Othello – The Value of Quotations

Part of effective writing is learning how to be selective of the quotations you use from the text you are studying. While any quote – as long as it proves your ideas – can be effective, the most valuable quotations are ones that fulfill the following criteria:

1. **They help to relate progression and significance of plot. This can be done with the help of elements such as foreshadowing and irony.**
2. **They help to reveal significant aspects of character.**
3. **They help to reveal or reinforce key elements of theme.**
4. **They illustrate how dramatic or figurative elements are used by the author.**
5. **They can be connected to other parts of the text by way of any of the previous criteria.**

Meager quotes will offer something to say about one or two of the aspects above. Powerful, significant quotations will offer the chance for meaningful discussion of more.

**Example**

*…Come you spirits*

*That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,*

*And fill me, from the crown to the tow, top full*

*Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,*

*Stop up the access and passage of remorse,*

*That no compunctious visitings of nature*

*Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between*

*The effect and it!*

(Macbeth, I, v)

**Speaker and Context**

Lady Macbeth delivers these lines once she reads the letter from Macbeth informing her of his encounter with the witches and subsequent promotion.

**This quote shows that:**

1. From the context this quote is taken from, the audience understands that it is the death of Duncan that she wants, so that her husband may become King. This quote reveals the possibility that Lady Macbeth will have something to do with the fate of Duncan later in the play.

2. The quote reveals that Lady Macbeth is ambitious because she is wishing for the strength to commit murder. She has the potential for evil, but in calling on powers to make her ruthless, may not be quite so evil yet.

3. This quote helps to reinforce the theme of natural versus supernatural. As is, Lady Macbeth lacks the ruthlessness to commit murder; it is natural that women of the time be incapable of such horrid acts. Instead, Lady Macbeth calls on the forces of the supernatural to help her achieve her aims. The dire, unnatural condition that Duncan – and Scotland – falls into is due in part to evil supernatural forces, but these forces would be insignificant if they did not have a human agent through which to act.

4. Shakespeare’s use of apostrophe in this passage helps to show how badly Lady Macbeth wants her husband to have the crown. She is so ambitious that she seeks to enlist the help of evil supernatural forces, and her literal pleading to these forces through the device of apostrophe helps to reveal her ambition and evil.

5. Macbeth’s seemingly unholy connection to the witches is proof of this, as it is suggested his “vaulting ambition” (I, iv) alone is not enough to compel him to murder. Fate, human weakness, and eldritch duplicity are all necessary requirements for the darkness that will befall Scotland.

**\*\*\* What we are working towards is a fluid, seamless response that answers all appropriate details in at least a paragraph.**

Now for your turn:

Choose one of the following quotes from *Othello,* and in at least one paragraph of **150 – 300 words**, respond to the significance of your chosen quote:

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| *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, iii, 20) | *Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:*  *She has deceived her father, and may thee.*  *(I,iii,18)* |

Notes from Experience:

* Some students struggle with the misconception that paraphrasing a quote is the same as analyzing it. Write not about what the quote is saying, but rather *why* the quote is important.
* This response is an opportunity for you to improve your writing on nearly all fronts. While the traditional paragraph and PPA structure might not fit, you can still show your best in terms of style and ideas. Pay attention to your expression, and utilize the tips you have been taught.