is how he seems to be so deceitful that these immoral doings and attributes often go unnoticed. Whether its it’s disguising his sexism as humour or putting on an admiring and gracious front towards Othello, Iago continues to be seen as a noble person, even to the extent that other characters repeat the essential oxymoron: “honest Iago” throughout the play. We know from early on that Iago is a deceitful person when he uses the phrase “I am not what I am” in act1. From this, the audience knows that any seemingly good-natured act from Iago is not him being his true self but merely a façade. He even admits to not allow his “outward action” to demonstrate the “native act” as he views this as a sign of weakness.

Shakespeare essentially uses the character of Iago not only as an embodiment of evil, but as a demonstration of how evil can be concealed.Yes, and used to horrific ends. How might this be relevant today? The characters in Othello being misled by Iago’s falsely honest disguise is something that Shakespeare is trying to warn against: don’t let your good nature get the better of you for people are not always as they seem. Good ending.

Chloe, you have written a very measured, clear and well-structured essay, showing a sound understanding of the play, plot and characters. You have also kept the presentation of Iago at the foreground of your discussion, which is excellent practice.

To improve: always cite where in the play you are quoting from.

Use more CT in your analysis of language

Link more to context in a detailed way (this will come with practise).

For the future, pursue you own ideas about what Shakespeare is doing by presenting Iago thus, and link to several critical opinions. 18/21