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**The Representation of the Renaissance Woman/man in William  
Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello***

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**Abstract:**

This modest dissertation has for purpose the exploration of the major Renaissance themes in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *Othello* (1603). It aims to examine Shakespeare's representation of the Renaissance woman/man through his Renaissance Venetian characters. To fulfil our study, we have relied on the New Historicist theoretical assumptions that stress the importance of the social, historical and cultural contexts in the study and interpretation of literary texts. Indeed, the Renaissance context of the plays under study determines largely Shakespeare's dramatic representation of the Renaissance females and males. We have divided our work into three chapters. We have devoted the first chapter to the general historical background that represents a necessary step for our analysis. We have introduced first the main aspects of the Italian Renaissance focusing on the emerging philosophy of Humanism and Individualism with its new perception of man. Then, we have given an insight to the Elizabethan/Shakespearean England, stressing the English interest in the Italian Renaissance. In the second chapter, we have tried to examine the Renaissance woman/man as a representative of the divergent Renaissance themes of subjectivity, individual will, independence, self-interest, tradition, communal ties, and social conventions. In the third chapter, we have examined the emotional life of the Renaissance woman/man in relation to the prevailing social conventions about racial difference. Finally, we have concluded that the Renaissance woman/man lives in a state of 'inbetweenness' embodying the ambivalent attitudes and thoughts of the transitional period. Therefore, the Renaissance woman/man can never be identified as an individual who has completely transgressed the impositions of the collective organic life.

## **Introduction:**

The following research explores Shakespeare's dramatization of the Italian Renaissance themes in his Italianate plays *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97) and *Othello* (1603-04). Being set in Renaissance Venice, the two plays provide a sample about how far was Shakespeare influenced by the Italian Renaissance in his writings. As a matter of fact, the ideals of the Italian Renaissance affected a lot of the English writers and dramatists. The latter, after having concentrated on the medieval religious and spiritual concerns in their literary works, they shifted their attentions away from such dogmatic interests with the coming of the Renaissance. Following their contact with the emerging ideas, they transcended the limited topics and hypnotic influence of religion in literature. They focused, instead, on the emerging worldly interests about the human being that stemmed from the Renaissance ideals.

Shakespeare (1564-1616) has always been considered as the literary icon of the English literature whose genius blossomed in the Renaissance era. As such, his works represent a portrayal of the existing social and cultural attitudes of the Renaissance society. Shakespeare reflected the Elizabethan real world in his different plays. The latter, indeed, include the history of England with its relations with other nations and races, in addition to the different revaluations and reversals that took place in the sixteenth century 'the age of the Renaissance'. Salinger L.G argues that "Shakespeare's plays are the monuments of a remarkable age" (Ford Boris, 1982: 51). Since the age that produced Shakespeare was, by no doubt, the Renaissance, his plays represent a dramatic casting of its values and interests. Indeed, Shakespeare could not be the burden of the name of the greatest writer in the language and the creature of the

greatest ordering of English, as Stanley Cavell maintains, if his writing was not engaging with the depth of the philosophical preoccupations of his culture (Joughin, 2000: 2). Actually, the culture about which Shakespeare wrote is determined to a large extent by the Renaissance beliefs that fashioned the Elizabethan atmosphere in which he lived.

Being one of the main English Renaissance dramatists, Shakespeare expressed a deep concern towards the new themes that the Italian Renaissance had brought to life. The Renaissance, being nourished by the teachings of antiquity, gave the primary importance to the human being with all that characterised his personality. It stressed the importance of the individual as an independent entity endowed with a particular inner and outer character. Instead of the collective life that kept him previously in constant subordination to the community, the Renaissance aimed to release him, and provided him with a sense of subjectivity. The interest in the individual and communal life was no longer in terms of moral conduct and religious aspects but instead in terms of societal relationships and worldly concerns of man. This was, in fact, a by-product of Renaissance humanism that found a profound expression in the literature of the period. The Renaissance, with its humanist tendencies, contributed to the rediscovery and redefinition of man in relation both to himself as an individual and to the universe.

The Renaissance humanist beliefs were set against the predominant culture of the period that sustained the traditional patterns of life. The latter, in the form of the medieval feudal system, the patriarchal authority, or the communal ties in general, were conceived as obstacles in the way of the humanist standards of freedom and independence of man. The Renaissance



Humanist culture introduced first a reconsideration of the position of the human being in the universe through challenging the time-honoured conception of the 'Great Chain of Being'. Instead of the lower position that he had previously occupied, the humanists placed Man in the centre of the universe, as master over himself. Then, the humanists stressed the notion of particularity of each human being through the principles embedded in the philosophy of individualism. The latter aimed to release the individual from the collective medieval corporations of family, community, group and race.

Shakespeare, as a man of his time, conceived of man as the sole target of inquiry, and the most enigmatic creature that deserves a careful examination. Man, in Shakespeare's literary kingdom, is the king. In all his literary works, Shakespeare deals with the mysteries of life of man both in his particularity and in his collective social life. He celebrates man as an individual and as a social being. The entire legacy of Shakespeare is "a probing, questioning inquiry into the intractable issues of the self and of the other, the individual and the community, and the very purpose of life that is to be or not to be" (Serageldin, 1998: 20).

Our dealing with Shakespeare's plays in a specific manner is not, by any way, meant to understand that Shakespeare had precedence in terms of writing about the preoccupations of the Renaissance. One can easily find that such English Renaissance writers, playwrights and poets as Christopher Marlow, and Edmund Spenser had already dealt with the emerging interests and preoccupations of the Renaissance age. Nevertheless, Shakespeare in the plays under study *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* has combined the emerging Renaissance beliefs with their innate setting 'Renaissance Venice' as well as the

representative characters who exemplify the Italian Renaissance men and women. Thus, one can argue that Shakespeare's plays provide an attracting and interesting case study. The diversity of themes in his plays allows a better illustration of the Renaissance impact on Western societies in general, and on English/Venetian society in particular. Being the 'monuments of his time', Shakespeare's plays mirror the great influence that the Renaissance age had exercised upon his writing and on the English society that constituted the primary raw material for his productions. Moreover, they provide a profound insight to the Western Renaissance society in general.

