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**The Representation of the British Empire in Shakespeare's
The merchant of Venice and *The tempest* : postcolonial standpoint**

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Abstract

This dissertation has examined the representation of the British Empire in William Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *The Tempest* (1611), from a Peripheral Postcolonial standpoint. The objective of the present work, which takes its theoretical bearings from Edward Said's Postcolonialism, is to challenge the existing idea of England's supremacy during the late 15th and early 16th centuries, arguing that the Spanish and Ottoman empires held more central positions in global power dynamics at that time. It investigates how Shakespeare's depiction of the British Empire reflected the ambitions of a nation seeking to establish itself as a dominant colonial force. By examining characters like Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and Caliban/Prospero in *The Tempest*, our concern is to highlight voices and perspectives that are often ignored or marginalized in order to maintain the existing power dynamics. Furthermore, we have explored the historical backdrop of the 15th and early 16th centuries, emphasizing the significant roles played by the Spanish and Ottoman empires on the global stage. Through this research, it is demonstrated that the British Empire, while emerging as a significant power, existed on the periphery of dominant imperial powers during that era. The findings of our research, have contributed to a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's portrayal of the British Empire, and England's position within the global power dynamics of the 15th and early 16th centuries. Overall, it is incorrect to categorize England as a colonizing imperial power in comparison to other European and non-European powers that exerted global dominance. During the Elizabethan (1558-1603) and Jacobean (1603-1625) eras, it can be argued that England was actively involved in constructing its empire but had not yet achieved the status of a fully established imperial power.

Key words: *British Empire; Spanish Empire; Ottoman Empire; Postcolonial theory; Peripheral; William Shakespeare.*

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Introduction

Our research focuses on the British society from the late 15th to the early 16th centuries, a time characterized by colonialism and the dominance of powerful empires such as the Ottoman Empire and the Spanish Empire. It is important to note that during this period, the British Empire did not yet exist, meaning that Britain was not a united country yet. Instead, the primary concern of the British people was trade rather than aspiring to establish an empire. The aim of our research is to examine this particular aspect of British history.

We aim to explore William Shakespeare's representation of the British Empire and its relationship with the world in the sixteenth century through our research titled *The Representation of the British Empire in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *The Tempest* (1611): A Peripheral Postcolonial Standpoint*. Two plays under study serve as illustrations of Shakespeare's portrayal of the British Empire and reveal the hidden aspects of British society. Shakespeare's representations played a significant role in the ideology of conquest and were widely circulated among both Westerners and non-Westerners, making them a crucial theme in postcolonial theory. Drawing upon Edward Said's *Postcolonialism*, particularly his book *Orientalism*, our essay offers a postcolonial overview by analysing these two plays. We also provide a brief summary of the concept of Imperialism, which is manifested through imperialistic characters in the plays. By examining *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest* from a peripheral postcolonial standpoint, we delve into the themes of colonization, domination, and identity in Shakespeare's works. This perspective allows for a critical analysis of power dynamics and prejudices, while shedding light on the marginalized perspectives represented in these plays.

Issue in context

Shakespeare's works have been the subject of extensive critical analysis and interpretation. Among these critical lenses, Postcolonialism and Feminism have emerged as significant perspectives. *The Tempest* has garnered significant attention as it explores themes of colonization, power dynamics and the representation of the other. *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* by Marianne Novy (2017) is a book that explores the Feminist perspective in *The Tempest*, it looks at how gender roles and power dynamics are portrayed in the play, with a focus on female characters like Miranda. The book analyses their agency, autonomy, and the societal expectations they challenge or conform to. By applying Feminist theory, Novy provides insights into the complexities of female representation in *The Tempest* and how it reflects the attitudes towards women during Shakespeare's time for example Miranda a young innocent woman sheltered by her father, Prospero. (Novy, 2017)

This passage explores *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* by Jyotsna Singh (2019), a great book that explores how postcolonial theory can be applied to *The Tempest*. It examines the power dynamics, cultural identity, the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer and resistance portrayed in the play, particularly in the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. Singh also provides insights into the broader historical and cultural context of colonialism during Shakespeare's time. This book offers a comprehensive analysis of the postcolonial themes in *The Tempest*. (Jyotsna, 2019)

Postcolonial criticism offers a unique lens through which to examine Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*. This critical perspective delves into the difficult interaction of social class, racial prejudice, power dynamics, and the representation of marginalized groups.

One significant aspect examined is the portrayal of Judaism through the character Shylock. Kern's article (2007), *The Jews in England and Venice*, delves into Shakespeare's depiction of Shylock as a reflection of historical prejudices against Jews. Throughout history, Jews have often been victims and associated with evil. The stereotypes that emerged during Shakespeare's time were influenced by the banishment of Jews from England in 1290, reinforcing the English perception of Jews as inherently wicked. Shakespeare utilizes these stereotypes to create a captivating villain in Shylock. The play further reinforces the notion of Judaism as evil, associated with material possessions and chance, while Christianity is portrayed as representing love and mercy. From a postcolonial perspective, this analysis sheds light on the spread of stereotypes and discrimination against marginalized groups, specifically the Jewish community, within the context of Shakespeare's plays. (Kern, 2007)

In Alford's book (2017), *London Triumph: merchants, adventurers, and money in Shakespeare's city*, he explores the historical context of London's rise during the sixteenth century. He examines the attitudes towards usury and moneylending in Elizabethan England. *The merchant of Venice*, through the characters of Shylock and Antonio, reflects the conflicting views on money. Antonio represents active trade and risk-taking, while Shylock symbolizes passive accumulation of wealth. From a postcolonial perspective, this contrast exposes the power dynamics within economic systems and highlights the difference between contributing to society and exploiting others for personal gain. (Alford, 2017)

In the article *The Merchant of Venice in light of post-colonialism* (2018), the author delves into the complex themes of social class and racial prejudices present in Shakespeare's play. The portrayal of Jews as other and Christians as superior raises thought-provoking questions about society and discrimination. The author examines Shylock's struggle to establish his identity in a biased society, with money symbolizing power and colonial ambitions. Shylock's quest for revenge becomes a symbol of resistance against oppression, resonating

postcolonial themes. The play exposes the marginalization of hybrid identities and explores the power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized. Shakespeare's nuanced portrayal of Shylock challenges stereotypes, while the character of Portia reveals the complexities of racial dynamics and the oppressive nature of Venice's justice system. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the durable influence of Postcolonialism in shaping narratives of oppression and power. (The Merchant of Venice in Light of Post-Colonialism, 2018)

Following our reading of the previous criticism, it becomes apparent that scholars have conducted detailed analyses of Shakespeare's plays, specifically *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *The Tempest* (1611). These scholarly investigations offer valuable insights from a postcolonial standpoint, shedding light on Shakespeare's depiction of the British Empire. However, it is worth noting that these critics may have overlooked the specific emphasis on the peripheral nature of Britain. Considering the historical backdrop of the 16th centuries, it becomes evident that Britain had not yet achieved the status of a dominant empire. Consequently, there arises a necessity for a comprehensive exploration of the peripheral perspective regarding Britain's position within these plays, considering the historical realities of the time.

Therefore, the aim of our research is to investigate both Shakespeare's peripheral and imperial standpoints of the British Empire. We will try to argue about the extent to which the representation of the British Empire in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest* corresponds to historical realities, and how the adoption of a peripheral postcolonial view challenges the notion of England's supremacy during the 16th centuries, compared with the powers Central to the Spanish and Ottoman Empires.

It is also part of our concern to closely analyse key characters and their interactions, such as Portia and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and Prospero/Caliban in *The Tempest*, through this analysis we aim to extract the peripheral side of Britain by illuminating the perspectives of marginalized individuals who challenge the dominant power structures.

Through studying these characters, we gain insight into how Shakespeare explores the moral consequences of imperialism. These characters, representing marginalized individuals on the border of British society, offer a deeper understanding of the complex effects of colonialism, their stories reveal the challenges and perspectives that challenge dominant power structures

To approach our chosen topic, we will employ the Theory of Postcolonialism. This theory belongs to a branch of literary theory and criticism that help us to examine Shakespeare's portrayal of the British Empire, which was shaped by his interactions with mighty empires, positioning him more on the periphery rather than at the centre of the emerging British Empire.

A) Methods

This section of our research paper focuses on the methodology employed to study the works of William Shakespeare, specifically *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, from a Peripheral Imperial Standpoint. Additionally, we delve into the use of postcolonial theory in our research.

We begin by discussing the concept of postcolonialism, which exhibits a double writing and double meaning. Firstly, post-colonialism, written with a hyphen, serves as a historical adjective indicating a chronological meaning of after colonization. Conversely, postcolonialism, without a hyphen, functions as a historical adjective referring to a postcolonial theory that emerged in the 1970s. As an adjective, it primarily denotes a temporal aspect of postcolonial, signifying the period following colonization. Another usage of postcolonial relates to the positioning of postcolonial discourse or attitude, involving how to respond to the historical and ethical dimensions of colonization that have profoundly affected humanity. Notably, postcolonialism pervades various disciplines within the humanities, including literature, philosophy, cultural analysis, and theoretical studies. Within this dissertation, we specifically explore the application of postcolonialism to Shakespeare's literary works, namely *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*.

Based on the information available to us, it is widely acknowledged that the emergence of postcolonial theory can be traced back to the 1960s, during which influential theorists like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha played significant roles. Their perspectives were shaped by the intellectual contributions of thinkers and philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Frantz Fanon, and Michel Foucault, while also being informed by their own lived experiences of the colonial past. The primary objective of postcolonial theory is to critically analyse and deconstruct the Western paradigm, challenging the dominant position of European literature and theories. By doing so, postcolonial theorists aim to question and dismantle

Western hegemony. The impacts of colonization, encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural transformations, serve as the backdrop against which postcolonial theory operates. Consequently, literature, particularly textual analysis, forms the foundation and starting point of postcolonial theory, commonly referred to as postcolonialism.

a) Said's Orientalism: The Western Conception of the Orient (1978)

Postcolonial studies have had an earlier presence in English universities and among American scholars. Pioneers of this critical movement effectively conveyed its essence and formulated its principles more explicitly. Among them, the most notable figure is Edward Said, in 1978, Said published his influential book "Orientalism" and actively contributed to the emerging field of postcolonial studies. This scholarly work has since become a foundational text in the realm of postcolonialism, providing insightful analyses and serving as a definitive point of reference. By extensively examining the concept of Orientalism, Said investigates the formation of knowledge and representations that have shaped the perception of the East and its people in contrast to the West. These representations, constructed primarily by European and later American scholars, artists, and writers, have prevailed throughout the modern era, spanning from the nineteenth century to the present day (Said, 1978.p85).

The following dissertation delves into key characteristics of colonialism found in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*. As a result, we found it fitting to use Edward Said's notable works, *Orientalism: The Western Conception of the Orient (1978)*, as a basis for conducting a comparative postcolonial study on these literary works. The aim is to delve into the respective authors' perspectives on Britain's representation. The reason we selected Said's works as a theoretical framework is because they serve as subsequent explorations of his ideas regarding colonial discourse and the resistance and opposition against it. Said thoroughly examines significant elements that illustrate how Oriental authors challenge and react to the stereotypical portrayals assigned to them in "Orientalist literature."

