

Othello as a tragic hero and his downfall



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A tragic hero is a person who makes a bad judgment that leads to their own destruction. Having culpability is having guilt and responsibility for an event or situations. *Othello* by Shakespeare had been a story that ended with a tragedy as both Desdemona and Othello die at the end. Throughout the story, Othello continuously questions Desdemona's loyalty as he gets manipulated by Iago. Finally, in the end, he kills Desdemona and later on realizes it was all lies and ends up killing himself. His anger and jealousy grow as more lies are told to him, enough that make him stop listening to Desdemona and others telling him the truth. As all that happens, it allows the reader to realize that Othello has different changes throughout the story as well as different characteristics that show him as a tragic hero. In *Othello*, William Shakespeare characterizes Othello as a tragic hero and as well includes ways that show how Othello had culpability for Desdemona's murder. Othello changes because of his actions, which results in his downfall, showing how he changes from a sweet and loving husband and then changes to a cruel and abusive husband who eventually goes on to kill his own wife. Othello is seen as a tragic hero since he not only was doomed from the start because of his race, which eventually lead him to do something bad as the result of his very poor judgment. As stated by Aristotle, a tragic hero is a person who is doomed from the start, and clearly is imperfect but has noble nature, a person whose judgment causes the tragedy. Othello is immediately judged for being black beforehand and people of a different race were mistreated and seen as inferior back then showing that he had something he was suffering through before the tragic event. Kiernan Ryan says, " The

colour of Othello's skin is obviously a crucial factor in his downfall, because his visibly alien racial identity makes him and his bride far more vulnerable to the machinations of Iago than if he were an equally accomplished and indispensable white man." Othello was an easy target for Iago's plan as he was already seen as an outcast in society making it easier for Iago to attack him and use him as his plan. Not only is Othello doomed from the start but his judgment from the way Iago used Othello's insecurity of race allowed him to decide that killing Desdemona was for the better. Othello had killed Desdemona because of his jealousy that was being fed with Iago's lies because he thought that being black would make Desdemona want to go for someone else besides him. Killing Desdemona had been a very bad judgment because Desdemona had been loyal and honest the entire time and Othello had ended up killing the love of his life because of manipulation and lies. All this shows that Othello has characteristics of a tragic hero, as he is doomed from the start and later on acts on very poor judgment.

Another reason why Othello has the characteristics of being a tragic hero is that he does take responsibility at the end and does suffer because of what he did, reflecting on how he is and what he became. Othello kills himself in order to take responsibility for killing Desdemona. Aristotle says a tragic hero is a person who does something because of bad judgment and later takes responsibility for it. Othello's anger and jealousy had caused him to go to the extreme and kill Desdemona. When he realized Iago had been lying the whole time he was filled with guilt as he realized he killed the love of his life because of Iago's manipulation of him and his failure to see through that manipulation. With that guilt, he decided that killing himself is the best

option for taking responsibility for what he has done. Here, Othello realized his mistake and feels that killing himself is the only way to make up for the atrocious thing he had done. Aristotle also says a tragic hero is a person who suffers death because of how he is and what he becomes. Othello is a decent guy in the beginning but as you notice throughout the story is that he is flawed. Having flaws is not bad, but it's what people do with those flaws that can make it worse. Othello's flaws were his insecurity and jealousy. Othello could've controlled his flaws and not let Iago's words get to him. Instead, Othello acted upon his flaws allowing them to control him instead. He allowed them to control him so much that it had led him to kill his wife.

