

Exploring iago's (lack of) motives for his evil deeds in othello essay



Iago's cunning and ingenuity, although helpful in his course of destruction, in the end do not disguise the fact that he is a malevolent manipulator who, throughout the play, fails to conceive a legitimate motive for his malicious actions. Iago is a villain. He is the embodiment of evil, hatred and spite, a vicious sociopath with no moral compunction, and therefore while he does initially provide a reason for his wicked intentions, his true motive is only the promising destruction of purity and goodness in Othello.

However, the means by which he obtains his evil intent is no easy feat. Iago is an incredibly intelligent, cunning scoundrel, who throughout the play uses his ability to think quickly to clutch on every opportunity that will further his cause. Iago uses Othello's favouring of Cassio over him for the position of lieutenant as his first big motivation to make trouble in Othello's life. He also suspects Othello of sleeping with his wife, Emilia, and uses his poisonous jealousy to spur on his vengeful doings.

However, it is notable that Iago only ever speaks of his 'Cassio reason' in his conversations with Roderigo, his "companion"; he is merely manipulating Roderigo for his money and would therefore have no inclination to tell him the truth as one would to one's true friends, whereas in his soliloquies- the only time he does speak the complete truth and show his true nature, he mentions nothing of Cassio's preferment.

He does talk about his jealousy and need for revenge on Othello's cuckolding him with Emilia (obviously a complete sociopathic fantasy), but this is just a face for his true envy and fundamental hatred of Othello's good qualities.

Iago hates everything in the world that is proper, reasoned and well ordered;

everything that has a 'daily beauty'. Othello has the very qualities Iago lacks and must therefore destroy. Iago is therefore not overly concerned with the destruction of people, but the eradication of the concepts and righteous ideals which he feels lacking in himself.

His justifications of unfaithfulness and unjust career-theft are weak, frail excuses that he needs to convince even himself of. His only true motive is, through his intense contempt for virtue and lack of self-love, to destroy what is good in mankind, and his destruction of Othello, the personification of this goodness, becomes the only drive as his objectives become clearer to himself. Therefore, Iago actually has no motive; as a motive implies reason and clear intentions due to logical

cause, and simply being evil and wanting to do bad things is not sufficient rationale to want to ruin someone's life. Evil for the sake of evil is not a motive, but a product of this sociopathic Machiavellian's need for wickedness. However, without Iago's ability to play the scenes by ear; his cause for chaos would go unrewarded. Near the climax of the play he manipulates Cassio into talking about Bianca, his courtesan, whilst Othello hides in the shadows, hearing only the slandering and hence condemnation of his damned wife, Desdemona.

Iago's intelligence allows him to judge a person's character quickly and so allows him to manipulate much of the cast of Othello down a continually narrower path to their inescapable ruin. His plan to convince Othello of Desdemona's adultery comes together mostly by Iago's knack for using circumstance to his advantage, his friendly charm, and his compelling

sympathy for Othello's injustice, with the aid of a few strokes of incredible luck. The latter two of Iago's behavioural qualities, however, are merely a surface-show of goodness; underneath his sincere exterior of charisma and consideration lies a dangerous and cold murderer.

The advice he offers to Cassio and Othello is superficially sound, and Iago himself remarks: " what's he then, he says I play the villain, when this advice I give is free and honest. " He knows he twists things, he knows he's the bad guy; he just doesn't see the terrible wrong in the turmoil he causes.

Ultimately, Iago's astute qualities, however admirable, do not save him from the fact that he is a fundamental villain with no moral qualms or justifiable cause for the destruction of Roderigo, Cassio, Desdemona and Othello's lives.