

Is edmond dantes a tragic hero? analysis of the count of monte cristo



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According to critic Northrop Frye, “ Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning.” Many tragic heroes in classical literature serve as the instrument of suffering. They have each chosen very different paths in response: Jean Valjean learns forgiveness, Raskolnikov follows reasoning, but Edmond Dantes from *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas is driven by excessive passion. Framed by his past friends, Edmond Dantes suffers seven years of injustice in prison. He is reborn through the kindness of Abbe Faria, and seeks vengeance on those who once betrayed him. Although he conducts godlike justice, Dantes has no sympathy for the guilty and the innocent alike. In this paper, I will argue that Edmond Dantes is a tragic hero due to his moral corruption by giving into excessive belief in false justice and revenge.

Edmond Dantes can be supported as a tragic hero by definition. The early Dantes embodies honesty, ability, and innocence. A young and successful sailor, he is on the rise to become a captain of the *Pharaon* at the age of twenty. He is devoted to his aging father and his young fiancée. Most importantly, Dantes is able to treat everyone equally despite his personal dislike. For example, he evaluates Danglars professionally when Morrel (his boss) asks him for his opinion of Danglars; he does not point out that Caderousse mistreated his father, and even offered to lend him money; he respects Fernand as his lover Mercedes does. Even during Villefort’s examination, he comments that Dantes is “ simple, natural, eloquent with

that eloquence of the heart never found when sought for; full of affection for everybody [...] because happiness renders even the wicked good" (Dumas, p. 25). Dantes is undoubtedly a respectable and successful young man. This aligns with Aristotle's tragic hero, who is morally good and displays noble traits. Yet, his tolerance and kindness towards others do not bring him peace and happiness, and instead evoke envy in his enemies. They perceive not his love but a sense of arrogance, eventually using Captain Leclere's letter from Napoleon to frame Dantes for treason. Dantes is morally innocent; he keeps the secret of the letter out of honesty and loyalty, and believes firmly in the French government's justice (represented by Villefort); however, these noble qualities lead him to his doom. Just like Aristotle's tragic hero, Dantes contributes to his own demise not because of his weak moral values or sinful actions, but because of his indifference and lack of knowledge.

Yet, Edmond Dantes is not exactly the ideal Aristotle hero: he is neither a nobleman nor a person from high status. Dantes makes a living by sailing into the sea and risking his life. His father is old and frail, while his mother seems to have passed away long ago. Dantes is only a man of ordinary origins: though he is considered successful among his peers, he is still almost at the bottom of the social ladder. Therefore, he fits Arthur Miller's definition of a tragic hero: a common man " who has been displaced from his rightful place, and seeks to attain it again. [His] tragedy, then, is the consequence of a man's total compulsion to evaluate himself justly." Thrown in Chateau d'If for seven years, Dantes completely loses his identity and is reduced to a simple number, ' 34.' Though he had first turned to God's prayers in search for peace, his despair turned increasingly into wraith as he

seeks justice, his emotional guidance became logical in order to achieve his rightful place.

When Dantes escapes prison and transforms into the Count of Monte Cristo, he is empowered by god-like mental and physical capabilities. Monte-Cristo's apotheosis, splendid as it is, contains within it the seeds of a new fall (Marinetti, 1976): his obsession for vengeance caused him to lose his human qualities. When he treats Franz in his secret luxurious grotto, he does not taste the food or touch the women around him. While his lifestyle seems to be one that maximizes human pleasure, he does not enjoy any of it. Clearly, Dante's excessive pursuit of vengeance displaces his human desires. At this point, although Dantes possesses immense wisdom and knowledge, he no longer possesses the knowledge of human love. Dantes also declares that he is a "being of no country, asking for no protection from any government." This indicates that he alienates himself from society, building standards of justice of his own and living up to his strict propriety. It also shows his extreme loneliness in his path of vengeance. Dantes has truly become a being that is unearthly and detached from life as seen through these statements.

Dantes' fixation for retribution takes away his kindness. As highlighted by critic Bryan Audrey, the problem of innocent suffering does not concern the Count. Viewing himself as an agent of God, Dantes chooses to wreak havoc by imposing his own pain and tragedy upon the families of Fernand, Danglars, Caderousse, and Villefort. He never took into account the safety of his enemies' children and viewed them as "the instruments of their fathers' punishment" (Stowe, 1976), or simple descendants of the evil that deserve <https://assignbuster.com/is-edmond-dantes-a-tragic-hero-analysis-of-the-count-of-monte-cristo/>

to be wiped from this earth. For example, Valentine de Villefort obviously knows nothing of her father's wrongdoings to Dantes; however, the Count had no intention of saving her from Madame de Villefort's poisonous killing spree out of greed just so Villefort's family will shatter. Dantes who defends himself and fights against evil is corrupted by it (Marinetti, 1976). He seems to be guided by cold logic and absolute justice, but his inconsideration, in fact, reflects his excessive ambition and passion as he turns to ways that he knows are wrong.

The Count of Monte Cristo seems to have offered a happy ending, with the evil punished, the couples married, and Edmond Dantes himself finally freed his lonely journey. Yet, Dantes' success in revenge is in fact his downfall as he suffers self-alienation, succumbs to ways of cruelty which he once condemned, and abandons human emotions and desires. His own initial tragedy caused a chain of effect, ruining the happiness and stability of many others. The book ends with Dantes' resignation and peace as he retires from the world with Haydee. All his knowledge from his transformation and suffering is finally condensed into the wisdom of two words, "Wait and hope." The tragic hero finally finds his role in this universe: no longer as an innocent, unknowing sailor, or an omniscient agent of Providence who carries out God's judgement, but as one who obeys the future revealed by God.

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