We will analyse Shakespeare's works in relation to colonial discourse and the celebration of the British Empire, drawing inspiration from Said's *Orientalism*. We have chosen to reference Said's work because he extensively examines various aspects of colonial discourse and the Western portrayal of the Orient, emphasizing the prevalence of negative stereotypes associated with Eastern countries. Said defines *Orientalism* as a Western approach of exerting dominance, restructuring societies, and asserting authority over the Orient. Essentially, Orientalism serves as a means of distorting and subjugating colonized peoples under the guise of civilizing and introducing them to the so-called modern and enlightened world. This understanding has shaped Said's conceptualization of the term. His objective is to delve into the Western perspective's misinterpretation of the rest of the world. From his standpoint, Orientalism functions as a discriminatory method, highlighting the perceived differences between Europe and the Orient to justify the invasion of other lands. These differences, encompassing socio-economic, cultural, and political aspects, create a divide between Europe and the rest of the world, ultimately supporting Western powers' occupation of other territories.

Additionally, Said argues that the colonizer exerts control over the colonized people by imposing Western culture and language, with the intention of replacing the native identity with one entirely controlled by the colonizer. This serves as a means for Westerners to demonstrate the alleged backwardness and decline of the Orient, while showcasing their own progress and superiority. Furthermore, Said argues that "Orientalism expresses and represents the Orient culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions." (Said, 1978.p 85) In simpler terms, literature is used as a tool to justify Europe's intrusion into these territories. This argument finds support in colonial institutions that maintain dominance over the Orient. Said also argues that Europe propagated stereotypical depictions of the Orient, portraying them as irrational, morally corrupt, childlike, and fundamentally different, as the Shakespearian representation of Caliban in *The Tempest* as savage and disfigured, thereby presenting Europeans as rational, virtuous, mature, and normal.

In summary, Said's contribution to the field of Postcolonial Studies was ground-breaking as he redefined the dynamics between Europe and the rest of the world by introducing the concept of the Orient.

To delve deeper into the topic, it is necessary to examine imperialism. Understanding the term, Imperialism requires consulting explanatory dictionaries. In Russian dictionaries, Imperialism is defined by Vladimir Lenin as the ultimate phase of capitalism, characterized by the dominance of large monopolies across all aspects of life. (Gudova, 2018.p 490) According to Luliia Gudova, the examination of imperialism emerges as a significant and pressing matter:

The notion of Imperialism appeared in the second half of the 19 centuries. It was understood as the desire of the state to expand its territorial possessions, mainly in other parts of the world. The notion of imperialism was elaborated to define the dominant policy of the empire. (Gudova, 2018.p 489).

In discussions pertaining to the subjugation of a people or region by a foreign power, the terms "colonialism" and "imperialism" are often employed interchangeably without a clear distinction in meaning. They both refer to the establishment of an empire. Edward Said uses the term "imperialism" in a broad sense, encompassing the "practice, theory, and attitudes of a dominant metropolitan centre ruling over a distant territory." He differentiates this process from "colonialism," which involves the establishment of settlements in a remote territory. However, there is a consensus that the term "imperialism," specifically referring to a conscious and openly advocated policy of acquiring colonies for economic, strategic, and political advantages, did not gain prominence until approximately 1880. (Said 1978).

B) Materials

This research focuses on William Shakespeare's portrayal of the English Empire during the late 15th and early 16th centuries from a postcolonial perspective. The analysis primarily examines two of his plays; *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, which explore themes related to the Mediterranean region. Shakespeare, a renowned poet and actor of the Renaissance

era, is celebrated as one of the greatest English writers whose works resonate with readers worldwide, capturing human emotions and conflicts.

A) Results and Discussion

a) Results

While carrying out this research, we have reached interesting findings. Through the examination of William Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest* within the framework of Edward Said's Postcolonial theory, we have observed that both plays are set in the Mediterranean region, which historically served as a centre of trade for premodern empires.

The first finding of our dissertation is concerned with Shakespeare's depiction of the Britain as a powerful force. However, when considering the historical context, our argument highlights the peripheral nature of Britain's position. In reality, during the 15th and 16th centuries, Britain had not yet become a dominant empire compared to the central powers like the Spanish and Ottoman empires. This contrast between perceptions and historical facts sheds light on Britain's position in the world at that time.

Another finding that derived from our analysis of the two plays under study is Shakespeare's portrayal of the strength of Britain and significant historical figures through his use of characters. For instance, the character of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* invites a comparison with Queen Elizabeth I. Both demonstrate "intelligence, decisiveness, and a strong personality". In the casket scene, Portia's refusal of suitors (the Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Aragon from Spain), mirrors Queen Elizabeth I's rejection of foreign suitors. This can be seen as a response to the historical fact of Queen Elizabeth's reign and her resistance to foreign dominance, particularly her half-sister Mary Tudor's marriage to Philip II of Spain, who sought to exert control over Britain. Similarly, in *The Tempest*, Prospero represents the European

colonizers who arrived on the island to assert their authority over the indigenous people. Prospero's superiority complex, and lack of awareness about the consequences of his actions symbolize the power dynamics inherent in imperialism.

A third finding of our research highlights that during the 15th and 16th centuries, the Spanish Empire with its control over countries in the Mediterranean basin, and the rising Ottoman Empire, emerged as the dominant powers. This perspective questions the conventional notion of Britain's supremacy during that period.

Overall, our findings reveal the peripheral nature of Britain in relation to the central powers of the Spanish and Ottoman empires, shedding light on the complexities of colonialism and imperialism as depicted by Shakespeare in these plays.

b) Discussion

In the first chapter of our research, we aim to analyse how William Shakespeare portrayed the British Empire and its significance during his time. Shakespeare's works often reflected the cultural and political climate of the Elizabethan (1558-1603) and Jacobean (1603-1625) eras. In exploring the concept of the British Empire, Shakespeare wanted to highlight its greatness and power through his plays, emphasizing its ability to establish colonies and expand its influence across the globe. He depicted the empire as a formidable force, capable of both military conquest and prosperous trade.

One aspect we examine is Shakespeare's representation of the British Empire as a city for prosperous trade. Just as Venice flourished as a commercial centre during that era, Shakespeare aspired for England to achieve similar commercial importance. By highlighting the economic aspects of the empire, Shakespeare aimed to convey the importance of trade and wealth accumulation in the context of empire-building. Another aspect we explore in this chapter is the policy of expansion and settlement adopted by the British Empire. Shakespeare demonstrated the imperial ambitions of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. This expansionist policy was a significant aspect of the empire's identity and influence during the time in which Shakespeare wrote.

Moving on to the second chapter, we delve into Shakespeare's use of characters in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, particularly their relationship to the British Empire. Shakespeare often drew inspiration from historical figures and events to create his characters, providing a reflection of the imperial context of his time. For example, in the character of Portia, we can see resemblances to Queen Elizabeth I. Portia's portrayal as a strong and superior figure mirrors Elizabeth's dominance over other empires during her reign. Shakespeare used such characters to not only entertain the audience, but also to explore and reinforce the ideals and aspirations of the British Empire. Furthermore, we examine the characters of Caliban and

Prospero in *The Tempest*. Prospero represents European practices and the imperial ambitions of the time, exerting control over the less dominant forces. Caliban, on the other hand, symbolizes the uncivilized natives, highlighting the imperial perspective of dominating and oppressing indigenous populations during the era of colonization.

In the final chapter of our research, our focus is on studying and identifying the most influential countries during the 15th and 16th centuries, such as the Ottoman Empire and the Spanish Empire. We delve into the construction of their powerful empires and their strategies for imperial domination. These empires played a significant role in shaping the global landscape of the time, expanding their control over numerous territories and establishing colonies across the world. By examining their successes and adventures in colonization, we gain a deeper understanding of the broader imperial context within which Shakespeare's works were situated.

Overall, our research seeks to explore Shakespeare's portrayal of the British Empire, its aspirations, and its relationship to other influential powers of the time. By examining his works in this context, we gain insights into the cultural, political, and imperial dynamics that shaped Shakespeare's writing and the broader Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

In addition to the themes of the British Empire and the exploration of Shakespeare's works, it is crucial to consider the significance of the Mediterranean basin during the time in question. The Mediterranean basin held great significance during the 15th and 16th centuries as a hub of trade, cultural exchange, and political power. Its strategic location and thriving maritime commerce made it a vital centre connecting Europe, Africa, and Asia. The region's charm and historical legacy captivated the imagination of Shakespeare's audience, leading him to set some of his plays, such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, in the Mediterranean. The presence of influential empires, such as the Ottoman Empire and Spain, along with the region's rich history and mythology, provided Shakespeare with a wealth of inspiration. Incorporating Mediterranean elements added depth and significance to his works, appealing to

the audience's fascination with history, myth, and the broader world. Overall, the Mediterranean's significance influenced the historical context of Shakespeare's plays, contributing to their complexity and exploration of empire, identity, and global dynamics.

Chapter One: England during the late 15th and early 16th century: A case of Non-Imperial Status

In our research, we focus on the British Empire from the late 15th to the early 16th centuries. This period was marked by conflicts and population growth in England, along with expanding trade. The British started establishing colonies and seeking trade opportunities, particularly in the Mediterranean region. They had significant trade relationships with Mediterranean Empires like Spain and Morocco during the Elizabethan period and the early 17th century. Additionally, we highlight the influential role of Shakespeare in 16th century Britain. His works vividly portrayed the emergent British society and its existence. We also examine the significance of trade in shaping the British Empire, going beyond Shakespeare's portrayal. We explore Shakespeare's perspective on Britain's existence through his plays *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, which provide unique insights into British identity, society, and its global relationships. Shakespeare delves into themes of power, colonialism, justice, and cultural exchange through complex characters and elaborate plots. By analysing his portrayal of Britain in these plays, we gain a deeper understanding of his perspective on the country's existence during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Lastly, we re-examine Shakespeare's depiction of British history in the 16th century. England lacked the characteristics of a full developed empire due to factors such as the absence of vast overseas territories, a focus on trade instead of territorial expansion, limited political control, and relatively modest military capabilities. While England was involved in European politics, trade, and exploration, it did not have an empire during that time.

The Tudor period in European history spanned from 1485 to 1603, with England being ruled by the Tudor dynasty. Henry VII became king after defeating Richard III, marking the end of the Wars of the Roses in 1485. Henry VIII succeeded him and his reign is considered the peak of the British Empire. The Elizabethan period, under Queen Elizabeth I, took place from

1558 to 1603. She continued her father's Protestant policies, defended England against the Spanish Armada, and played a significant role in the nation's economic development. Elizabeth's reign saw literary advancements, with Shakespeare flourishing. After her death, the Jacobean era (1603-1625) began under James I. The British sought to establish territories and trade to form an empire during this time (Smith's Wood Academy, 2020).

