

## ENGLISH

**The enduring value of “Othello” lies in the tragic impact evil has over goodness. To what extent do you agree?**

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Shakespeare’s “Othello” has endured over time due to the tragic impact that evil has on goodness in the play. This is presented through the characters of the play (particularly Iago), through “Othello’s” structure as a tragedy and through the text’s gripping plotline which is driven by the role of evil and the inclusion of jealousy and revenge in the play, themes which still relate to audiences today. However, whilst evil does conquer over goodness in the play, goodness is still present and provides an essential balance within the text as well as satisfies the audience.

The tragedy of “Othello” is brought about through the characters, most prominently by Iago, who as a result of his evil actions and through the strong relationship he has with Othello, Desdemona, Roderigo, Cassio and Emilia, manipulates these characters, ultimately bringing about their downfall. This conveys Iago’s strong desire for revenge and his evil-scheming nature. As described by Samuel J Coleridge, the audience can recognise Iago as having “motiveless malignancy”. Iago’s intense hatred towards Othello is the result of his irrational desire to destroy Othello for not awarding him the military position as well as his ungrounded suspicion of Othello being unfaithful with his wife. Furthermore, Iago’s illusion of being one thing when he is in fact another adds to the tragic impact of the play, as can be seen in the line “I am not what I am” which conveys Iago’s untrustworthy nature through the use of the negative (‘not’) and through the repetition of the word ‘I’. His nature is further explored through the use of dramatic irony in that his words contradict his actions. Furthermore, the imagery of black and white as well as poison are explored in the play to emphasise Iago’s desire for revenge – “Not poppy nor mandragora, nor all the drowsy syrups of the world shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep”. Additionally, contrast exists in the language spoken by Iago which is bestial (“Barbary horse”, “old black ram”), as opposed to Othello’s language which is noble.

In addition, as is typical of a tragic text, the structure of “Othello” means that it is not until the last act that the real tragedy occurs, Othello’s death. As a result, we see Iago’s gradual destroying of Othello endure until the last act which results in his evil scheming building dramatically and in severity in the audience’s eyes. Iago’s key role as a contributor to the overall tragedy is evident through the various stages of his plan to destroy both Othello and Cassio. Through the dialogue of the final scene in which Iago’s evil deeds are exposed, repeated truncated sentences and exclamation marks are used to make this moment very dramatic and climactic as Emilia exclaims her horror upon hearing the deeds that Iago has done - “Villainy, villainy, villainy!”... “O villainy, villainy!” Throughout the play, particularly in the last act, the various tragic events that play out are all of Iago’s doing; whether directly or indirectly and all lead to the tragic end for which “Othello” is well-known.

Another factor that has resulted in “Othello’s” endured value as a text is the gripping plotline which bridges the gap between modern and Shakespearean English, ensuring the text does not become dull and difficult to read. Throughout the play, one event leads to another, the first being that we learn of Iago’s jealousy towards Cassio who has been awarded a military position to Othello. The importance of this moment within the text is emphasised through Iago’s diction and tone which clearly conveys Iago’s dislike of Cassio; “...Forsooth, a great arithmetician, One Michael Cassio, a Florentine– ...” Iago’s jealousy of Cassio leads to his malevolent desire to seek revenge against Othello for giving Cassio the military position; “...Though I do hate him as I do hell pains...” It is these first two themed moments of jealousy and revenge within the text which in turn lead to Iago, Othello, Desdemona and Roderigo being destroyed by the end of the play. Furthermore, the themes of jealousy and revenge relate to and interest the audience as these themes are still part of modern day society, thus showing that the driving plot line and themes of jealousy and revenge in “Othello” have resulted in the enduring value of this text.

Finally, although evil's tragic impact over goodness has played a role in the enduring value of "Othello"; goodness has played a role too. In the text, goodness lies in the form of the love that exists between Othello and Desdemona. Although this love is challenged, by the end of the play, it is evident that the love still exists when through the use of strong emotive dialogue in Act 5, Scene 2, we see Othello battles with himself as to whether he can kill Desdemona; "... yet I'll not shed her blood..." and "... yet she must die..." In addition, not only does this goodness make the text more complex, but this goodness helps to establish an essential balance between good and evil in the play, leaving the reader feeling satisfied, something which is essential to a text if it is to continue to be valued as a piece of literature.

In conclusion, "Othello's" enduring value can be accredited to the tragic impact that evil has over goodness in the text. The characters (in particular Iago), the structure of the tragedy, the gripping plotline, the inclusion of jealousy and revenge and finally, the role of goodness in the play to create balance and satisfy the audience all result in "Othello" being a text which has textual integrity and has thus has endured value as a text.