

The Tragic Hero And The Different Degrees To Which They Are Presented

Many novels involve the use of the Tragic Hero, this is a character, usual the main, who follows a set of five general characteristics. These characteristics are; that they are respected, and have some power, they have a tragic flaw in their character, they learn some knowledge from their experienced, and they often die as a direct result of this flaw. These characters are often placed into works to varying degrees, and not many authors meet all five of these character traits. Even, some novels don't include a tragic hero of any sort. This writing tool of the tragic hero is used to advance the plot, and to provide some enlightenment to the reader as to a meaning or theme of the story. Although a character may die as a cause of their flaw, this does not necessarily mean that they are a tragic hero, but instead just a hero, or in some cases they are not even that.

In the first novel *Wuthering Heights* the character of Heathcliff is central to the plot. However Heathcliff is most certainly not a tragic hero. He is in fact much less than this. Surprisingly he does meet many of the noted character attributes for the tragic hero, and yet he is not one. He is not introduced as dignified, or respected. Instead he is introduced to the reader as a homeless child who is adopted, and then treated like a servant. He instead has to work for his respect, and earn it. He indeed has a flaw, and that is his determination for revenge. And he even learns something as a result of his experience. He learn that he must forgive people, as he is still getting revenge long after the people he is mad at have passed away. However it is the last point that prevents him from being a by the book definition of a tragic hero, there are also many other reasons that are not directly in the definition. His final death is not caused by his flaw, it is in fact when he moves on and overcomes his flaw that he finally dies. This shows that his death is not because of his flaw, but actuality inspire of the flaw. Along with this, for him to be a tragic *HERO* he must be a hero. However throughout the novel, Heathcliff is

demonstrated to be the negative force. He tortures people for actions their relatives did, and in general he is clearly the antagonist of the story, showing that he cannot by definition be a hero, and therefore is not a tragic hero.

Another character who is not a tragic hero is Rick Deckard from *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Although he is not as far away from heroism as Heathcliff, Deckard does not meet more of the requirement for the characteristics of a tragic hero. He is not very respected, and has almost no rank. He does not have a clear tragic flaw, besides for his moral dilemma. And his moral dilemma does not bring about his fall. He pushes past it, by sleeping with an android, then killing one that looks exactly like her. He also gains almost no knowledge or wisdom from this experience, as before it, he was fine to kill androids, then he just killed more androids. Nothing has changed about him, and so he is not a tragic hero. Although he is an excellent created character, who has many strong traits, he does not have the necessary ones that make him a tragic hero.

Sydney Carton from *A Tale of Two Cities* is another character that does not meet the characteristics of a tragic hero. Sydney like Deckard lacks a fatal flaw that will bring about his demise. Although at the end of the novel he does eventually die, he is not brought to his death accidentally through a flaw, instead it is his decision to enact this death, for the aid of his friends and the love of his life. The extreme love that he has for Lucy is not a flaw in the case of this novel, instead it is an honorable trait, as he makes all of his decisions, and controls himself to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it. For Carton it is not some over pride that ultimately leads to his downfall, and inevitable destruction, but it is instead his one choice to kill himself in order to save his friends, as he realizes that this is the only way to save them. His character although vital to the story, is not a tragic hero, but he could be more closely defined as a sacrificial hero, or Christ like figure. He takes his own life to save the lives of others, and he does this with little to no recognition of his actions. Although

Carton is not a tragic hero, he is still a great hero in his own right, and can be even more honorable than the tragic hero, as he looks death in the face, and embraces it to help others avoid it.

Jay Gatsby from *The Great Gatsby* is another character, who this time is a tragic hero, although not a perfect one. When the novel introduces him, he is very dignified and respected as one of the most wealthy people in the city, despite his dubious method to gain this wealth. His tragic flaw is similar to the characteristics of Carton, in which he has undying love for a woman who has already married. However there is a very distinct difference between these two characters, Carton's love is recognized, but is left at that. However, Gatsby's love for Daisy is abused, and used all the time. The fact that he permits his love be used by Daisy and the other characters in the novel makes it a flaw instead of an honorable attribute like it was for Carton. The main example of this is when Daisy hits and kills Myrtle. Because she uses Gatsby and his love, he takes the blame for her, and pretends it was him. This is what of course leads to his eventual death at the hands of Wilson. This lines up with all the attributes that make a tragic hero, however, it is to note that Gatsby does not learn much. He begins that novel thinking that he can win Daisy back, and then before he dies, he still thinks he can win Daisy back. Nothing has changed, although he is still a tragic hero.

Finally that character who is by far the most clearly tragic hero out of them all is Hamlet from the play *Hamlet*. Hamlet is a prince, so clearly he is extremely respected and dignified, so right off the bat he fits perfectly into the first attribute for a tragic hero. He also has a clear tragic flaw, where he has the inability to act against his uncle who he suspects has killed his father, and this flaw ultimately leads to his downfall, where due to his inability to act, his uncle acts first ending in both their deaths. He also comes to new knowledge that the lack of action, or inaction, is just as bad/dangerous as action.

All of these novels have had a varying level of the implementation of the tragic hero, but it is clear that a tragic hero does not need to die at the end, and even the characters that do end up dead are

not necessarily a tragic hero. However it appears that the novels only incorporate a small aspect to the full extent of the tragic hero, while the play which is much older incorporated the full tragic hero to the final detail.