A) Exploring the Mediterranean Basin: A Tapestry of History and Literature

Through careful analysis and examination of various plays, we aim to delve into two key aspects: the significance of the Mediterranean basin and its connection to trade in British history, particularly with the Mediterranean Empires of Spain and Morocco. The Mediterranean Sea has held immense value throughout history, attracting numerous powers due to its strategic location as a connecting route between Africa, Europe, Asia, and America. This importance is also evident in literature, as exemplified by Shakespeare, one of the greatest English writers, who focused on the Mediterranean and made it the central setting for his tragic plays, namely *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*.

To begin, let us explore the meaning of the term "The Mediterranean Sea", derived from the Latin words "Medius" and "terra," means "middle land" and was introduced by the Romans. It connects Europe with Eurasia, particularly the Middle East and Africa. Spanning from the Strait of Gibraltar to the Suez Canal, it holds fertile and sought-after lands throughout history, renowned for its rich historical and cultural heritage. (The Mediterranean Sea, n.d)

Secondly, The Mediterranean basin served as a crucial crossroads for politics, economics, and religion, allowing Shakespeare to address sensitive topics and negotiate a British imperial identity in relation to the Spaniards and Ottomans. This region played a significant role for Britain, providing access to India and influencing economic dynamics in Europe (Grygiel, 2020). Early sea explorations expanded civilization, offering financial opportunities, cultural integration, and territorial acquisitions. Advancements in shipbuilding

and navigation enabled longer voyages and larger cargo transportation. (Leupold, n.d). Sea journeys provided inspiration for literary works, such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which explores the motivations and dangers of sixteenth-century sea travel.

B) From Britannia to the Mediterranean: An Epoch of Empires

a) Spain and the Britain in the Early Modern Era (1558-1603)

Initially, the relationship between England and Spain was complex due to their political and religious differences, as well as their status as imperial powers with overlapping territories. The powerful Spanish empire, under the Habsburgs, sought an alliance with England against France, but tensions remained strained. The marriage between Philip II of Spain and Mary Tudor briefly improved relations, but after Mary's death, Protestant Queen Elizabeth's ascension to the throne turned the friendly relations hostile.

During the 16th century, there were temporary alliances between King Henry VIII of England and Carlos I of Spain against France. Philip II, through his marriage to Mary I, became king of Spain, England, and Ireland, but Mary's death without heirs ended this unification. (Spain-United Kingdom relations, 2020).

In 1568, Queen Elizabeth seized gold from Spanish ships in English ports, which was intended for the Spanish Netherlands. This led to a series of penal actions, with England seizing Spanish ships and Spain imposing an embargo on English imports. However, both sides wanted to avoid war, leading to a resolution in August, 28th 1574 called the Bristol Convention, where compensation was provided for losses. Trade resumed, and relations began to improve between England and Spain. (The Treaty of Bristol settles disputes between English and Spanish merchants, 2011)

b) From Allies to Adversaries: The Complex Relations between Britain and Morocco

The historical relations between Britain and Morocco have been marked by a delightful complexity. Spanning centuries, their interactions have evolved from periods of alliance and cooperation to moments of tension and rivalry. In the 16th century, Britain sought to establish trade routes and secure strategic advantages in North Africa, leading to diplomatic engagements with the Moroccan sultanate. However, differing political and economic interests often strained their relationship, creating a dynamic landscape of shifting alliances and fitful conflicts. These complex relations between Britain and Morocco serve as evidence to the intricate web of politics, trade, and cultural exchange that shaped their interaction during this crucial era of history.

In the late 15th century, London and Marrakesh sought an alliance despite their differences. (Errazouki, 2021) Queen Elizabeth I of England and Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur of Morocco both aimed to benefit from this alliance, despite their distinct political, cultural, and religious contexts. They corresponded and collaborated to counter their common enemies, negotiate trade agreements, and protect their imperial interests. Their collaboration contributed to their rise as Atlantic powers and was facilitated by historical developments and their correspondence. Queen Elizabeth played a key role in establishing trade agreements with Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur, driven by their shared opposition to Philip II of Spain. Initially hesitant due to concerns from Christian powers, Queen Elizabeth's engagement in the arms trade with Morocco increased over time. Their diplomatic exchanges evolved into a political alliance after Portugal's defeat in the Battle of Alcácer Quibir in 1578. Queen Elizabeth fostered commercial relations with the Islamic world, leading to the establishment of trade companies for Morocco, the Ottoman Empire, and India. (Queen Elizabeth I, 2014).

Regarding the Ottoman Empire, diplomatic relations were established with England. In an effort to destabilize Catholic Europe, England exported tin, lead, and ammunition. Queen Elizabeth also engaged in discussions with Murad III for potential joint military operations during the war with Spain in 1585.

Morocco and England developed a commercial relationship driven by their opposition to Spain. The trade involved Moroccan sugar in exchange for English goods like shields, ammunition, timber, and metals. In 1600, Abd al-Wahed ibn Masoud, an ambassador from Morocco, visited England to negotiate the Anglo-Moroccan alliance and discuss plans against Spain. Queen Elizabeth I agreed to supply ammunition to Morocco and encouraged joint military actions against the Spanish. However, conflicts and hostilities between the two nations persisted. Morocco aimed to maintain independence and resist European influence, while England sought to expand its colonies and control trade routes. This enmity resulted in clashes, including piracy and naval battles, as both countries competed for dominance in the Mediterranean and Atlantic regions. The "English-Moroccan War" from 1577 to 1580 exemplified these hostilities, with English privateer Thomas Stukeley attacking Moroccan coastal towns and the Moroccan sultan responding by capturing English ships and prisoners. These events underscore the complex power dynamics and competition characterizing the Morocco-England relationship during that time. (Queen Elizabeth I, 2014). Ultimately, the conflicting interests and territorial ambitions of both powers transformed their initial alliance into a state of rivalry and confrontation. This evolution in their relationship was driven by the pursuit of their respective goals, which often clashed with one another.

C) Shakespearean Insights: Shakespeare's Perspective on the Existence of Britain through *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*

Shakespeare's plays *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest* offer profound insights into the existence of Britain. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare crafts a tale set on a remote island where the exiled Duke of Milan, Prospero, reigns with his magical powers. While the play does

not directly take place in Britain, it serves as a metaphor for Britain's expanding empire during Shakespeare's time. Prospero's control over the island symbolizes the increasing dominance of imperial Britain as a colonial power, spreading its influence across distant territories and shaping the course of history. (Shakespeare, 1611). Moreover, *The Merchant of Venice* explores the cultural tapestry of Britain by delving into themes of tolerance, prejudice, and religious identity. Set in Venice, a vibrant hub of diverse cultures, the play examines the complex relationships between different ethnicities, religions, and social classes. Shakespeare's inclusion of Venice allows for a nuanced exploration of how Britain, as a multicultural nation, navigates issues of religious and cultural differences. The character of Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, challenges the prevalent anti-Semitic sentiments of the time and provides a platform for Shakespeare to question and critique prevailing prejudices within British society. (Shakespeare, 1596)

Edward Said's postcolonial theory provides a valuable perspective for analysing Shakespeare's plays and their exploration of Britain's existence. By utilizing Said's insights, we can examine how Shakespeare portrays colonial expansion, cultural diversity, and societal prejudices, revealing power dynamics, resistance, and the enduring effects of colonialism. Said's framework enables a critical evaluation of marginalized voices, identity negotiations, and the subversion of colonial norms in Shakespeare's works, deepening our comprehension of how Shakespeare engages with the complexities of Britain's historical context and its imperial legacy. These themes are evident in plays such as *The Tempest*, which references to Britain's expanding empire and global ambitions, and *The Merchant of Venice*, which delves into the challenges and diversity within the nation. Shakespeare's profound understanding of human nature and his ability to capture societal complexities contribute to a richer understanding of Britain's historical and cultural development. His works serve as literary testaments, offering invaluable insights into the intricate dynamics that shaped Britain during the Elizabethan era and beyond. Incorporating postcolonial perspectives enhances our analysis of Shakespeare's

plays, shedding light on their exploration of Britain's existence and their resonance with broader social, cultural, and political implications in the context of postcolonial discourse. (Said,1978).

To substantiate our claims, we have sourced examples directly from the original texts of William Shakespeare's, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*. We have carefully selected quotes as they reflect significant moments and dialogues that shed light on the themes and perspectives discussed in relation to Britain's imperial existence. By extracting these excerpts, we provide concrete evidence of Shakespeare's profound insights into the historical and cultural context of Britain during his era. By delving into the plays themselves, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the depth and complexity of Shakespeare's perspective on the existence of imperial Britain. Here are examples from *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest* that illustrate Shakespeare's perspective on the existence of imperial Britain:

a) *The Merchant of Venice*:

The Merchant of Venice by Shakespeare does not directly address imperial Britain. However, certain quotes from the play touch on themes of power dynamics and cultural clashes relevant to the era of imperialism. These quotes explore power, manipulation, and cultural conflicts, offering insights into the impact of imperialism.

The play's setting in Venice, a cosmopolitan city known for its trading networks, allows Shakespeare to examine the interactions between different cultures and ethnicities. The characters of Portia and Bassanio, who hail from Venice, highlight the cosmopolitan nature of the city and its influence on Britain as a centre of commerce and cultural exchange.

"If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces." (Shakespeare, 1596.Act 1, Scene 2, p.23). This quote by Portia reflects the social hierarchy and class distinctions of the time. It indirectly alludes to the power structures present in imperial societies, where the wealthy and privileged hold higher status and control over resources.

"The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose." (Shakespeare, 1596. Act 1, Scene 3 p.35). It reflects Shakespeare's perspective on the existence of England, warning against the manipulation of religious texts and the dangers of rigidly following laws, which illustrates imperial Britain.

The final courtroom scene, where Portia disguises herself as a lawyer and skilfully navigates the trial, emphasizes the power of intellect and justice. This scene highlights Britain's legal system and its commitment to fairness and equity.

The famous "pound of flesh" speech delivered by Shylock in Act 3, Scene 1 reveals his desire for revenge against Antonio. This scene raises profound questions about justice, mercy, and the consequences of seeking retribution.

b) The Tempest:

The storm in the play represents the chaotic forces of nature and symbolizes the challenges faced by early colonial Britain. In *The Tempest*, Prospero's control over the island parallels Britain's colonial power, symbolizing the expansion of imperial authority and colonization efforts during the Elizabethan era.

"All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail! I come to answer thy best pleasure; best to fly, to swim, to dive into the fire, to ride on the curled clouds; to thy strong bidding, task Ariel and all his quality." (Shakespeare, 1611. Act 1, Scene 2. p27). This quote highlights the power dynamics and servitude within the play, with Ariel obediently following Prospero's commands. It reflects the imperial control Prospero exercises over the supernatural being.