Othello changes throughout the story which results in the downfall and shows how he went from a loving person to a cruel and abusive husband. Othello changes for the worse, as at first, he was a good and noble character and later on changes into a character that does horrible actions. He changes into a character that is filled with jealousy and revenge over an assumption that was told and that had been manipulated in his head. In the beginning, he treats Desdemona with the respect that she deserves and treats her like he genuinely loves her using nice words as Othello says, " Not now, *sweet* Desdemona." (3. 3-55), that shows he has affection for her and loves her. Later on, Othello treats Desdemona in the complete opposite way, as Othello does and says, "(striking her) Devil!" (4. 1-188) in which clearly shows a strong change in his personality and character. Othello clearly has a change of heart for Desdemona which is influenced by Iago filling his head to make him suspicious as well as making his jealousy exaggerated. It is clear that there is a big change in Othello's reactions to his wife since he goes from

treating her like he loves her to mistreating and abusing her. All this shows the obvious change in Othello and shows that when Othello let Iago get into his head, the downfall was bound to happen.

Othello had a big part in the tragedy and has a lot of culpability in Desdemona's murder. Othello has responsibility for Desdemona's murder since he did kill her because he allowed his jealousy and insecurities to control him into abusing and actually killing his wife. He had been a good moral man in the beginning and later on became a jealous filled person, messed up enough to kill his wife. As the professor Mark Van Doren had said, Othello is a fearful but an honored and nobleman who does though create a bad atmosphere as events continue on. Othello already being insecure and suspicious is quickly driven by his jealousy to do terrible things. He had caused his own tragedy by allowing himself to be manipulated and allowed his anger to control all his actions regardless of the truth. Othello had been responsible as he clearly wasn't a bad person but had let his anger take over him and his control and actions. Othello as well had the choice to listen to Emilia and Desdemona who were telling him the truth. However, Othello didn't listen to them, unfortunately. His hatred and resentment against Desdemona because of the things he was being told had caused him to do something he will regret entirely. It is not Desdemona's fault she was murdered because of Othello's jealousy.

Some may say Othello had no actual fault in Desdemona's murder as he was manipulated by Iago to do it. However, Othello did have a lot of culpability in Desdemona's death as he allowed his jealousy and anger to control him when he could've simply listened to Desdemona instead of mistreating her.

In 4. 1 Desdemona continuously tries to tell Othello her side and that she is loyal but Othello does not listen to her and continues insulting her and eventually hits her. Othello instead continues to listen to Iago and as all the lies continue being told to him, Othello gets worse and doesn't listen to anyone tell the truth. All that lead to Othello killing Desdemona. Yet, If Othello had simply listened to Desdemona and her side of the story, the tragedy could have been avoided. Othello had been very much at fault as not only was he the one who killed Desdemona, he was never forced to do anything and had done everything on his own. Yes, he was manipulated but was he forced to follow Iago's ideas? No, not only did he have Desdemona to tell him the truth, he had Emilia telling him she was loyal as well. He is also the one who suggested killing Desdemona in the first place, showing how it's not entirely Iago's fault. All his actions were done on his own showing that he had a lot of fault to Desdemona's murder.

In William Shakespeare's *Othello*, Shakespeare creates Othello as a tragic hero and has him change throughout the story in order to fit the plot and makes sure the reader knows Othello has culpability for Desdemona's murder. Othello has many changes in him as the story continues that allow the story to be made and shows Othello as a tragic hero and shows how different things happen that all lead up to the end, where Othello kills Desdemona and then after kills himself. Othello as well had many characteristics that make him a tragic hero, he was doomed from the start, he has a noble nature but imperfect as a person and creates a tragedy because of his bad judgment. Othello had culpability to Desdemona's death as well not only did he kill her but he could've controlled his anger way before it had gotten worse. Othello as well could have listened to

Desdemona and Emilia as they did try to tell him the truth but Othello hadn't listened to either of them which had led him to continue to listen to lies and eventually kill Desdemona. Shakespeare had wanted the reader to see how Othello's characteristics connect to being a tragic hero as well as wanted the reader to know Othello had culpability in Desdemona's murder. Not many people realize many of the actions had been Othello's fault. Many as well don't notice the connection of Othello as a tragic hero. Othello though had a lot of fault in her murder and Othello as well shows strong characteristics of a tragic hero.

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