

Othello

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



To what extent does Shakespeare present Othello as being responsible for his own downfall? Shakespeare's Othello consists of the themes betrayal, love and dishonesty. At the centre of this play is the tragic downfall of Othello at the hands of his so called friend Iago. In this essay I will be discussing the reasons for and against Othello being responsible for his downfall through looking at critical interpretations of his character and actions. In some ways you could say that Othello was highly responsible for his own downfall as he was easily manipulated by Iago showing him to be gullible and naïve. Iago manipulates Othello by making him suspicious through inference, " Ha I like not that". Iago mutters this in act 3 scene 3 when he sees Desdemona and Cassio talking. Iago hints that he knows something making sure Othello can hear yet making it subtle enough to pretend that he didn't want him to know. Iago then pretends to be reluctant to tell Othello about Desdemona, " Utter my thoughts! Why, say they are vile and false? " He tells Othello just enough to intrigue him; he does this by asking leading questions, " Did Micheal Cassio when you wooed my lady, know of your love? " Iago exasperates Othello by revealing so little, " I did not think he had been acquainted with her". This adds to Othello's jealousy about Desdemona and so he keeps asking more questions about what Iago may know " What dost thou say, Iago? He then wants to no all the details, " I prithee speak to me as to thy thinkings". Iago is gaining more influence over Othello after this point `as Othello is becoming more trusting of him, Iago is putting himself in a place of knowledge and power. The critic Leavis also agrees that Othello has no one to blame but himself for his actions, '.....'. Yet in some ways you could say that

Othello wouldn't have acted the way he did if it wasn't for the fact that Iago was manipulating him and therefore he might not have been entirely responsible. Bradley also a critic states that it was Iago's manipulation that eventually led to Othello's downfall, '.....'. On closer examination, throughout the play we see Iago manipulating all the characters in turn; this shows that he is an expert master manipulator for everyone to be deceived by him. When reading this play we don't expect Othello to be as easily manipulated by Iago as he was. As Othello is a general in the army we expect more discipline for him. He is a highly respected general in a trusted position of authority. How could he have been driven into such a murderous rage, either at the hand of another (Iago) or by a fault of his own? Othello has no reason to doubt what Iago is saying in fact he thinks him honest and has placed great trust in him..... and therefore he becomes more easily manipulated by him, the more Othello trusts Iago the more lies he can tell in his favour. Iago ingratiates himself to Othello and appears to be the good guy Othello is a foreigner and is culturally naïve, he is not from Venice and so doesn't have much knowledge of Venetian culture. Iago uses this to his advantage by telling Othello he knows of Venetian woman and Venetian culture, " I know our country disposition well: " Iago translates events and give Othello misleading information, he tells that Venetian woman often cheat on their husbands, " In Venice they do let God see the pranks". This makes Othello dependent upon Iago for cultural guidance making Othello think that his wife is capable of cheating as he is not from the same culture. Iago makes Othello question

his judgement over Desdemona whilst enhancing his jealousy. Othello is dependent upon Iago and Iago exploits this. When talking about or to Desdemona, Othello's language is rich and passionate and he uses poetic language, " My soul hath her content so absolute that not another comfort like to this succeeds in unknown fate". Later on in the play we can see that Othello is under Iago's influence when his poetic language changes and he becomes confused, " Lie with her? Lie with her? We say lie on her when they belie her. " This shows Othello's breakdown through the breakdown of his syntax. Othello's language once again becomes poetic at the beginning of act 5, " Yet I'll let not shed her blood, nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow". This shows that Iago's influence over Othello is so consuming that Othello himself doesn't realise that he is under his influence. Othello is oblivious to the fact that he is being manipulated by Iago and his return in poetic language shows that he is so much under Iago's influence that it no longer affects his speech; he's adapted the ideas and influence of Iago fully. " When I have plucked thy rose, I cannot give it vital growth again". After Othello is sure of Desdemona's disloyalty he then goes to speak to Emilia, " You have seen nothing then? " When he questions her she says she has saw nothing, " Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect" As Emilia spends most of her time with Desdemona, Othello should have some belief in what she is saying because if Desdemona was to cheat then Emilia would be the one to know about it. " I durst my lord, to wager she is honest. " Othello's mind is already made up, " Yes you have seen Cassio and she together", Nothing Emilia says can change his mind; he says Emilia is a whore with secrets. " This is a subtle whore, a closet lock and key of villainous secrets" Othello

says these things about Emilia so that he can defend himself because he doesn't believe that she knows nothing of Desdemona's affair. This shows that it is his own fault as he is quick to judge Emilia for lying. Othello is very much to blame at this stage as he is acting in a rash and impulsive way and not taking in the information he is being told. It is obvious from the beginning that Othello is in love with Desdemona we see this from his poetic language, "As truly as to heaven I do confess the vices of my blood", So we as a reader do not expect Othello to turn against her so easily. A reason for this could be that Othello was so deeply in love with Desdemona that he became open and vulnerable therefore he himself does not expect to be so easily manipulated by Iago. Othello states towards the end of the play that he was killing Desdemona for her own sake and therefore preventing her from doing the same again, 'Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men'. Yet we still see he loves her, 'O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade justice to break her sword'. Othello is almost trying to defend his actions that are about to take place, 'This sorrow's heavenly- it strikes where it doth love'. This shows that Othello still cares for his wife but is so far under Iago's influence that he feels killing her is the only way to end his suffering. Other readers of the play show they have different interpretations as to what caused Othello's downfall and this shows that there are clearly many opinions. The critic Bradley, for instance sees Othello as 'a noble creature', he says the play is about 'Iago's evil intention and Othello's self-defeating idealism' whereas for Leavis (also a critic) states the play is about 'Othello's blindness' Both these critics have valid points for why they state these opinions. Bradley says that Othello is a trusting person, "His trust, where he

trusts is absolute" Though Leavis objects to this, " We must add that this is true only of his trust of Iago, not of his wife". Leavis states that Othello is more responsible for his downfall than Bradley does. Where Bradley excuses Othello's behaviour Leavis blames him. In a way Bradley is right as Iago was very good at manipulating Othello yet Leavis also makes valid points because Othello trusts Iago more than he does his wife. There have been many opinions from critics about Othello's downfall, but no clear conclusion can ever be made about who was to blame for his downfall as there are valid points on both sides. At the heart of Othello's character there appears an ambiguity he's at once a general, dignified and upstanding yet gullible, passionate and naive. I think that Othello is responsible for his own actions. Although I do not think that any of the murders would have happened if it wasn't for Iago's meddling. The influence of Iago can never be discounted and any clear conclusion could never be made.