"Me, poor man, my library was dukedom large enough." (Shakespeare, 1611. Act 1, Scene 2. p23.) Here, Prospero emphasizes the importance of knowledge and education, suggesting that his intellectual pursuits and the power of his mind were enough to rule over a significant domain. It reflects the intellectual and cultural superiority associated with imperial Britain.

"This island's mine by Sycorax, my mother, which thou takt's from me." (Shakespeare,1611 Act 1, Scene 2,p.39) Caliban, the native inhabitant of the island, laments the loss of his homeland to Prospero. This quote alludes to the colonization and appropriation of lands by imperial powers, representing the imperialistic tendencies of Britain during Shakespeare's time. Caliban's introduction in Act 1, Scene 2, explores the dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized, raising questions about power, oppression, and imperialism.

The masque scene portrays the extravagant entertainment and splendour enjoyed by the ruling elite in Shakespeare's time.

In short, Shakespeare employed his plays to offer insights into Britain's imperial existence through themes of colonial expansion, power, colonization, control, and societal prejudices. By placing his characters in diverse settings and exploring their interactions, Shakespeare provides a nuanced reflection of the historical and cultural context of Britain during his time. *The Tempest* hints at Britain's expanding empire, while *The Merchant of Venice* delves into the cultural diversity within the nation. Shakespeare's portrayal of these themes not only highlights his literary prowess but also reveals his keen observation of the world around him. His works serve as a testament to Britain's historical and cultural development.

Shakespeare is widely regarded as a masterful storyteller, celebrated for his remarkable talent as both a tragedian and a comedian. His plays continue to captivate audiences with not only their depth of characterization, but also rich language. While Shakespeare often drew inspiration from historical events and figures for his plays, it is important to recognize that his portrayals of British history were primarily a product of literary imagination rather than strict adherence to historical accuracy. In his plays, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, Shakespeare undoubtedly incorporated elements of real historical events and individuals. However, he took significant artistic liberties to shape the narratives that serves the thematic intentions of the play. Shakespeare's primary objective was not to provide a comprehensive and

precise historical account but rather to engage and entertain his audience. Moreover, Shakespeare occasionally altered or embellished historical facts to intensify the emotional impact of the story or to emphasize particular themes. While it is important to acknowledge the distinction between Shakespeare's literary imagination and historical accuracy, and this topic will be the subject of our forthcoming discussion.

D) Re-evaluating Shakespeare's Portrayal of British History

To better understand Shakespeare's portrayal of British history, it is important to examine the primary sources available during the period he depicted. By scrutinizing historical documents, we can compare them with Shakespeare's narrative choices and evaluate the extent to which he adhered to or deviated from historical facts. This analysis allows us to separate truth from fiction. Additionally, studying primary sources, contemporary accounts, and the socio-political climate of the time provides a more comprehensive understanding of the events and figures that inspired Shakespeare's plays. This contextual analysis helps differentiate historical facts from artistic interpretation, shedding light on potential inaccuracies or creative exaggeration in Shakespeare's portrayals. Shakespeare's plays have had a significant impact on our perception of British history, shaping our understanding of key events and figures. However, it is important to approach his works critically and acknowledge that they are not intended to provide historically accurate representations. Therefore, it is necessary to re-evaluate Shakespeare's portrayal of the British history by examining primary sources and comparing them to his narrative choices. This process allows us to distinguish fact from fiction, identify potential inaccuracies, and gain a more nuanced understanding of the historical context in which Shakespeare wrote. By reassessing how he depicted historical figures and events, we can uncover new perspectives, challenge traditional narratives, and enrich our appreciation for the complexities of Britain's historical past.

During the 16th century, England's non-imperial status was substantiated by several significant factors. These factors include the absence of extensive overseas territories, a primary emphasis on trade and commerce rather than territorial expansion, limited political control, and comparatively modest military capabilities. Despite its involvement in European politics, trade, and exploration, England did not possess the defining characteristics of a complete empire during that specific era.

At that time, England did not possess the vast overseas territories or colonies that were characteristic of imperial powers like Spain and Portugal. While England did engage in early exploration and colonization efforts, particularly in North America, these ventures were limited in scope and did not result in the establishment of a significant empire. The English settlements in the Americas, such as Jamestown in Virginia (1607), Newfoundland (1610) and Plymouth in Massachusetts (1620), were relatively small and struggled to expand their territorial control. In contrast, Spain had established vast colonial empires in the Americas, including territories in present-day Mexico, Peru, and the Caribbean, while Portugal had significant control over territories in Brazil, Africa, and Asia. The comparatively limited territorial acquisitions of England during this period indicate that it did not possess the same imperial reach as its European counterparts. (Williamson, 2005).

In contrast to the imperial ambitions of other European powers, England's activities in the 16th century were primarily centred around trade and commerce. The English pursued the establishment of trade routes, the development of commercial networks, and the expansion of their commercial interests. They focused on establishing favourable trade agreements and monopolies, such as the formation of trading companies like the Muscovy Company in 1555 and the East Company in 1600. These companies were primarily interested in securing valuable goods and resources, rather than the direct governance or administration of overseas territories. The primary goal of English expeditions was often to establish trading posts, where they could

establish economic relationships and facilitate the exchange of goods. This emphasis on economic opportunities and the accumulation of wealth through trade relationships differentiated England's approach from the more territorial expansion-driven agenda of traditional empires. (Williamson, 2005). Moreover, in the 16th England's involvement in overseas territories did not extend to exercising significant political control. Unlike empires that exerted direct governance over colonies, England's engagements were often limited to the establishment of trading posts or settlements. The English lacked the administrative apparatus and infrastructure necessary to administer extensive overseas territories. Their colonies in North America were relatively small in population and governed through relatively loose structures, allowing for a greater degree of autonomy compared to colonies of other European powers. Additionally, England lacked the institutionalized systems of governance and bureaucracy that were characteristic of traditional empires. Unlike the highly centralized governance structures of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, England did not establish vice-royal administration or governor-general positions to exert direct political control over their overseas territories. This limited degree of political control further supports the argument that England was not operating as a full-developed empire during this period. (The First British Empire, 2013).

Furthermore, during the 16th century, England's military capabilities were comparatively less advanced and extensive when compared to major imperial powers. While England did possess a navy, it did not possess the formidable strength and reach exhibited by the Spanish Armada or other imperial fleets of the time. The English navy was relatively small and lacked the resources and infrastructure necessary for large-scale military campaigns and overseas conquests. This limited military capacity constrained England's ability to project and maintain imperial dominance. (Williamson, 2005). The English navy primarily focused on protecting trade routes and securing their merchant vessels rather than engaging in extensive territorial expansion. In comparison, the Spanish and Portuguese empires had powerful navies that

enabled them to assert control over vast territories and engage in military campaigns to protect and expand their imperial holdings. The relative disadvantage of England's military capabilities during this period further suggests a lesser inclination towards establishing and maintaining a large territorial empire.

In summary, the period from 1500 to 1600 marked a time of transition and exploration for England, rather than a period solely focused on aggressive empire building. Although England's ambitions for empire would grow significantly during this era, it is crucial to acknowledge that the country had not yet fully developed into an empire. Instead, England's primary focus was on exploration, trade, and the establishment of overseas colonies, with an emphasis on expanding economic influence. This approach was characterized by a nuanced strategy that prioritized commercial ventures and diplomatic relationships, rather than an unwavering pursuit of territorial conquest.

Chapter Two: "Shakespeare's Characterization: An Analogy of the British Empire"

This chapter delves into an examination of the characters in Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, through a postcolonial lens. The central focus is on portraying the peripheral side of Britain in the years 1558-1603/1625. The characters, such as Portia, Caliban, and Prospero, serve as means to depict the power dynamics and imperial aspirations of the time. In the case of Portia, her representation is a means to highlight Britain's desire to assert its strength and superiority in a similar way to Queen Elizabeth I. On the other hand, characters like Caliban symbolize the marginalized and colonized natives, shedding light on the oppressive practices employed by the colonizers. Prospero, as a character, exemplifies the imperial plans adopted in Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, reflecting their ambitions of colonization, in other side also Prospero represents the powerful forces of imperialism and colonization that sought to assert control over weaker nations and peoples. By exploring these characters and their interactions, the aim of this chapter is to present a comprehension of Britain's peripheral position as it directed the complexities of imperialism during that era.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, from 1558 to 1603, England experienced a remarkable period of maritime and commercial dominance, establishing itself as a leading power in the Western world (Elizabethan England, n.d). This era was marked by England's victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588, which further solidified its position as a formidable force (Elizabethan England, n.d).

In the 16th and 17th centuries, European empires sought to expand their influence and control in the Mediterranean region, employing trade and territorial expansion as key strategies. Shakespeare's plays served as a platform for him to express his views on the imperial ambitions of the British Empire, using his characters as analogies to depict influential figures of that time.

For example, in *The Merchant of Venice*, the character of Portia represents Queen Elizabeth I, portraying her strength, superiority, and decisive nature. The scenes involving the casket symbolize the power and authority of Queen Elizabeth during her reign. One of the suitors, the Prince of Morocco, choosing the golden casket due to its material value, reflects Shakespeare's criticism of the obsession with material wealth. It is interesting to note that during the 15th century, Morocco was ruled by Ahmed al-Mansur, known as Al-Dhahabi, who was admired for his stability and economic prosperity (Ahmed Al-Mansur Al-Dhahabi Sultan of the "Golden Age" of the Saadian State, n.d). Ahmed al-Mansur sought an alliance with Queen Elizabeth I and encouraged her to engage in war against Spain (Ahmed Al-Mansur Al-Dhahabi Sultan of the "Golden Age" of the Saadian State, n.d). These historical connections highlight the contextual relevance that Shakespeare incorporated into his plays, offering insights into the interplay between power, politics, and imperialism during that period. Another historical revelation in Shakespeare's play is associated with the second suitor, the Spanish prince of Aragon, who chooses the silver casket. This connection between the silver colour and Spain's story with silver is not a coincidence. J.H. Elliot argues that during that time, "American silver was still flowing into Spain in large quantities, and the port of Seville exhibited undeniable prosperity" (2002:291). The silver casket chosen by the prince of Aragon had the inscription "whoever chooses me will get what he deserves" (Shakespeare, 1596. Act II, Scene 9). However, upon opening it, he was met with a foolish image. This coincides with the reign of King Philip II, who sought to marry Queen Elizabeth I, but she rejected him due to her fear of taking away England's authority and hegemony over her, as she just declared her loyalty to her country. The marriage series of Philip II's parents, Ferdinand and Isabella, aimed to acquire as many countries as possible. Philip II's marriage to Queen Mary Tudor was an attempt to seize control of England and make it part of Spain's dominion. Lastly, when Bassanio arrives to face the test and successfully chooses the leaden casket, Shakespeare emphasizes the importance of moral value over material possessions or dominant forces.