It is important to mention how much the English authors, especially dramatists, were attracted by the works of Italian authors. During the Renaissance, they often adopted stories from Italian writers such as Bandello, Ariosto, Boccaccio and Cintheo (Thompson Karl.F, 1964: 310). It is argued that, During the English literary Renaissance, entire plays were lifted wholesale from Italian authors. Yet, there was no plagiarism but all was transmuted or re-written in an English way (Plumb, 1989: 154). It is no wonder then, that in writing his plays, Shakespeare relied on Italian stories. In writing *Othello*, for example, he was inspired by a story in a collection of Italian tales called *Gli Hecatommithi* (1565) written by Giraldi Battista Cinthio (Eric Griffin, 1998: 63). The original Italian story is entitled after the English translation 'The Valiant Moor'. Likewise, the story of the Jew in *The Merchant of Venice* seems to have been dramatized before Shakespeare's time by Stephen Gosson in his *School of Abuse* (1576). The latter as an early version of *The Merchant of Venice* was derived from an Italian story in Ser Giovanni's *Il Pecorone*, which was printed in 1558 (Joan Holmer, 1985: 308). Evidently, Shakespeare had only

grasped the idea from his sources while he relied on his genius for developing the plots and the themes of the stories. He succeeded to make of the simple ideas that he adopted immortal works that addressed universal concerns.

Shakespeare's 'timelessness' gives his works lasting significance (Christopher Ricks, 1993:276). Indeed, almost all the works of Shakespeare, though written centuries ago to satisfy an audience of a specific era, are still fascinating subjects for study. However, the understanding and interpretation of Shakespeare's plays differ considerably from one time to another introducing new meanings and re-evaluations. The critics highlighted different issues in all the plays of Shakespeare. Recently, they focused on such aspects as the ideological dimension of his works. In his essay 'Shakespeare in Ideology', James H. Kavanagh argues that Shakespeare the author means more than a historical figure in the sense that he symbolizes the values of the English literary tradition for which he stands as a canon (2002: 148). Our selected plays for study in this research *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, have been studied by many critics and researchers who provided different interpretations. In our review of the literature, we are going to review a number of those interpretations.

### **Review of the Literature:**

The tragic-comedy of *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97) and the tragedy of *Othello* (1603-4) as all the other Shakespearean plays attracted a wide range of critics. Indeed, Shakespeare's works have undergone a continuous process of interpretation and reinterpretation through time. They have been studied from different perspectives. The cultural, feminist, psychoanalytical and postcolonial studies presented various reinterpretations of Shakespeare's writings and

thoughts, and gave importance to recent issues overlooking the traditional studies as A.C Bradley's character analysis. In fact, the recent re-readings of Renaissance writings or culture, as Loomba argues, opened up new questions as that of colonialism and race in relation to Shakespeare's literary productions (Loomba Ania & Martin Orkin, 1998: 3). Essentially, the postcolonial critics highlight the aspects of British colonial ideology imbedded in the discourse of the plays. The essays in *Women, 'Race' and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (1994), edited by Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker locate Shakespeare's text within the incipient moment of colonization and representation of cultural difference (ibid: 196).

Within the light of classical criticism, A. C Bradley in *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth* (1904) has studied Othello's character stating that Othello is a 'noble barbarian' and 'simple' character. In the play, as Bradley argues, Othello refers to himself as "one not easily jealous but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme" (1991: 176). He says that Shakespeare refers to Othello as a Blackman who is looked at as a stranger, arguing that "most surely as an English audience was disposed in the beginning of the seventeenth century it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl (Desdemona) falling in love with a veritable Negro" (ibid : 189). Moreover, Bradley points to the aspects of the discourse of whiteness/ blackness or Desdemona/Othello in the play. He notes that Desdemona is innocent, saint, and loyal while Othello is described as a 'lascivious', 'lustful' and an 'old black ram' (ibid). This, according to him, explains how the Elizabethans conceived the image of the Moor as anti-thesis of Elizabethan identity.

Aside from the traditional criticism emerged alternative criticism with its multiplicity of readings and interpretations. In her work *Gender, race, Renaissance Drama* (1987) Ania Loomba makes a deep analysis of the discourses of Renaissance literary productions. She extends the discussions of gender and politics to include race. For her, the play of *Othello* is simply about a complex relationship between a black man, a white woman, and the state. In relation to the analysis of the discourse of race that she studies, she refers to the 'otherness' of Othello in the country in which he lives. She argues that *Othello* is about the African in Europe (Loomba Ania & Martin Orkin, 1998: 148).

Similarly, Nostbakken Faith argues that the very title of the play *Othello, The Moor of Venice* highlights the aspect of identity and anticipates Othello's position in Venice. Being a 'Moor' denotes a black colour that indicates two important features of Othello: race and place (2000: 27). He maintains that colour and race mark the difference between Othello and the Venetian characters. Moreover, Faith links the aspect of identity in the play with the history of racial prejudice and conflict that dominated the world from the seventeenth century to the present (Ibid: 29).

Habib Imtiaz also has referred to Othello's identity as an alien in the Venetian/ Elizabethan society. He maintains that the Elizabethan world view about the black Other is transmitted through the character of Iago who is the 'archetypical' native member of the Venetian/ Elizabethan society. Imtiaz Habib argues that "Iago is not just the generalized vehicle of the irrationality of racism, but also the particular metaphor of Elizabethan colonial discourse's clueless writing out of its black other" ( 2000: 138). He adds that "Iago

functions like the Tudor historical editors whose histories are built on exclusion” (*ibid.*).

