Othello Soliloquy – Syntax and Emphasis Within a Line. A Partner and Individual Activity Assignment:

This is a two-day activity. The total point value is 50 pts. as an “in-class/homework grade” upon completion, including the performance. Both partners must perform; one partner will perform the first part, the other partner will perform the second part.

PART I – Listen and Annotate. Listen carefully to James Earl Jones’ rendition of Othello’s soliloquy from Act I, Scene iii. With a highlighter, annotate the textual excerpt below as you listen, paying careful attention to where Jones places his emphasis within the lines and how that emphasis correlates with the syntactical construction of the original lines and the punctuation used. Use the lined space to the side to make notes if needed.

OTHELLO – Act I, Sc. iii:

Partner One

Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
My very noble and approved good masters,
That I have ta’en away this old man’s daughter,
It is most true; true, I have married her:
The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech,
And little bless’d with the soft phrase of peace:
For since these arms of mine had seven years’ pith,
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used
Their dearest action in the tented field,
And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle,
And therefore little shall I grace my cause
In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnish’d tale deliver
Of my whole course of love; what drugs, what charms,
What conjuration and what mighty magic,
For such proceeding I am charged withal,
I won his daughter...

Partner Two

Her father loved me; oft invited me;
Still question’d me the story of my life,
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes,
That I have passed.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
To the very moment that he bade me tell it;
Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field
Of hair-breadth scapes i’ the imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence
And portance in my travels’ history:
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven
It was my hint to speak—such was the process;
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline:
But still the house-affairs would draw her thence:
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
She’d come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse: which I observing,
Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part II</th>
<th>With your partner, discuss the following prompts. Individually write your own response based on the small group discussion.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prompt 1</td>
<td>Examine the use of syntax in the original text, then discuss how it affects the emphasis of words, phrases, and even whole lines to convey meaning, and what that meaning is. Individually answer below:</td>
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<td>Prompt 2</td>
<td>Compare and contrast the text’s syntax and emphasis with Jones’s interpretation. Discuss what the differences in emphasis between the two are, speculate as to the reasons for Jones’ emphasis within the lines as he spoke them, and how Jones’ placement of emphasis subtly altered the original conveyance of meaning of the lines, if not subtly changed the meaning itself. Individually answer below.</td>
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Whereof by parcels she had something heard,  
But not intentively: I did consent,  
And often did beguile her of her tears,  
When I did speak of some distressful stroke  
That my youth suffer’d. My story being done,  
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:  
She swore, in faith, twas strange, ’twas passing strange,  
’Twas pitiful, ’twas wondrous pitiful:  
She wish’d she had not heard it, yet she wish’d  
That heaven had made her such a man: she thank’d me,  
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,  
I should but teach him how to tell my story.  
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:  
She loved me for the dangers I had pass’d,  
And I loved her that she did pity them.  
This only is the witchcraft I have used:  
Here comes the lady; let her witness it.
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Part III – Re-write your part of the soliloquy below. Where would you place the emphasis within the lines? How would you need to alter syntax and punctuation from the original text in order to communicate that emphasis textually?

You may move sentence structure around within the sentence, especially in the case of coordination and subordination within compound or compound—complex sentences. You may even break-up compound and compound-complex sentences into shorter, simple sentences to affect rhythm within and among the lines, and shifting between the lines. Note that quick and/or abrupt shifting can profoundly impact meaning.

As for diction, you may change out some terms for more “modern” ones (although Shakespeare’s language is firmly modern English, not old or middle English…) if appropriate to keep the syntax consistent with the effect you are attempting to create. Your diction choices must consist of equally powerful words if you do decide to change out some of the more archaic terms with more contemporary ones, so be careful if you undertake this procedure.
PART 4 – Perform your version of the Othello soliloquy IF YOU AND YOUR PARTNER ARE RANDOMLY CHOSEN TO PERFORM BY ME. You are being graded 50 pts. for fulfilling Parts 1-3. Those chosen for Part 4 will likely be those needing to cover some participation points from Socratic Seminars, so here is your chance to make up those points.

PART 5 – AS AUDIENCE MEMBERS to Part 4, it is your job to discuss the choices the student performers made in re-writing the soliloquy using the following prompt:

Compare and contrast the text’s syntax and emphasis with your peers’ interpretation. Discuss what the differences in emphasis between the two are, speculate as to the reasons for your peers emphasis within the lines as he spoke them, and how Jones’ placement of emphasis subtly altered the original conveyance of meaning of the lines, if not subtly changed the meaning itself.

The student performers may NOT justify their choices during this process. Instead I want you to reflect on these two things: You will be called on to share your observations on these the last 10 minutes of class after the performances and the peer critiques.

1) How closely did your rewriting intentions match your classmate’s analysis of those choices, and what does that possibly say about your skills in being able to construct subtle meaning with syntax choices? Be honest and do not automatically become reactive in considering possibilities for this phenomena.

2) Even if the feedback is close to your intentions, it is still highly likely that not all of your intentions were picked-up upon by the audience. What does that say about the idea that once an author or artist puts his or her work into the public sphere, it no longer belongs to them and that the audience will always bring their own experiences into the work?