Bassanio's desire for Portia is based on his love for her, not for her wealth or his personal gain. Unlike the Moroccan and Spanish kings who wanted to showcase their strength and dominance, Bassanio is a merchant from Venice who has known Portia for a long time. Shakespeare's intention is to contrast the foreign kings with their display of strength and control, as Spain was a dominant power in the 15th and 16th centuries, seeking to acquire countries worldwide. This parallels the Moroccan king, Ahmed Al-Dhahabi, whose era was known as the golden age, signifying his victory over the Ottoman Empire, which also aimed to control countries through conquest. By utilizing the casket scene to frustrate and mock these foreign powers, Shakespeare highlights their materialistic ambitions. Furthermore, Bassanio's success in the test represents Shakespeare's depiction of Queen Elizabeth I, who refused marriage proposals out of fear of surrendering her reign to foreigners, unlike Bassanio, the noble merchant of Venice, who values love and ultimately triumphs in Portia's father's test for marriage.

Although it is challenging to discuss *The Merchant of Venice* without acknowledging the importance of Venice as the play's setting, we will attempt to explore other elements of the story. Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*, is heavily influenced by the city of Venice itself, which served as the primary inspiration for the setting. The playwright sought to capture the beauty of Venice and incorporate it into his work, drawing parallels between the city's essence and the themes of the play. Venice serves as a central axis in the play, where events unfold rapidly and conflicts arise, such as the case of Antonio and Shylock, highlighting the competition and tensions among merchants. By showcasing the struggle between Britain and emerging powers like Spain and the Ottomans for control over the Mediterranean Sea, which was of great importance to these empires, Shakespeare aimed to depict England in a way that emphasized the splendour of Venice and its influence during the 15th century.

Additionally, Shakespeare uses the city of Belmont, depicted from a peripheral perspective, to create an atmosphere of calmness and tranquillity. It serves as a place where love and peace prevail for the three couples in the play. Venice, on the other hand, is characterized

by trade and mercantilism, being a renowned meeting centre for Mediterranean merchants throughout history. It is a historic maritime republic and a city where much of the play's action takes place. The movement of the story between Venice and Belmont expands our understanding of commerce and its reach.

By closely examining and analysing *The Merchant of Venice*, we discover the inherent significance of commerce in the play. It reflects the diverse motivations and affiliations of the characters, shaping their perspectives on what seems to be purely commercial matters. Gaining some historical background on Venice helps us comprehend Shakespeare's portrayal of the city and the social interactions within it. The play's depiction of Venice as a hub of commerce, wealth, and materialism is rooted in historical reality. Venice became a dominant naval power from the 15th century onwards, with access to trade routes in the eastern Mediterranean and strong connections to Turkey, making it a multicultural republic. It was a cultural and economic centre of its time, renowned for its architecture, art, and diverse population. Many English writers of the 16th and 17th centuries also wrote about Venice, expressing varying attitudes towards this commercial hub, Thomas Coryats praised the wealth and beauty of mercantile Venice, writing in *Coryates Crudities* (1611):

The fairest place of all the city . . . is the piazza, that is, the marketplace of St. Mark . . . Truly such is the stupendous . . . glory of it, that at my first entrance thereof, it did even amaze or rather ravish my senses a man may very properly call it rather Orbis than Urbis forum, that is, a marketplace of the world, not of the city. (Coryats, 1611)

The depiction of Venice in *The Merchant of Venice* not only celebrates the city itself but also carries subtle connections to the British Empire. By emphasizing the importance of commerce and the conflicts surrounding it, Shakespeare intertwines the narrative with the struggles England against emerging powers like Spain and the Ottomans for control over the Mediterranean Sea. This parallel underscores the play's exploration of power dynamics and imperialism.

In Venice, the intricate conflicts within the merchants reflect the complexities faced by England in its own commercial actions. Antonio, as a merchant, struggle with his identity and quest for fulfilment, mirroring the challenges encountered by British merchants seeking prosperity and purpose. The financial dealings, such as Antonio's loan to Bassanio, highlight the role of friendship and alliances in navigating the commercial landscape, much like the diplomatic and economic relationships forged by the British Empire during its expansion. The infamous bond between Antonio and Shylock symbolizes the clash between different religious and cultural identities, reminiscent of the tensions between the British Empire and other nations. Shylock's character, representing materialism and exploitation, echoes the negative perceptions that England may have held towards rival empires. By portraying Shylock's control and oppression, Shakespeare sheds light on England's efforts to assert dominance and establish its own imperial rule. Additionally, to Portia's, engagement with and thrives in the commercial world of Venice, correspond to Queen Elizabeth I's engagement in commerce to enhance the country's trade. Portia appropriates and redirects the literalism and legalism of Shylock during the trial scene, displaying her heroic and liberating moment. Even in Belmont, Portia's fate remains intertwined with commercial contracts, from her father's binding casket game to her marriage bond with Bassanio. Bassanio's love and commitment to Portia are symbolized by the physical ring she uses to test his loyalty. The marriages in Act V and the fate of Antonio and Bassanio's friendship demonstrate how the commercial, especially in Belmont, incorporates contracts, obligations, and indebtedness within the play's social dynamics (Coryats, 1611).

Through the interconnectedness of commerce, power dynamics, and imperialism, *The Merchant of Venice* indirectly reflects the aspirations, conflicts, and social dynamics of the British Empire during the time of Shakespeare.

The second play understudy *The Tempest*, a play that delves into themes of revenge and redemption, is often regarded as a reflection of the colonialism prevalent during the Elizabethan

and Jacobean periods in England. The story unfolds with a violent storm that unexpectedly causes the shipwreck of travellers, who subsequently find themselves encountering a series of mysterious events while stranded on an unidentified island. During the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, early sea voyages frequently encountered shipwrecks due to various factors such as limited technology, inexperienced sailors, unpredictable weather systems, uncharted territories, and other natural phenomena. These voyages often resulted in tragic outcomes as many individuals lost their lives at sea. However, in the literary work *The Tempest*, the characters manage to survive the dangerous sea voyage and find refuge on the island. (Shakespeare, 1611).

The play draws intriguing parallels between the experiences of marine exploration and its own narrative. Early maritime explorations primarily focused on territorial expansion and the acquisition of valuable resources from newly discovered lands. These territories and the industries that emerged from them were seen as lucrative sources of wealth for those who could afford to embark on maritime expeditions. *The Tempest* explores these themes through its depiction of the characters' struggles and interactions on the island, highlighting the complex dynamics of power, colonization, and the quest for dominance. Overall, the play serves as a medium through which Shakespeare explores the complicated aspects of colonialism prevalent during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, shedding light on the challenges and consequences associated with maritime exploration and the acquisition of new territories. During the 15th and 16th centuries, the trade routes between Britain and the Mediterranean region were flourishing, with valuable goods of oriental origin such as spices, silk, ivory, and precious stones being highly sought after (Smith, 2022). The Italian sea towns served as crucial hubs for merchants engaged in this lucrative trade, primarily conducted through the Mediterranean Sea (Leupold, n.d). As stated by Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom during the late 19th century, “colonialism aimed to strengthen empires and gain political power” (Smith, 2022).

In *the Tempest*, Shakespeare portrays Prospero, a European duke who seizes power on the island where he was exiled, reminiscent of European colonization in the New World. This mirrors the exploitation, enslavement, and colonization of indigenous peoples, which also resonates in the character Stefano's aspirations of becoming a ruler of the island. Through conflicts between characters and their distinct viewpoints, Shakespeare explores the moral complexities of colonialism, shedding light on the ethics involved (Smith, 2022). Shakespeare sets the events of *The Tempest* on a fictional island located somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea, a region extensively travelled by merchants during the time. As Alonso, the King of Naples, and his companions journey back from his daughter's wedding, they encounter a storm that alters their fate and exposes them to Prospero's retribution. The play delves into the theme of colonialism, presenting Prospero as a colonial exploiter initially, and showcasing the power struggles faced by all the characters. Prospero's mistreatment of Caliban exemplifies the oppressive nature of colonialism (Smith, 2022). During the 11th to 15th centuries, West Africa emerged as an important trading centre, exporting goods across the Sahara Desert to Europe and beyond through seaports along the northwest coast. Besides the infamous slave trade, one significant aspect of African trade was fish. European demand for saltwater fish motivated deep-sea anglers to venture farther into the Atlantic Ocean in search of profitable catches. While Shakespeare does not explicitly mention the motives behind Alonso's daughter Claribel's marriage to the Prince of Tunis, it can be inferred that commercial interests played a role. (Leupold, n.d).

In summary, during the 15th and 16th centuries, the bustling trade routes between Britain and the Mediterranean facilitated the exchange of valuable goods. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* explores the dynamics of colonialism, portraying Prospero as a colonial exploiter and delving into the ethical implications through conflicts between characters. The play's setting in the Mediterranean aligns with the historical context of British trade in that region, while referring to the wider scope of colonial ventures, including West Africa. In the 15th and 16th centuries, long-distance sea travel was primarily driven by economic considerations rather than leisure, as

it is perceived today. It was an expensive endeavour, typically undertaken with the aim of generating profit or accessing valuable resources. Given the cost and purpose of sea travel, it was unlikely that individuals, like Alonso's daughter Claribel, would have made frequent visits to their future spouses in Africa to establish a close relationship. This suggests that Claribel's marriage was likely arranged for strategic and commercial reasons. The trade along the African coast was highly lucrative during this period, providing a strong incentive for alliances and partnerships. The marriage between Milan and Tunis, as depicted in *The Tempest*, could have offered financial benefits to both parties involved. This notion aligns with the politics of King James I, who emphasized matrimonial and political alliances within a European cultural space while excluding North African states. Highlighting the parallels between Shakespeare's portrayal and King James I's policy of European reconciliation and exclusion of North African states (Gariti, Riche n.d). In short, sea travel during the 15th and 16th centuries had a distinct purpose of economic gain, making it unlikely for individuals to engage in frequent long-distance voyages solely for personal relationships. Claribel's marriage to a prince in Africa is more likely to have been arranged, considering the profitable African trade during that time. The alignment of this portrayal with King James I's politics further underscores the financial and strategic motivations behind such alliances in the context of Britain during the 15th and 16th centuries. Alonso, as the ruler of his kingdom, may have perceived an opportunity for personal gain and the improvement of his town's status by establishing a relationship with a desirable trading post. However, sailing during that time was fraught with failures, and long voyages were difficult and uncomfortable.