In “Othello’s Racial Identity”, Philip Batchelor considers the trait of blackness as essential for the interpretation of the play. He explains that Shakespeare’s description of Othello as black cannot be accepted without examination, because blackness is sometimes used in Elizabethan drama to refer to characters who are villainous. Though the playwright used just some passages in the play to refer to Othello’s complexion, yet they are enough to distinguish him from the other characters. This, Batchelor maintains, makes of Othello someone who belongs to another nationality with a distinguished racial identity (1952: 244-246)

In the same way, *The Merchant of Venice* is, recently, studied in the light of the new criticism of Shakespeare’s works. In his study of the play, Jay.L Halio states that Shakespeare raised many issues in *The Merchant of Venice* mainly those related to the problems of anti-Semitism and racism. He argues that, in the play, Portia’s comments about her suitors in the casket scene, particularly her remarks about the Prince of Morocco, reflect both racial prejudice and a form of nationalist pride that approaches xenophobia. Though she does not use the derogatory labels for those of other nationalities or races, she reveals indirectly her feelings of superiority over them (2000: 142 -145).

Stephen A. Cohen has studied the play in his article “The Quality of Mercy: Law, Equity and Ideology in *The Merchant of Venice*”. He sheds light into an important aspect in the play that, according to him, was neglected by the New Historicists which is ‘law’ and ‘justice’ in the early modern English as well as Venetian society. He aimed to investigate the socio-political functions

of law at that period by analysing the play. He refers to the scenes where the court is involved to settle the problem between Shylock and Antonio. According to his analysis, the element of law is very important in the play since it indicates the role of justice in solving misunderstanding and re-establishing order in an appropriate way. In addition, he shows how the play partakes in contemporary anti-Semitic stereotypes as greed and social separatism.

Indeed, many researches have been conducted on Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* as well as *Othello*. In his doctorate dissertation entitled "An Africanist Orientalist Discourse: The Other in Shakespeare and Hellenistic Tragedy", Haegap Jeoung has examined the representation of the other in some of Shakespeare's plays. He has tried to show how the discourse of the psychoanalytical other as femininity, disorder, madness and death is mixed with colonial discourse in some Shakespearean as well as Greek Roman tragedy. Haegap Jeoung illustrated from different works of Shakespeare the various dimensions of the notion of 'Other'. Among the plays on which he focused *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, *The Moor of Venice*. He explains that "generally speaking, the Shakespearean 'other' is mostly associated with negative images of dark skin" (2003: 4). According to Jeoung, the stranger who is like Othello is an allegory of madness or deviation condensed in human psychology, and he is bound to be excluded. His foreignness causes his exclusion from Venetian identity. The Venetian canon, Jeoung says, forces him to live just as a useful 'Moor' (ibid: 76). Similarly, in *The Merchant of Venice* Jeoung refers to the rejection of the foreigners: Shylock and Prince Morocco. The former represents racial difference through his 'Jewishness', and the latter (prince of Morocco) through his dark complexion.

In his article “Shakespeare’s Venetian Paradigm: Stereotyping and Sadism in the *Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*,” Maurice Hunt says that Venice in the two plays is used by Shakespeare to denote a place of multicultural reputation. He draws attention to the relationships between the Christian culture and a potentially savage alien ‘a Turk, a Moor, or a Jew’ who lives in the city. The Venetians, he argues, stereotype and persecute the ‘foreigner’ sadistically. Hunt explains clearly the reason for the intense hatred towards the foreign ‘other’. According to him, the reason may be related to psychological problems. He says:

Antonio's and Iago's relative alienation and their painful self-disgust over their lot in life could form their compound impulse to stereotype the Jew and Moor as alien "devil" and wish to abuse each victim physically (2003: 5).

Nevertheless, the victims who are the receivers of racist hatred, in their turn, try to avenge themselves. Hunt argues that both Shylock and Othello enact the same process as the racists. Shylock wants to torture Antonio in a terrible way by asking for a pound of his flesh, and Othello ends the life of Desdemona in a tragic way.

Azouaou Lacheb, in his turn, has dealt with both *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* in his Magister dissertation. His research is entitled “Domestic and Foreign Othering in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*” (2007). In the latter, he examines Shakespeare’s representation of the ‘other’ with its two categories, the domestic and the foreign. In the section devoted to *Othello*, he has dealt with the ‘othering’ of the category of the Moors in the Elizabethan society. He has studied the alienation of Othello as a representative of the foreign ‘other’. Likewise, in *The Merchant of Venice* he has concentrated on the ‘othering’ of the Jews, who, like the



Moors, are rejected from the Elizabethan as well as the Venetian society. He has also examined the degraded state of women and their alienation in the English society. Unlike the Moors and the Jews, they constitute the domestic other.

### **Hypothesis and Issue:**

From our review of the literature, we have come to discover the different perspectives from which Shakespeare's plays *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* have already been studied. It has been found out that the critics and researchers explored the divergent meanings of the plays and focused mainly on such aspects as racism, anti-Semitism and feminism. Yet, despite the great number of studies carried on the plays to be investigated, and according to the best of our knowledge, there is no research followed yet concerning the major Renaissance themes in the two plays. For this reason, we have undertaken the task of examining the plays in relation to their Renaissance context.

Our intention in this research is to deal with Shakespeare's dramatization of the Renaissance ideas that started in Italy. We shall try to explore the new Renaissance themes of subjectivity, individual will, independence and self-interest aligned with the prevailing themes of communal ties, social conventions and tradition. We shall try to show how Shakespeare portrayed women and men of the Renaissance as wavering between the new notions of the Renaissance and the existing traditional beliefs. We will explain how they stand for subjectivity, independence, individual will and self-interest and, at the same time, they adhere to the norms of tradition, social convention and communal ties. Throughout our contribution, we will try to demonstrate the extent to which the Renaissance man and woman possessed subjectivity with all what it entails of individual freedom and independence claimed for the Renaissance period.

Taking Shakespeare's plays as a mirror that reflects the reality of the Renaissance life, we will scrutinize the Renaissance individual character in relation to social conventions.

