

Preston Leigh

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Dr. Emmanuel Doh

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Iago's Manipulation of Othello and the Subsequent Fall of a Tragic Hero

In life, heroes will emerge whenever they are called for. Heroes come in a variety of ways, from saving cats from trees to saving the world from monsters. William Shakespeare has meticulously crafted some of the most distinguished tragic heroes in literature, with one of those being Othello. Lies and deceit are common in society, and many individuals hide their true intentions with a facade. The character Iago is no different from these deceptive individuals. Iago is a psychopath and a very wicked character who finds enjoyment in manipulating Othello and others, thus causing him to fall from grace and damage the souls of everyone involved. One of those characters heavily exploited by Iago's cruelty is Roderigo, who has opened his purse to Iago.

The wicked Iago has plans to use Roderigo's unsuspecting and naïve nature to his advantage. Roderigo has an obsessive love for Othello's wife Desdemona that renders him credulous to Iago's manipulation. The play has just begun, and Iago's manipulative and evil nature has already been shown to the audience. Iago has already heard rumors that "the moor" has slept with his wife. "...I hate the Moor; / And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets / H' as done my office: I know not if't be true; / But I, for mere suspicion in that kind / Will do as if for surety"(1.3.385-389). Though he has no proof, he does not care. Iago was passed over for promotion for the less experienced Cassio, which triggers envy and rage in Iago and thus

motivates him to ruin Othello's marriage and life. Gradually as the play goes on, more of Iago's motives are revealed. Iago wants to use Roderigo to do his bidding, and he succeeds because Roderigo is blind with love for Desdemona. Initially, Iago mugs Roderigo of his fortune by convincing him that the gold and jewels will be given to Desdemona as a proclamation of his love when Iago plans to keep it for himself. Later in the play, Iago uses Roderigo once more by convincing him to kill Cassio. Though Roderigo is disinclined at first, he relents once Iago insists that by helping him, Roderigo will win the love of Desdemona. Having fallen for Iago's deceit, the gullible Roderigo attempts to kill Cassio. In the end, Iago chooses to kill Roderigo. Iago's treatment of Roderigo shows how far he will go to disgrace Othello, as one can see he shows no empathy for those involved in his plans. Thus, Iago exploits Roderigo's ingenuity and lust for Desdemona by manipulating him to bring about the downfall of others in the play; the main "villain" in Iago's eyes, Othello.

Iago exploits the self-doubt and insecurities of Othello to bring about his downfall. It is made apparent to the audience that Othello is an outcast, being the only black man in a white community. Iago sees Othello as only concerned with personal and political gain with Cassio as his choice for lieutenant. Throughout the whole play, Othello is referred to as "The Moor", which shows his skin color results in prejudice against him and thus prompts the association of animalistic characteristics. Even more so, his relationship with Desdemona is in a time when such a marriage would be most controversial, especially for a man and woman of their standing. As a result of society's prejudice, Othello's self-esteem diminishes, allowing Iago to capitalize on his insecurities and bring envy into Othello. Iago hints that Desdemona is unfaithful to Othello, as she prefers only people of her class, to which Othello will never belong. Iago professes that Desdemona prefers Cassio, who is like her in age, race, and class, as opposed

to Othello, who is older and black. Similarly, Iago uses Desdemona's gender and past to convince Othello of her adultery. He then proposes that Desdemona is very likely to betray Othello since she has betrayed her father. What tips Othello over the edge and causes him to believe Iago's every word is when Iago plants the scene of Cassio holding Desdemona's handkerchief casually while talking to her. This could be because women of the time tended to be unvirtuous and unfaithful. As a result of falling for Iago's tricks, Othello smothers his wife with a pillow and seals his fate.

To understand why Iago so easily manipulates others with no remorse, one must first understand Iago himself. If one can see what brings him the motivation to ruin the lives of others, then his mindset will become clear. Iago is envious of Cassio's promotion over him, and how he believes he is worthier of being lieutenant. Iago is also blatantly racist, as he addresses Othello as "The Moor." Furthermore, he is envious of Othello's marriage, as he wants to have Desdemona's love and believes Othello is not worthy. Iago goes to great lengths in his scheme to ruin Othello. He casually manipulates Roderigo, Cassio, Desdemona, and even his wife all in the name of petty revenge. Iago is a psychopath because he does not think at all about the emotions of other people, except for how he can use them to benefit himself. He uses his knowledge of human psychology and manipulation to get himself what he desires. Iago treats his wife like dirt and is only "honest and kind" to those he wants to manipulate most. He feels no remorse for his actions against others. A psychopath isn't a killer, but someone who lacks any emotional response in the emotions of other people. According to Healthline, some common signs of a psychopath include but are not limited to disregarding or violating the rights of others, inability to distinguish between right and wrong, difficulty with showing remorse or empathy, tendency to lie often, and manipulating and hurting others. Thus, one can then understand why Iago is one of

the vilest characters in literature. He is wicked, manipulative, and a psychopath. He destroys the lives of others for fun. With every villain, there is a hero.

Though Othello is held in high regard, that does not keep him from being a tragic hero. A tragic hero is not tragic without some sort of devastating downfall. Othello's downfall is set into motion when the jealous Iago begins planting seeds of doubt into Othello's already insecure mind. Iago's manipulative words convince Othello that his wife is unfaithful; from then on, he begins to lose his noble traits. He ends up treating his wife like garbage and eventually murders her in cold blood. When Iago's plot comes to light and Othello realizes his disastrous mistake, it becomes evident he has reached his emotional limit. "Whip me, ye devils, / From the possession of this heavenly sight! / Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulfur! / Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire! / Oh, Desdemona! Desdemona! Dead! / Oh! Oh!" (5.5.309-314). In his shattered state of mind and with his crushed heart, Othello decides suicide is his only option. With one deadly stab, this hero's tale comes to a tragic end. Othello is a tragic hero because he is noble, he suffers from a fatal tragic flaw and he goes through a tragic downfall. Because of these traits, Othello is known as one of the most famed tragic heroes in literature.

When one reads *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice*, one can understand the nature of Iago and why Othello is considered one of the greatest tragic heroes of all time. Shakespeare is celebrated as one of the best play-writers in history, and this play is one of his many masterpieces. From the detail in the tragedy to how it all unfolds, *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice* is an inventive piece of literature. From how Iago treats others and thinks, to how Othello starts gracefully but then spirals down a rabbit-hole of shame, we can conclude that Iago manipulates others because he is a psychopath, and Othello is one of his many victims.

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