The primary concern during these journeys was the constant threat of shipwreck. In executing his plan, Prospero relied on the drowning of Alonso and his companions. He needed the circumstances to be under his control, allowing him to confront his opponents in his own environment and on his own terms. Since the sinking of Alonso's ship could be attributed to natural events, such as a storm, the crew had no reason to suspect anything unusual about their

sudden predicament. This provided Prospero with the opportunity to reveal himself as the sole orchestrator of Alonso's downfall at his discretion. By creating the tempest, which symbolizes his control over nature itself, Prospero sought to prove his magical abilities. The intensity of Prospero's storm was terrifying yet non-lethal, and Shakespeare may have drawn inspiration from the testimonies of shipwreck survivors, such as William Strachey, who wrote *A True Report*. Strachey's account included vivid details of the storm that led to his own drowning. He described the storm as "a battle for the sky between the sea and the clouds," and the rain from the storm as "a flood in the air." This literary depiction of an ocean storm and shipwreck may have influenced Shakespeare's use of the tempest as a tool of revenge for Prospero (Strachey, n.d). Through Prospero's actions, the play metaphorically reveals the hidden aspects of England during the 15th and 16th centuries. It highlights the harsh treatment of the people subjected to colonization by the English, presenting Prospero as the colonizer and his enemies as the colonized. The tempest symbolizes the chaos and destructive forces unleashed upon his adversaries, reflecting the painful reality of domination and exploitation inherent in the England. In the 15th century, the English were enticed by the idea of colonizing America, and it is within this historical context that many scholars view *The Tempest* as a metaphor for the British Empire. The play depicts a story of colonialism, where upon the arrival of the sorcerer, Prospero, to the island, he imposes his own culture and asserts control over the native inhabitants. As the events unfold on the island controlled by Prospero, his sorcery and ability to manipulate the weather and creatures symbolize the imperialist image of those seeking to control the resources of foreign lands. Another significant character in the play is Caliban, who becomes Prospero's servant and is compelled to obey his every command, despite being a native of the island. This portrayal leads us to understand Prospero as a man driven by imperialistic instincts. Consequently, it becomes evident that Prospero represents a colonizer who arrived on the island with the intention of subjugating the indigenous population. (Smith, 2022)

In exploring the peripheral side of Britain influence during the 15th and 16th centuries, we can delve into the portrayal of imperialism in *The Tempest*, where Shakespeare presents a narrative that reflects the consequences of European colonization and sheds light on the negative effects of imposing cultural dominance on marginalized nations. In another aspect, Prospero can be seen as representative of the European colonizers who arrived on the island to govern and exert control over the indigenous population. He perceives himself as superior to them and holds a disdainful attitude towards them, completely disregarding the implications of his actions because he believes he has the right to rule. The contrasting personalities of Prospero and Caliban highlight the stark cultural differences between the Europeans and the natives. When it comes to indigenous peoples, it is common to find them resigned to a life of poverty and servitude, while the Europeans are content with their role as rulers and beneficiaries. Prospero, a white man, rules in the island with an iron fist, utilizing it to secure the interests of the Venetians, a white European nation. He exploits Caliban, a black native, viewing him as a lesser figure in the hierarchy. Caliban is often dehumanized and depicted as nothing more than a monstrous being in Prospero's world. These dominant dynamics within their relationship reflect the historical context of imperialism, where powerful nations impose their own values and beliefs on marginalized nations, resulting in conflict and instability. The theme of imperialism is evident in *The Tempest*, reflecting the consequences of European colonization. The play sheds light on the negative effects of such practices, both for the colonizers and the colonized, as dominant nations enforce their own cultural norms on weaker nations, leading to strife (Smith, 2022). The motif of shipwrecks, prevalent throughout history, is notable. It is worth mentioning that the famous sinking of the Sea Venture in 1609 served as inspiration for Shakespeare's writing of *The Tempest*. The Sea Venture, a newly built vessel traveling from England to Jamestown, Virginia, encountered a violent storm and strayed off course, ultimately wrecking on an island now known as Bermuda. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Bermuda was referred to as Devil's Island due to its treacherous nature for ships and sailors. Even today, divers can uncover

the treasures of numerous ships that fell victim to the intricate coral reefs surrounding the island. This reference highlights the peripheral side of Britain's presence during the 15th and 16th centuries. In the peripheral realm of Britain's maritime influence during the 15th and 16th centuries, a significant event occurred in 1609 when a fleet of ships, including the *Sea Venture* commanded by Admiral Sir George Somers, encountered a powerful storm off the Azores. The shipwreck and subsequent experiences of the passengers mirrored the challenges faced by the occupants of Prospero's island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Despite the play's Mediterranean setting, it is believed that Shakespeare drew inspiration from this shipwreck incident, which eventually led to the colonization of the Bermuda Islands, referred to as the "Somers Isles" in honour of Sir George Somers (Strachey, n.d).

Shakespeare incorporated historical events and diplomatic relations of the 15th and 16th centuries into *The Tempest*, shedding light on the significance of marriages as tools of conquest and alliances between colonial powers. Gariti and Riche have argued in their article entitled *William Shakespeare and the Mediterranean Sea* about Matrimony in *The Tempest* that Drawing parallels from history, Prospero is likened to Philip II, who, similar to Prospero, was granted the Duchy of Milan by Charles V in 1540 (The Holy Roman Emperor). The association between Antonio and Don Juan of Austria, Philip's half-brother, is also reflected in Shakespeare's play, depicting political betrayal. The plot unfolds with Antonio seizing power and subjecting Prospero's duchy to the rule of King Alonso of Naples. (Gariti, Riche, n.d)

The depiction of Prospero and Philip II in *The Tempest* reveals the peripheral side of Britain during this period of reign, shedding light on the imperialistic tendencies and power dynamics at play. Prospero, representing Philip II, exemplifies the imperialistic instinct of the European colonizers. Philip II, the King of Spain, held significant influence and control over vast territories, including the Duchy of Milan. Similarly, Prospero, a powerful sorcerer and ruler of the island, exercises control and dominance over the native inhabitants. This portrayal

emphasizes the hierarchical relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, where the Europeans considered themselves superior and deemed it their right to govern and exploit the resources of other lands. (Smith, 2022)

Philip II's association with his half-brother Don Juan of Austria, who betrayed him politically, mirrors the relationship between Prospero and Antonio (Prospero's brother) in the play. Antonio seizes power from Prospero, comparable to Don Juan's betrayal of Philip II. This highlights the political intrigue and power struggles that existed within the European peripheral spheres during this period. Furthermore, Prospero's actions in subduing the native Caliban, who is depicted as a lesser figure and often dominated a monster, reflect the oppressive nature of colonialism. This dynamic mirrors the way European colonizers viewed and treated indigenous populations, considering them inferior and subjecting them to slavery and servitude. (Smith, 2022)

By drawing parallels between Prospero and Philip II, Shakespeare exposes the darker side of Britain's imperial ambitions during the 15th and 16th centuries. It reveals the exploitative nature of the colonial enterprise, where dominant nations imposed their values, beliefs, and control on lesser nations, causing conflict and perpetuating inequality. This depiction provides insight into the peripheral side of Britain reign during this period, displaying the complex dynamics of imperialism, power dynamics, and the exploitation of indigenous populations.

In conclusion, the characters in both *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest* serve as vehicles to illuminate the peripheral side of Britain during the 15th and 16th centuries, shedding light on the imperialistic ambitions, power dynamics, and exploitation prevalent during that era. Through the depiction of Shylock, the relationships between Prospero/Caliban, and other characters. In addition, the character of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and Queen Elizabeth I serve as representations of the imperial side that Shakespeare intended to depict. Through these

characters, Shakespeare explores the complex relationship between imperialism and the peripheral side of Britain, offering insights into the aspirations, conflicts, and consequences of a nation seeking to assert its dominance on the global stage

Chapter Three: Empires and Superpowers: Dominant Forces of the 15th and 16th Centuries

Shakespeare occasionally modified or embellished historical facts to heighten the emotional impact of his stories or emphasize specific themes. It is crucial to acknowledge the distinction between Shakespeare's imaginative literary creations and historical accuracy, which will be the focus of our upcoming discussion. Through careful examination of historical documents, we can compare them with Shakespeare's narrative choices and assess the degree to which he adhered to or deviated from historical truths. This exploration enables us to challenge Shakespeare's perspective on imperial Britain by delving into history and discovering that the dominant empires of that era were actually the Spanish and the Ottomans.

In this chapter, we unveil the influential powers of the 16th century and their profound impact on the global stage. It begins with an examination of the formidable Ottoman Empire, which spanned more than six centuries and controlled extensive territories from the Middle East to North Africa. Despite reaching its zenith under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, the empire eventually declined, leaving behind an enduring legacy of impressive architecture, legal systems, and cultural contributions. The unparalleled dominance of the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean firmly established it as the most powerful force of its time.

Shifting our focus, we delve into the unparalleled supremacy of the Spanish Empire. From the reigns of Charles I to Philip II, Spain underwent a period of expansion and conquest, exemplified by its successful subjugation of the Aztec and Inca empires. Spain's alliances with indigenous elites and its promotion of Christianity ensured its control over these territories. In the meantime, England cautiously supported the Dutch in their conflicts against Spain and engaged in battles with France. Queen Elizabeth I's support for Protestant causes provoked Spanish invasion plans, culminating in the construction of the Spanish Armada. However, England's smart strategy and naval strength resulted in a decisive victory.

A) The Ottoman Empire: Reigning Power

The Ottoman Empire, also known as the Turkish Empire, was a vast and influential empire that spanned several continents for over six centuries. It emerged in 1299 under the leadership of Osman I, who united various Turkish tribes in Anatolia and established the foundation of the empire. Over time, the Ottoman Empire expanded its territory through conquests and alliances, encompassing regions in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, Southeast and West Asia, and North Africa.

One of the pivotal moments in Ottoman history was the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Mehmed the Conqueror. This event marked the end of the Byzantine Empire and the establishment of Istanbul as the new capital of the Ottoman Empire. The fall of Constantinople had profound implications, both politically and culturally. It led to the migration of scholars, artists, and intellectuals from the Byzantine Empire to Western Europe, contributing to the flourishing of the Renaissance. Additionally, the Ottoman control of key trade routes and the blockade of traditional overland trade routes to the Far East motivated European powers to seek alternative sea routes, sparking the Age of Exploration (The Ottoman Empire, n.d).

The most significant periods in Ottoman history, was the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, who ruled from 1520 to 1566. Suleiman was a remarkable leader who further expanded the empire's territory, particularly in Eastern Europe. Under his rule, the Ottoman Empire reached its peak, with cultural, economic, and military advancements. Suleiman implemented reforms in governance, law, and education, earning him the title of Suleiman the Lawgiver. His military campaigns, such as the capture of Belgrade, Rhodes, and the Siege of Vienna, displayed the empire's power and influence. (Early life of Suleiman, n.d). Moreover, the Empire was known for its religious tolerance, as it encompassed diverse populations with various faiths and ethnicities. Non-Muslim communities, such as Christians and Jews, were

granted certain rights and autonomy under a system called millet, which allowed them to practice their religions and have their own legal systems within the empire.