### **Methodology and Outline:**

In order to deal with the study of the Italian Renaissance themes in Shakespeare's plays, we will rely on the New Historicist theoretical assumptions. The latter's contention is that literary texts can only be evaluated and studied in their socio-historical contexts. From this standpoint, our study will be sustained by drawing a link between the literary texts that we intend to study and their social and historical context. The two plays, *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *Othello* (1603), were produced within the time of the Renaissance in England and they were set in Renaissance Italy. As such, it is inevitable to consider the influence of the Renaissance values on the themes and characters of the plays.

New Historicism is originally a critical movement that insists on the importance of the historical context to the interpretation of texts of different kinds. Its basic aim is the exploration of the extent to which any historical enterprise reflects the interests and bias of the period in which it was written. In other words, it puts considerable emphasis on the socio-historical conditions that shape the thoughts and assumptions of any author's dramatic productions. The literary texts are, in fact, "part of the political, religious and social institutions that form, control and limit them" (Berghahn Claus .L, 1992: 145). For this reason, the new historicists, according to M.Keith Booker, believe that "it makes no sense to separate literary texts from the social contexts around them because such texts are the product of complex social "exchanges" or

“negotiations” (1996: 138). In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), Stephen Greenblatt points to the interpretation and understanding of literature as “a part of the system of signs that constitute a given culture” (1980: 4). Louis Montrose asserts that the focus of new historicism is an attempt to refigure “the socio-cultural field within which canonical Renaissance literary and dramatic works were originally produced” (1989: 17). In sum, in terms of new historicism, “a literary text can not be considered apart from the society that produced it: a literary text is another form of social significance which is produced by the society” (ibid: 24). As such, a literary work should be examined in relation to the culture that produced it, taking into consideration its social, historical, and political contexts.

Additionally, we will refer to Edward Said’s post-colonial theory *Orientalism* (1978). Orientalism, according to Edward Said, is “the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice” (1991: 72). The Orientalists aim to highlight the differences between the two opposing worlds, the West and the East. They assert the inferiority of the ‘Others’ by using “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) the occident” (ibid: 2). In fact, ‘the Orient’, as it is understood by the Western world, is a mere Western invention that for decades cared to preserve both the exotic sense of mystery and inferiority of the East, and through time it is transformed into “a created body of theory and practice” in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. “Continued investment” Said says “made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient” (1991: 6).

Moreover, Orientalism presents a learned field, an ‘unclosed space’, and a stage on which the whole East is confined ‘Orientalized’. In this stage, by way of generalization, some figures represent all the other Eastern people. This Oriental stage, in fact, demonstrates a cultural repertoire that represents a rich world “half-imagined, half-known” (ibid: 63). From this repertoire, the European imagination is nourished. Starting from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, such authors as Milton, Marlowe, Cervantes and Shakespeare drew on the Orient’s riches for their literary productions (ibid). However, what they do is the conversion of the Orient from something to something else for the sake of their culture. In other words, they make the Orient seem as they want, weak, ugly, uncivilized and inferior just to glorify their culture as superior in contrast to that of the ‘Others’.

We intend to divide our work into three chapters. The first chapter will be devoted to the general historical background that fashioned Shakespeare’s mind in writing the two plays. We will introduce, first, an overview about the Italian Renaissance focusing on its main aspects. Then, we shall try to explain how the Renaissance found a way to England during the sixteenth century, and affected the English mainly during the Elizabethan/Shakespearean Era. Evidently, we will deal with Shakespearean England with much more scrutiny, and consider all of its political, social, and cultural conditions.

In the second chapter, we shall deal with the Renaissance related themes of subjectivity, independence, individual will, self-interest, tradition, and communal ties. Our aim is to demonstrate the ambivalent mood of the men and women of the Renaissance who embody both of the new Renaissance beliefs and the traditional norms. We will try to show how the collective communal

conventions still hinder the autonomy and individuality of the Renaissance woman/man who is still identified within the traditional institutions of family, community and race.

In the third chapter, we will deal with Shakespeare's portrayal of the emotional side of the character of man and woman of the Renaissance. In this chapter, we shall deal with Shakespeare's depiction of human passions, romantic love and intensive hatred, aligned with the Renaissance distinction among races and peoples. Our aim will be to demonstrate the effects of the established social conventions about racial differences on the subjective individual emotions. To fulfil this task, we will examine the relationships that link the main characters in the plays under study.

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## William Shakespeare: Life, Time, and Influence

Our intention in the following chapter is to present the general historical background of Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-97) and *Othello* (1603-04), within the light of the sixteenth century English Renaissance. The latter, being greatly inspired by the Italian Renaissance of the two previous centuries: the fourteenth and the fifteenth transported a lot of Italian Renaissance values to the English life. As such, it seems inevitable to consider the connection between the Renaissance in Italy with the English people in general and English writers in particular. This will lead us to deal with Shakespeare as an Englishman of the Renaissance, who like all the sensitive and educated men shared in Renaissance excitements. It is important to note that Shakespeare displays a concrete image of the correlation between England and Europe. Though England was the most important to him, he was also concerned with the social life of contemporary Europe, of which we mention Italy. The latter was so influential at that time with all its subtleties, humours, villainies and also humanity (Highet Gilbert, 1957:218).

We will start by introducing a general overview of the Italian Renaissance from its beginning in the fourteenth century until the sixteenth century. Our emphasis will be put on the main aspects that the new age had brought to the Italians, the aspects that later on found a path to Northern Europe. Then, we will introduce the historical background of the English Renaissance that coincided with the Tudor dynasty. In the latter, we will concentrate on the Elizabethan period that marked the emergence of Shakespeare as an English writer and during which his two plays under study *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *Othello* (1603) were produced. In introducing the background of Elizabethan/



Shakespearean England, we will focus on the English/Italian relations during the time of the Renaissance.