However, over time, the Ottoman Empire faced challenges and entered a period of decline. External pressures from European powers, internal conflicts, economic struggles, and social unrest contributed to its gradual weakening. The empire underwent a series of reforms in the 19th century, known as the Tanzimat era, aimed at modernizing the state and addressing the challenges it faced. Eventually, the empire disintegrated following World War I, and in 1923, the Republic of Turkey was established under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The Ottoman Empire's legacy is significant and far-reaching. It left a lasting impact on the regions it ruled, shaping their history, culture, and governance. The empire's architectural achievements, such as the Hagia Sophia and the Topkapi Palace, continue to be admired today. Its legal system, known as the Ottoman law, influenced legal systems in various parts of the world. The empire's rich cultural heritage and traditions are still celebrated, and its history continues to be studied and appreciated. (The Ottoman Empire, n.d)

a) Ottoman Expansion and European Alliances

In 1520, Suleiman assumed the throne of the Ottoman Empire following the death of his father. One of his early military campaigns was the siege of Belgrade in 1521. Suleiman gathered his Ottoman forces and marched towards Belgrade, which was then under the control of the Hungarian army. Despite their efforts, the Hungarian army was unable to withstand the Ottoman forces, and they eventually surrendered. The battle took place from June 25 to August 29 and resulted in a decisive victory for the Ottomans. This victory was not only significant in terms of territorial expansion for the Ottoman Empire but also symbolized the growing strength and influence of Suleiman's rule. It displayed the military prowess and effectiveness of the Ottoman forces under his leadership. Additionally, the capture of Belgrade provided the

Ottomans with a strategic stronghold in the region, enabling further campaigns and territorial expansion in Eastern Europe. (The Ottomans in Europe, n.d).

In the following year, Suleiman set his sights on the Greek island of Rhodes, which had previously managed to repel Ottoman attacks. Under the command of Mesih Pasha in 1480, the Ottomans had failed to capture the island, which was held by a medieval Catholic military order. However, Suleiman was determined to succeed where his predecessors had failed. In June 1522, a large Ottoman fleet arrived off the coast of Rhodes, initiating a siege that would last for several months. The siege of Rhodes involved intense bombardment and constant assaults on the city's fortifications. The defenders put up a strong resistance, but eventually, the castle's defences were breached, and the Ottomans gained control of the island. The representatives of Rhodes accepted Suleiman's terms, which included a promise not to convert any churches into mosques. The capture of Rhodes was a significant triumph for the Ottomans as it solidified their control over the eastern Mediterranean, facilitating trade and communication with Constantinople and the Levant. However, Suleiman's ambitions extended beyond the eastern Mediterranean. In 1525, the Battle of Pavia between Francis I of France and Holy Roman Emperor Charles V resulted in the defeat and capture of Francis I. Francis, upon his release from captivity, sought allies to challenge Charles V's power. He formed a coalition known as The League of Cognac, which included other European leaders opposed to Charles V's dominance.

Suleiman saw an opportunity to align with Francis I and weaken Charles V's influence in Europe. In 1536, the sultan formed a Franco-Ottoman alliance with France, which aimed to counterbalance the power of the Holy Roman Empire. This alliance symbolized the growing geopolitical significance of the Ottoman Empire and its role as a major player in European affairs. Moreover, Suleiman's forces also clashed with the Hungarian Kingdom, which resulted in the defeat of King Louis II. The death of Louis II marked the end of the Jagiellonian dynasty and signalled the collapse and division of medieval Hungary. This had far-reaching consequences for Hungary, as it would remain divided and under Ottoman influence for several

centuries. (The ottomans in Europe, n.d). Overall, Suleiman's military campaigns and alliances during the early years of his reign displayed the expanding power and influence of the Ottoman Empire. His victories in Belgrade and Rhodes, as well as his alliance with France, positioned the Ottoman Empire as a force in both Eastern Europe and the wider geopolitical landscape of the time.

b) Ottoman Relations with the Mughal Empire and Persia

Suleiman the Magnificent's ambitions extended beyond Europe as he sought to establish trade and expand Ottoman influence in other regions. In the east, he directed his attention towards the Mughal Empire in South Asia. In 1538, Suleiman's forces captured the port of Aden in Yemen from the Portuguese, transforming it into a strategic base for Ottoman trade with Asia. This facilitated significant trade between the Ottomans and the Mughals in the 16th century, utilizing trade routes in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Additionally, Suleiman aimed to connect the Ottoman territories in North Africa. The Ottoman-Portuguese Wars, which occurred from 1538 to 1559, focused on securing advantageous trading locations in North Africa and the Red Sea. When the conflict concluded, the Ottomans expanded their influence in the Red Sea while the Portuguese maintained control over the Persian Gulf. The Ottomans also absorbed the weakened Adal Sultanate, enabling their expansion into Somalia and North Africa. Furthermore, the Ottomans received a request for assistance from Aceh located, in modern-day, Sumatra, Indonesia, in their struggle against the Portuguese in 1564. Suleiman agreed and dispatched a fleet, displaying the far-reaching influence of the Ottoman Empire under his leadership, stretching from Austria to Indonesia. Suleiman the Magnificent emerged as a pivotal figure during the 16th century.

In dealing with Persia, Suleiman sought to eliminate the threat it posed to the Ottoman Empire. In 1533, Ottoman forces occupied Tabriz and peacefully took control of Bitlis in Asia Minor. The following year, the Safavid dynasty chose to cede territory rather than engage in

battle. By 1535, Suleiman's forces had entered Baghdad and restored the tomb of Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanafi School of Islamic law followed by the Ottomans.

Suleiman's second campaign in Persia took place from 1548 to 1549. The Safavids once again employed scorched earth tactics and avoided direct confrontation, forcing the Ottomans to contend with harsh winter conditions. As a result, in 1549, the Ottomans relinquished their hold on lands in Azerbaijan, Van, and Georgia. The final Persian campaign under Suleiman's reign proved to be the most successful. In 1553, he reclaimed Erzurum, crossed the upper Euphrates River, and gained territories in northern Persia. The Peace of Amasya, signed in 1555, delineated the borders between the Safavid and Ottoman empires. Armenia and Georgia were divided evenly, while the Ottomans acquired Iraq, granting them access to the Persian Gulf. (The Ottoman Empire, n.d).

On September 6, 1566, Suleiman passed away (The last days of the sultan, n.d) while leading a campaign from Constantinople to Hungary. His death was reportedly kept secret from the army to preserve morale. Despite his demise, the Ottomans emerged victorious in the Battle of Szigetvar. Suleiman's body was transported and buried in Istanbul, but his name remained revered in the empire and in history. Suleiman the Magnificent was an exceptional military leader whose authority and wisdom enabled the expansion of the great Ottoman Empire across vast regions, including dominance over the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf.

Upon Suleiman's death, the throne passed to his son in accordance with the rules of succession. Historians identify Selim II as the last surviving son of Suleiman. Born on May 30, 1524, in Constantinople, Selim II's mother was Hurrem Sultan, a Russian Orthodox slave who later became Suleiman's legal wife. Selim II married Nurbanu Sultan, and their union produced his successor, Murad III, as well as other siblings. Selim II reigned as the eleventh sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1566 until his death in 1574, inheriting one of the world's greatest and most powerful empires at the time.

By 1566, Ottoman rule extended from Basra on the tip of the Persian Gulf to Buda in Hungary. Selim II entrusted much of the empire's responsibilities to Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, while his focus was resolving the ongoing conflict with the Habsburgs. In 1568, a treaty known as the Treaty of Adrianople was signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburgs, effectively ending the conflict. Other conflicts, such as with the Romans, were also addressed. The Roman Emperor Maximilian II agreed to pay an annual tribute, and in return, the Ottomans recognized Maximilian as the ruler of western Hungary.

Rebellions arose in Ottoman colonies, such as Yemen and Basra, posing a threat to their stability. In 1570 (some sources state 1571), the Ottomans declared war on Venice with the primary objective of conquering Cyprus. Christian corsairs in the Mediterranean had been disrupting Ottoman ships. Eventually, the Ottoman naval fleet captured Cyprus. In response, an anti-Ottoman alliance called the Holy League was formed, consisting of Venice, Spain, Genoa, and the Papal States. The Holy League defeated the Ottomans in the Battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571. This battle served as inspiration for notable works of literature and art, including Don Quixote. Despite the Ottoman defeat, their dominance in the Mediterranean continued, and Venice ceded Cyprus to the Ottomans, who then swiftly took control of Tunisia in August 1574, previously under Spanish rule.

Another significant event was the lengthy Turkish War in Europe from 1593 to 1606, also known as the Thirteen Years' War. It involved the Habsburg Monarchy, the Principality of Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia opposing the Ottoman Empire. Problems arose within the Ottoman army, including issues with discipline due to the significant presence of knights and infantry, leading to unresolved rebellions. (The last days of the sultan, n.d)

In conclusion, the Ottoman Empire, spanning from 1299 to 1923, was one of the greatest empires in history, characterized by its vast achievements and dominance from East to West. The empire flourished under the rule of Suleiman the Magnificent, known as the "Golden Age

of the Ottoman Empire," experiencing economic, religious, and cultural prosperity along with significant victories. Religion played a crucial role, with Islamic principles serving as the foundation for Ottoman laws. While the Ottomans themselves were Muslims, they respected and protected Christians and Jews, allowing them to practice their religions freely. This inclusive approach helped maintain stability and harmony within the empire.

B) Unveiling the Dominance: The Supremacy of the Spanish Empire

Spain, owing to its geographical location, has been shaped by various influences from ancient times until its emergence as a unified country. The fifteenth century marked the consolidation of Spain as a unified nation through the unification of Catholic kingdoms and the control of the entire Iberian Peninsula in 1492. During modern times, Spain exerted significant influence on other regions, earning the names Spanish Empire, Spanish Monarchy, or Catholic Monarchy. This came about through the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, known as the Catholic Monarchs, who united the crowns of Castile and Aragon under the single dynasty of the Trastamara, establishing the economic and military power of Iberia. This alliance extended its dominion over numerous kingdoms and territories, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean regions. (Spanish Empire, n.d)

The Spanish Empire, spanning from 1492 to 1976, was a colonial empire that emerged as one of the largest in history. Alongside the Portuguese Empire, its spearheaded Europe's exploration and conquest, encompassing vast parts of the Americas, Western Europe, Africa, as well as various islands in Oceania and Asia. It earned the nickname "the empire where the sun never sets" due to its expansive reach. Ferdinand of Aragon was particularly keen on expanding into France, Italy, and North Africa. The Christian conquest of the Islamic Emirate of Granada in 1492 further boosted their revenues from the newly discovered territories, strengthening their control over the empire. The only threat to Spanish domination came from Portugal, which led

to Spain invading and conquering the Iberian nation in 1580, resulting in the unification of the two crowns under Philip II of Spain. (Spanish Empire, n.d)

Despite this conquest, Philip II respected the autonomy of the Iberian territories and established the Council of Portugal, along with other peninsular councils, to oversee Portugal and its empire while maintaining its laws, institutions, and monetary system. Additionally, the Spanish Empire encompassed European territories, with the Netherlands being one of the richest. Spain also held sway over half of Italy, including the Kingdom of Naples, Sicily, Sardinia, and the Duchy of Milan, as a result of treaties and the conclusion of Italian wars against France in 1559. These lands remained under Spanish rule even after the war of the Spanish succession (Spanish Empire, n.d).