### **The General Background for the Renaissance in Italy: Its main aspects:**

The Italian Renaissance went as far back as the fourteenth century. It started approximately around 1350 and lasted until the end of the sixteenth century. Before providing any detail about the movement, it seems very important to identify first the meaning of the concept. The word 'Renaissance' indicates the Revival of Learning period in European cultural history that started in Italy around the early fourteenth century and lasted until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to Ernest H. Wilkins, it is usually used to designate both "a cultural movement and the period within which that cultural movement is thought to have had its span of life" (1950: 67). By the cultural movement we mean, of course, the different changes that marked the decade and made of it a liminal era. In other words, it denotes the whole transition from the medieval culture to that of the modern world; in the sense that it challenged the medieval assumptions and gave birth to a new culture nourished with worldly interests. According to Ernest Wilkins, Renaissance as a cultural movement is essentially a complex of interrelated strands among which Humanism is the most essentially characteristic, in addition to the classic tradition that created a sort of reaction against a preceding non- classic tradition (Wilkins, 1950: 75). In sum, the Renaissance as a cultural movement is "a complex of many strands, most of them deriving inspiration from the tradition of classic culture and all of them vibrant with vital energy" (ibid). The strands included arts, sciences and literature.

Italy was the first European country to inaugurate the Renaissance era. In fact, it took the lead in starting radical transformations in the way of life, liberating the minds from the womb of illusions that swept Europe during the previous era- the Middle Ages. This happened thanks to the favourable conditions of Italy from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth. Even though Italy lived a period- at the beginning of the Middle Ages- as severe as in northern European countries as England, its culture recovered far more rapidly than that of the other countries. Hence, it possessed the necessary climate for the growth of new ways of thinking that was basically sustained by political freedom and commercial prosperity (Alfred Pearson & A.Symonds, 1893: 4).

The beginning of the Renaissance Age was marked by an increasing enthusiasm for the revival of the Classical Greek and Roman heritage. The Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt stated in his work *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860)* that in Italy “the sympathies both of the learned and of the people were naturally engaged on the side of antiquity as a whole which stood to them as a symbol of past greatness” (1990: 121). The Italians turned to the study of the Greek and Roman literature that provided them with the inspirations for which they longed. They found in following on the steps of the ancients-classical as well as biblical antiquity- ideals of human life that could save them from the rigid ideas of the medieval church. The latter had imposed an order that condemned every earthly aspect as pleasure and beauty, and bound the human being to the spiritual world and recognized him just as an integral part of it. However, thanks to scholarship the wealth of man’s mind, the dignity of human thought and the value of human life apart from any religious dogmas were at last revealed. The Italians, mainly the Florentines, revered

antiquity with its wisdom, its grace, its philosophy and its literature. The heritage of antiquity, as the works of Plato and Aristotle, had been studied attentively in monastic schools and universities. The Renaissance, in this way, afforded people access to the ancient Greek and Latin literature, and as a result, works of enormous importance were taken as models, of which we state those of Virgil printed in 1470, Homer in 1488, Aristotle in 1498 and Plato in 1513 (Plumb J.H, 1987: 17).

As far as the political environment is concerned, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries –Renaissance Italy- coincided with the rule of despots. It was under their reign that the conditions of the Renaissance started to take shape in Italy. The despotic rule was carried on by individual rulers from diverse origins. What characterized their rule was mainly the uncertainty of succession of the throne from father to son; absence of respect for the legitimacy of birth; and the seizure and maintaining of power through force. Yet, despite this chaotic image, the states seemed orderly governed and prosperous. The despotic conduct of the country projected the corruption that swept the gleaming surface of the Renaissance. For under the cover of progress and improvement lied the heavy atmosphere of self-conscious and deliberate vice that determined the qualities of the so called ‘new age’ and affected by example the whole Europe (A. Pearson & A.Symonds, 1893:36). Consequently, the use of vice, crime, revenge, and treachery to hold power became known as part and parcel of the despots’ conduct. Their absolute power with its temptations to selfishness, and enemies made of the ruler a real tyrant. It is argued that the despots many times used of vice a fine art for their amusement and openly defied humanity. This is what happened mainly during the rule of Ludovico Sforza, who was called IL Moro,

around 1496. Italy, under the reign of IL Moro, knew a widespread of immorality of the worst kind (Burckhardt, 1990: 44).

In fact, it was under such circumstances, tyrannies, intrigues, wars and revolution, Jacob Burckhardt argued, that the famous individuality of the Italians obtained its ultimate development and made of the Italian “the first born among the sons of modern Europe” ( ibid: 98). This individualism –as one of the main aspects of the Renaissance- was remarkable for noticeable genius and talent. Burckhardt considered individualism as an important movement at the heart of the Renaissance in Italy. The emergence of the essence of the man as an individual, he believed, happened through three facets that he named the discovery of the individual, the awakening of the self and then the development of the individual.

Burckhardt considered the Italians of the Renaissance as a people “who have emerged from the half-conscious life of the race and become themselves individuals” (ibid: 214)). Before the Renaissance, i.e., in the Middle Ages, “man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation-only through some general category” (ibid: 98 ). However, the Renaissance era ended this state in which the human being is denied his singularity, as Burckhardt declared, “this veil first melted into air; an objective treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of the world became possible” (ibid). What happened was that “the *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself...man became a spiritual individual, and recognized himself as such” (ibid). Once individuality was discovered, the aim was directed towards the development of the individual. Roberta Garner remarked in “Jacob Burckhardt as a Theorist of Modernity” that the Renaissance became the first

era of 'self-improvement' (Garner, 1990: 50). The individual had to look for perfection through the development of all facets to the self instead of remaining just content within a medieval organic community. He had to realize his personal and moral autonomy, which would allow every man to work out his own life pattern according to the law of his own singular nature. Burckhardt remarks:

the sight of victorious egotism in others drives him (the individual) to defend his own right by his own arm....in face of all objective facts, of laws and restraints of whatever kind, he retains the feeling of his own sovereignty, and in each single instance forms his decision independently, according as honour or interest, passion or calculation, revenge or renunciation, gain the upper hand in his own mind (1990: 279)

The development of individuality culminated in the emergence of what Burckhardt called the 'universal man' or 'L'umo universale' who belonged exclusively to Italy (ibid: 101). The Age of the Renaissance, with its eagerness for the new, required such universal men. For, indeed, the fifteenth century was "—above all- that of the many sided men" (ibid: 102).

It is worth noting that the individuality of the Renaissance was not restricted to men but it included also women. "The individuality of women in the upper classes," Burckhardt remarked, "was developed in the same way as that of men" (ibid: 251). What can be said of the men of the Renaissance can be said of women as well, with slight differences attributed to the traditional secondary role they had already occupied. The highest praise which could then be given to the great Italian women was that they had both the mind and the courage of men (ibid). In such terms, women of the Renaissance could escape the subservient traditional position and gain equality with men.

The Italian individualism expressed itself in its highest levels in the form of cosmopolitanism. The latter meant a belief in the universe as a single country for all humanity. This idea of cosmopolitanism was in fact one of the main features that characterized the Venetian society as a model of the Italian Renaissance society. Venice was an Italian city where people from a variety of races and places mingled in the streets. The Venetians often gave outsiders key military roles as a strategy to ensure peace. They thought that if they hired their own citizens for commanding officers, power abuse and uprising would surely result. As Plumb argued, Venice was, by the time of the Renaissance, cosmopolitan as no other city in Europe was. He explained how “the crowded wharves of the Rialto and Riva degli Schiavoni saw gentile and Jew, Moslem and Greek, haggling over rich cargoes from the Orient (Plumb, 1987: 105). Like Venice, Florence being one of the historical places that gave birth to the modern understanding of the individual, was a place where ‘cosmopolitanism’ was encouraged among people (Connell J. William, 2002: 2).

Moreover, the Italian individualism was accompanied by the emergence of the ‘cult of celebrity’ as equivalent for the modern idea of fame. This was shown in terms of the emergence of celebrities of every kind as statesman, churchman, inventors, poets, discovers, men of letters, poets and artists. Not the least, the disappearance of status groups or classes was a significant fact of the Renaissance. Hence, birth and origin were of no significance, the only measure for nobility was personal merit. The individual was no longer identified according to his social class, all what he needed was ‘personal merit’. Even the illegitimacy of the rulers was substituted by their intellectual merit. Burckhardt explained that “Talent and calculation were the only means of advancement”

(1990: 27). This is to mean that even the rulers did not count on the help of their origins or wealth to reach power; instead, they relied on their personal intelligence. The Renaissance in this sense marked the dawn of an age of equality between people. Men became dignified and given the same chance to reach any position. Pico della Mirandola, in his speech on the Dignity of Man (1486) asserted that God made man at the close of the creation to know the laws of the universe, and he bound him to no fixed place and to no prescribed form of work but, instead, gave him freedom to will and to love ( ibid: 229). The humanists, in their turn, affirmed the conviction that birth decides nothing for a man, and had nothing to do with his goodness or badness (ibid: 231).

If individualism was an important current within the Italian Renaissance, Humanism was the strand that endowed it with magnificence, specificity and such grandeur that it had enjoyed. It was the main stream from which individualism took its rise. Renaissance Humanism grew up in Italy where the classical tradition persisted. The revival of antiquity was led by the humanists who worked as a bridge through which the elements of an ancient culture passed to their age. Indeed, it was, particularly, from Florence that spread the new philosophy of humanism with its newborn beliefs. Consequently, Florence was the most important house for the development of humanism. It was there that it expressed itself for the first time as an indispensable new social tendency inherent in the daily life of Italians. The Florentine humanists cultivated a new appreciation of political liberty and civic virtue, a new attitude toward the place of man in society and in the universe as a whole. For this reason, Florentine civic humanism had long been recognized as characteristic of one aspect of the Italian Renaissance (Plumb, 1989: 178).

The Humanist Movement was originally led by the Florentine Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) (1304-1374), who was often qualified as the first humanist or ‘the father of Humanism’. He was a kind of a living representative of antiquity who transmitted the humanist interests of the ancient epoch. Petrarch preached, “let us come back to the purer sources” (quoted in Rocco Montano, 1973: 216). Being the ‘chief reviver of ancient learning’, he anticipated the idea of combining theological thinking and reason (ibid: 171). From this principle, the Italian humanism constructed its assumption on the persuasion that the path towards god is one of moral betterment, of continuous, difficult choices between right and wrong and most important of all, it expressed a stark opposition against delusive abandonment to the divine against personal inspirations and all forms of irrationalism (Rocco Montano, 1973: 220).

As a humanist, Petrarch brought the human and moral element, reason and its responsible choice, classical wisdom and confidence in man into the Christian world and thus maintained the humanist belief that people did not need to deprive themselves of what is human in order to satisfy the church and become divine (ibid). Starting from this principle, Petrarch and the humanists in general made of human love a central theme for their writings. Petrarch developed his renowned doctrine of love that tied together introspection and courtly love (Aldo Scaglione, 1997: 552). Petrarchan love was greatly influenced by the Platonic love that is in essence attached to the perdurable qualities of the soul. It is from Platonism that it acquired its spiritual aspect. Petrarch was inspired by his love for Laura de Noves of whom he said “I could never love any thing else! My soul is so used to adoring her, my eyes are so used to gazing on her, that all that is not she looks dark and ugly!” (Qtd in



Plumb, 1989: 168). The spiritual vision of Petrarchan love lies mainly in the image of the beloved that Petrarch held as a divine creature whose qualities exceed that of any ordinary woman.

By definition, Humanism derives from the Latin word 'humanitas' that carries the connotation of the highest human faculties including mainly the 'bonae litterae' or 'good letters' that aimed to develop man's mind (Burke Peter, 1997: 10). Renaissance Humanism was, basically, an interest in the world of man including both the outer and inner aspects of human character. With the growing humanist philosophy, people ceased to look for answers to the fate of man in the dogmas of the church. They, instead, searched the histories of antiquity for precedents that might guide them to the truth. They started to look for explanation of the world in which they lived, as Machiavelli did, in relation to what they referred to as 'the nature of man' (Plumb, 1989: 19).