During the early expansions of Spain, notable events included the fall of Granada, a series of military campaigns between 1482 and 1491 under the rule of the Catholic Monarchs. These conquests, driven by both military and religious motivations, led to the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition. While operating under the Catholic Church, the Spanish Inquisition acted independently and resulted in the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. This practice was later extended to the Americas, effectively eliminating the last remnants of Islamic rule in Iberia and solidifying Christian colonization.

In 1492, the Jews in Spain were issued an ultimatum to convert to Catholicism or face expulsion from Spanish territory. Concurrently, the Inquisition gained full control of the Canary Islands by 1478. Spain also sought to expand into Muslim-controlled North Africa, and in 1497, they occupied Melilla as a strategic move to safeguard Aragon, Castilian, and Genoese maritime trade along the African Mediterranean coast. This expansionist policy in North Africa aimed to prevent potential African invasions and establish Spanish hegemony in the region, where many Muslims had sought refuge after leaving Granada (Spanish Empire, n.d).

Ferdinand and Cardinal Cisneros organized and led expeditions to Morocco and Algeria, aiming to establish Spanish possessions that would serve as a safeguard for the peninsula. Additionally, until Ottoman intervention, Algiers was compelled to pay tribute to Castile. Along the Atlantic coast, Spain captured the outpost of Santa Cruz in 1476 with the support of the Canary Islands. This possession lasted until 1525, as confirmed by the Sintra Treaty of 1509.

On the path of continuous expansion, the Catholic Monarchs strategically arranged marriages for their children, which played a crucial role in securing Spain's long-term stability. Isabella ensured political alliances by orchestrating strategic unions for each of her five children. One of her sons, Isabelle I, married the Portuguese crown prince Alfonso and later Manuel I, establishing crucial relations between the neighbouring countries and solidifying the alliance's future. Their second daughter, Juana, married Philip the Handsome of the Habsburg dynasty, securing Spanish political stability as the heir to the Holy Roman Empire's crown. Their only son, Juan, married Margaret of Austria, and their daughter Maria married Manuel I of Portugal. Catherine, the fifth daughter, wedded King Henry VIII of England (who later became the mother of Queen Mary I).

Following the same strategy, the Spanish monarchs supported the House of Aragon in Naples during the Italian Wars against Charles VIII of France, which commenced in 1494. General Gonzalo (also known as General Ferdinand) assumed command of Naples after France's defeat in 1503, establishing Spanish lordship over the region. The Tercios, the military units of the Spanish army during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs and the Habsburgs, gained recognition for their battlefield effectiveness and formed the elite military forces of the Spanish monarchy.

In 1492, Isabella granted official approval and funding to Christopher Columbus for his westward voyage to reach the "Indies," resulting in his arrival in the New World. This marked the beginning of the Spanish Empire's colonization of the Caribbean and subsequent territorial

expansion over the next three centuries, encompassing the Caribbean islands, half of South America, most of North America, and a significant portion of Central America. This conquest of the Americas incorporated the territories into the Spanish Empire, with the exception of Brazil, British America, and some small regions in South America and the Caribbean.

The Crown established civil and religious structures to govern these vast lands. The conversion of indigenous populations to Catholicism spread, and resource extraction became the driving force behind colonial expansion. The pursuit of material wealth bolstered the status of the conquistadors and the Spanish Crown while furthering the spread of Christianity in extending Spanish sovereignty over the overseas territories.

Columbus made four voyages to the West Indies, with the kings granting him extensive powers to rule over this previously unknown part of the world. The Crown of Castile provided more funding for his Atlantic voyages. Scholars have characterized the first period of Spanish conquest from 1492 to the mid-16th century as the largest genocide in history, as the settlement became effective after Columbus introduced livestock, seeds, and farming equipment in 1493. The rapid spread of diseases brought by the Eurasian newcomers caused the deaths of millions of Native Americans, surpassing the impact of Spanish conquerors themselves. The Spanish invaded Native American lands, often treating them unfriendly and resorting to violence upon their arrival. Consequently, colonization profoundly affected the indigenous peoples of the New World, influencing their labour, introducing new religious concepts brought by the Spaniards, and leaving a lasting impact on their way of life. (Catholic Monarch and Origins of the Empire, n.d)

a) The Rise of Spain: Charles I to Philip II and the Age of Expansion

The death of Ferdinand marked the rise of young Charles to the throne, becoming Charles I of Castile and Aragon and effectively establishing the monarchy of Spain. Inheriting all the Spanish possessions in the New World and Mediterranean, Charles also gained the Netherlands

and Franche-Comté upon his Habsburg father's death in 1506. Growing up in Flanders, Charles later inherited the Habsburg lands in Germany and was elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1519, coinciding with the death of his grandfather, Maximilian I. The remaining hereditary Habsburg domains were transferred to Ferdinand, the Emperor's brother, while Spain and its remaining territories were inherited by Charles's son, Philip II of Spain, upon his abdication in 1556.

Under Charles and Philip II's rule, Spain pursued various goals, including undermining French power, defending Europe against the Ottoman Empire in the Ottoman-Habsburg wars, maintaining Habsburg hegemony in the Holy Roman Empire, protecting the Roman Catholic Church against the Protestant Reformation, spreading Catholic Christianity in the New World and the Philippines, exploiting the resources of the Americas (gold, silver, sugar), and engaging in trade with Asia (porcelain, spices, silk). Spain aimed to exclude other European powers from its New World possessions, reaching the height of its power and subsequent decline during the Habsburg reign in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Carlos I, the first Habsburg ruler in Spain, ascended to the throne in 1516, and Spain became a focal point of dynastic conflicts in Europe. The Habsburg Empire was divided into two parts: The Holy Roman Empire and Spain, including its possessions in Europe, the Netherlands, North Africa, and the Americas. Carlos I eventually abdicated and passed the Spanish crown to his son, Philip II, in 1556. The Habsburgs controlled territories across five continents, including the Americas, the East Indies, the Low Countries, and various regions in Europe such as Italy, France, and Germany. They also held the Portuguese Empire from 1580 to 1640 and small enclaves like Ceuta and Oran in North Africa. This period of Spanish history is often referred to as the "Age of Expansion." With the Habsburgs, Spain became one of the most influential political and military powers in Europe and the world during the 16th and 17th centuries. The Spanish crown gained greater control over the empire and increased its revenues from the American colonies. The papacy granted the Crown powers of patronage, solidifying

its religious authority. In 1580, when Philip II succeeded to the throne of Portugal, he established the Council of Portugal to oversee Portugal and its empire while preserving its laws, institutions, and monetary system.

During Philip II's reign, Spain emerged as the most powerful country in the world, surpassing France and England. The treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 confirmed Philip II's legacy in Italy, securing Spain's claims to Naples and Sicily, which originated from Aragon's presence in the 15th century. Neapolitan revolts against Spanish rule did not occur until 1647 after the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis. Although the Duchy of Milan remained officially part of the Holy Roman Empire, the title of Duke of Milan was bestowed upon the king of Spain. (The period of the Spanish Habsburg, n.d)

Philip II pursued an aggressive foreign policy due to concerns about the growing Ottoman Empire's dominance in the Mediterranean. He appealed to the Pope and other European powers to counter the Ottoman threat, particularly after Charles I's defeat against them in 1541 when major Mediterranean naval powers, including the Spanish Crown and Venice, became reluctant to confront the Ottomans. The early part of Philip II's reign. (The period of the Spanish Habsburg, n.d)

During the early 16th century, the Spanish empire successfully conquered and assimilated both the Aztec and Inca empires. They achieved this by maintaining the loyalty of indigenous elites to the Spanish crown and promoting the conversion to Christianity among them, which served as a means of mediation between their communities and the royal government. After a brief period of decentralized authority in the Americas, the Spanish Crown re-established control over these regions and established the Council of the Indies to oversee governance there. In the midst of these events, England cautiously supported the Dutch in their conflict against Spain, notably during the first battle of the Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604) and their war with France (1590-1598).

In 1586, Queen Elizabeth I of England lent support to the Protestant cause in the Netherlands and France. In response, Philip II of Spain sent the Spanish Armada to launch an attack on England, with the intention of transporting Spanish troops from the Netherlands to invade England. Spain was extracting gold and silver from its controlled territories in the Americas, and England desired a share of that wealth. Thus, Queen Elizabeth I encouraged sailors like Francis Drake to raid Spanish ships and cities. The conflict between the two states was further exacerbated by their differing religious doctrines, with Spain adhering to Catholicism while England had largely embraced Protestantism. (Anglo-Spanish War, n.d)

Starting in the 1560s, England began providing support to Dutch Protestants who were rebelling against Spanish rule. By the early 1580s, King Philip II of Spain devised a plan to dispatch a fleet to invade England and suppress English invasions, aiming to reinstate Catholicism in the country. In 1586, Philip commenced the construction of the Armada, incorporating numerous new warships and heavily arming existing vessels. At the same time, England equipped numerous merchant ships and incorporated them into its fleet, leading to the formation of a naval force consisting of smaller, faster, and more agile English warships. The Armada engaged in a cannon-fire exchange with the English ships. The English dispatched eight fire ships towards the Armada, causing the Spanish ships to retreat to the sea in order to avoid the flames. Subsequently, around sixty English ships attacked a similar number of Spanish ships near the French port of Gravelines. This assault resulted in the sinking of two Spanish ships and inflicted damage upon the remaining vessels. The impaired Armada ships sought refuge in the North Sea, navigating northward around the British Isles. However, adverse weather conditions caused the destruction of many ships along the coast of Ireland. Only 67 ships managed to return to Spain, marking the end of the Spanish Armada's campaign (Spain United Kingdom relations, n.d.).

General conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has explored the representation of the British Empire in William Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Tempest*, from a Peripheral Postcolonial Standpoint, in light of Edward Said's Postcolonial theory. By challenging the depiction of England as a supreme power during the late 15th and early 16th centuries, this dissertation has shed light on the dominant central powers of the Spanish and Ottoman empires and their significant influence on the global power dynamics of the time.

Through combining literary analysis, historical research, and postcolonial theory, it became evident that England's position in the world during this period was peripheral rather than central. The findings of this study highlight that during this period, England had a limited colonial presence compared to the Spanish and Ottoman empires. This indicates that England's position in the world was peripheral rather than central, which is reflected in the economic, military, and political challenges faced by the Spanish and Ottoman empires. Which provides an insight into the global power dynamics of the time.

As we move forward, our analysis has focused on the portrayal and significance of influential figures like Portia/Queen Elizabeth I and Prospero, as well as the representation of peripheral characters like Shylock and Caliban. By examining their roles, we gain insights into the experiences of marginalized individuals who challenge dominant power structures. These findings strengthen our argument about Britain's position on the periphery, rather than at the centre of power.

In conclusion, our research highlights the historical context of the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly during Queen Elizabeth I's reign. However, our analysis of historical evidence leads us to the argument that England did not possess the same level of power and dominance as the Ottomans and the Spaniards, who had already established themselves as global empires. Instead,

England was in a transitional phase, actively working towards the development of its own empire during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. This signifies that England's position was still evolving, and it had yet to attain the status of a dominant imperial power during that time.

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