The Renaissance humanist culture favoured the human being and all that was related to him. Therefore, the human nature became the target of intense study in order to reveal the mysteries of the character of man. After having discovered, and developed the individual, the Renaissance gave birth to a desire to understand all what characterized his personality. Observation and description were essential parts in the process of the discovery of the intellectual side of the character of man. Machiavelli, for instance, was preoccupied with men and events, the effects of political action and the consequences of chance. By doing so, the men of the Renaissance, through using their inquiries, scepticism and the sharpness of their observations, gave impetus to the search for truth, what is over, on earth instead of in heaven. (ibid). It was from this time on that Men began to create new images of themselves, and as a

result, all aspects of a personal life as birth, love marriage, ambition, defeat, acquired a heroic and universal significance (ibid: 119). Human passions, as a part of the nature of man, were given enormous importance. Jacob Burckhardt mentioned in his work that during the Renaissance the human nature attracted the attention of the Italian writers who started to detect and describe the human mind as well as his heart. He argued that *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's well-known work, was an expression of the human spirit that had taken a mighty step towards consciousness of its own secret life. The work, he added, revealed knowledge of the man in his 'Totality' (1990: 204). This means the complete understanding of the human being in his daily life with his changing mood, feelings and behaviours. Being influenced by the works of the ancient poets, as Virgil in *The Aeneid* (the tragical love of Dido and Aeneas), the Italians were the earliest to give complete expression of modern European feelings. They were, in fact, the first who gave documentary proof of the knowledge of the movements of the human heart (ibid). For this reason, it was no wonder that the foundation of the modern romantic literature was attributed to the Italians, namely Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio (René Wellek, 1949: 6).

Besides this great desire to understand the nature of man as an individual, there was an interest, during the Renaissance, on the study of human beings in numbers or in other words following their races and societies. It was from that point that human differences started to be revealed. This is what Burckhardt referred to by saying that "this national gift [study of human nature using the biography] did not, however confine itself to the criticism and description of individuals, but felt itself competent to deal with the qualities and characteristics of whole peoples" (ibid: 220). This was, in fact, a result of the

Italians' discovery of the outward world. Drawn by their thirst for knowledge, the Italians explored different parts of the world following the crusades. Burckhardt explained that "even in the crusades the interest of the Italians was wider than that of other nations, since they already were a naval power and had commercial relations with the East." (ibid: 185). Starting from this point, it is possible to argue that the Renaissance with its humanistic culture and its pretence of equality led the way to a kind of racist feelings that grew later on into a 'justified' despise and scorn of the non-Europeans.

Concerning religion, the Italian Renaissance spirit, informed by Humanism, was far more secular and focused on the activities of human beings. It encouraged the re-birth and development of a free philosophy that was no longer subject to the church. Once again, it was the powerful individuality of the Italians that made them subjective in religious matters. While in the rest of Europe, including England, people were preoccupied with religion, the Italians were too much worldly (ibid: 312).

Religion acquired a new conception with the use of the new skills of philology and textual criticism, which the Italian humanists had perfected. By doing so, they aimed to purge the Christian faith from false conceptions (Plumb, 1989: 149). This new approach to religion aimed essentially to interpret religion to the reason, the motto of the Renaissance. This was the first seed of the movement that was to be known later as the Reformation. The reform movement, in fact, was never an isolated phenomenon within the Renaissance but rather an integral part of its basic assumptions. Indeed, Reformation "exhibited in the religious thought and national politics what the Renaissance showed in the field of culture, art and sciences" (A. Pearson & A.Symonds, 1893: 11). In other

words, the work that the scholars were doing in favour of society in terms of improving education, and adopting a new insight to the individual as well as his social circumstances; was the same task of the religious reformers who tried to stop the hypnotic influence that the popes exercised upon people.

The Italian Religious Reformers aimed to purge the Catholic Church from the corruption that swept its members. In opposition to the official doctrines of the church, they wanted to establish a kind of religion that was to be founded on the illumination of the spirit as the most important source of truth. The proponents of this new approach, as Martin Luther, asserted the right of the individual to judge, interpret, criticize and construct opinion for himself (ibid: 10-11). To realize this freedom, the reformers recurred to the principles set by the pagan philosophers as Ovid and Plato. They relied on them in expressing their view on salvation and individual illumination and the importance of human love as a step towards the divine love. Plato stressed the importance of human choice and reason to be directed towards God and the true faith. For him the human being had to choose between the animal existence of the visible world and the perfect life of the intelligible realm. To reach the latter, man had to employ the powers of his reason and to dare question the existing norms to achieve awareness of the eternally good and beautiful. This entails the avoidance of the evil of bodily pleasures that hinder the progress of the eternal soul in its journey towards knowledge. The latter would enlighten man's soul and direct him to perceive the reality of things (Plato, *The Republic* in Scott Buchanan, 1977). By adopting such classical ideas, the reformers set themselves against the blind imitations of the religious doctrines and called for the use of human reason.

Following the Italian greed to change and high esteem for antiquity, the Italian Renaissance was believed to be pagan. Despite the efforts of the humanists to clarify the position of humanism towards the function of religion in society, the fervent religious men expressed a stark opposition towards the teachings of antiquity. They considered the increasing enthusiasm for the classical antiquity as a warning sign of going far away from religion. In fact, ‘paganism’ was the reputation that the other European countries often had had about the Renaissance in Italy. For this reason, when the Renaissance ideals reached the countries north of the Alps, they were in a way or another transformed to suit the beliefs of people.

### **England and the Italian Renaissance**

#### **The beginning of contact**

The Italian Renaissance affected the whole European countries starting from the sixteenth century. Students from different European countries went to Italy to study the classics, philosophy, and the remains of antiquity and thus contributed to spread the Renaissance north of the Alps. That new age which brought enormous changes to the Italian life in general became a point of attraction that stimulated the interest of people all over Europe and soon “the Renaissance ideas and achievements ran like an in eradicable dye through the fabric of Europe” (Plumb, 1989: 19). The Italian literature and art, even the Italian ways of clothing and behaving were imitated in European countries as France, Spain, and England. Among the Europeans, the English in the sixteenth century became greatly influenced by what had happened during the two previous centuries and was still happening in the sixteenth century in Italy. The connection between the two countries went back to the beginning of the Tudor

rule, and continued during the reign of the last Tudor monarch Queen Elizabeth I. Though the relationship between the two countries was basically that of competition and rivalry, there was a kind of cooperation between the English and Italians in some domains as education. Increasingly, the fascinating ideas of the Renaissance in Italy were penetrating English shores through either the English travellers and students or the Italians who were coming to England as teachers and advisers. Consequently, the sixteenth century English Renaissance absorbed the ideals of the Italian Renaissance. It is argued that England owed much to Italy in the Renaissance to the point of indebtedness (A.C Krey, 1947:129). The increasing English enthusiasm for Italy started from the very beginning of the sixteenth century, and intensified during the Elizabethan era.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, during the reign of Henry VIII, the English Renaissance started to take shape enhanced by the Italian Renaissance. Being a man of learning, the king grew fascinated by the political as well as cultural life of the main Italian states as Florence and Venice. Henry VIII was a friend of the dukes of Ferrara and Urbino who were greatly renowned at that time. Hoping to learn much about the Renaissance life, he surrounded himself with men who promoted the Renaissance's 'New Learning' as a step to spread the recent education in England. The 'New Learning' meant exactly the knowledge of the classics that gained a wide favourable reputation and turned to be a necessary qualification for anyone who wanted to enter the court. Henry VIII was willing to advance literature and arts as the Italian despots were doing at that time. Following his encouragement of Renaissance learning, a wide range of scholars travelled to Italy to master the new learning. Additionally, he called

to his court many Italians, among whom we can mention the poet Peter Carmeliano.

Thomas Linacre was one of the English students who visited Italy for the sake of Renaissance learning. He represented a direct connection between the Italian and English Renaissance at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Linacre studied at Florence, Rome and Padua and after having left Italy, he continued to correspond long after his return to England with Aldus Manutius who was encouraging him to make translations of Aristotle and Galen's works. Linacre acknowledged his indebtedness to Italy by erecting and dedicating a cairn of stone to Italy that he qualified as "mother of studies" (A.C Krey, 1947:131). After his return to England, Henry VIII hired him as his personal physician. Another English Renaissance scholar was William Grocyn who was educated in Italy, and when he returned, he initiated the learning of Greek at Oxford.

Not the least, such men as Sir Thomas MORE (1478-1535) and John Colet (1467-1519) played an important role in promoting the English Renaissance. Their direct connection with Italy, on the one hand, and collaboration with the humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1467-1536), on the other, served to propagate the intellectual currents of the Renaissance, mainly humanism, in England. Together, they dedicated themselves to create a Renaissance society governed by reason. These Renaissance scholars introduced to the universities of England the Platonist method of education aiming to decrease the domination of the scholastic methods. Thomas MORE became, during the reign of Henry VIII, a key leader of the English Renaissance. Around 1516, he published his *Utopia*, which is considered as one of the greatest products of English humanism. Its

humanistic character is shown in the deep concern that it expressed for social improvement, its kinship with Plato's Republic and its stress on education. As a humanist, MORE pinpointed in his work the humanist belief on the creation of a classless society guided by the dictates of natural reason.

Gradually, the English were becoming fascinated by the new Italian Renaissance values, and writers showed a great enthusiasm for the depiction of the Italian history and way of life. The growing English enthusiasm for Italy was first expressed in literature in the work of William Thomas in his *Historie of Italie* (1549). This work was published in a period when Italian influences were affecting both English learning and customs. However, there was an incident during the reign of Henry VIII that interrupted the relations with Italy and Europe in general. The incident was the complete separation from the Roman Catholic Church. After the English Reformation and the establishment of the Anglican Church, the political and religious ties that had previously joined England and Italy ended. Henry VIII adopted a policy of isolation mainly from the Catholic countries of Europe for a long decade as a way to preserve the independence of the Church of England and maintain security at home. This isolation remained until the Elizabethan period.

### **Elizabethan/Shakespearean England**

The Elizabethan era or Shakespearean England was the culminating point of the Renaissance as well as the English-Italian relationships. Elizabeth's reign transformed many things in the English life. Each field was altered, Religion, economy, culture and politics; if not completely changed, they knew a lot of corrections. When Queen Elizabeth took the throne in 1558, her interest was to make of England a powerful and peaceful country. She encouraged all domains



of knowledge, sciences, literature and art as a way to promote the power of the English nation. Her good and wise conduct that improved the lives of her subjects made of her an example of a Renaissance humanist Queen. Thanks to her willing and overt character, the majority of English Renaissance achievements took place under her reign.

### **Elizabethan era and the religious conflicts**

When Elizabeth I became the Queen of England, the English were living in a nightmare of religious upheavals and growth of intolerance. Despite the policy of moderation that the Queen adopted to satisfy all the religious sects, religious troubles continued for a long period. On the one hand, the Queen faced the unsatisfied Protestants who were against her moderate policy. On the other, she tried to stop the Catholic plots against her. During the 1580's and 1590's, England knew a successive tide of catholic uprisings and plots that hoped to snuff out English Protestantism. Worst of all, the angry Catholics inside England participated in plots with England's rivals, the Spanish and the French, to overthrow the Queen and re-establish Catholicism. Yet, the solidity and wisdom of Elizabeth managed to switch off those alarming threats. She could re-establish peace and maintain order, and succeeded to make of her Era the Golden Age in English history.

### **The Elizabethans and Foreigners**

Elizabethan England witnessed a racial xenophobia. The fervent religious beliefs on the one hand, and the growing attention to racial differences that came with the Renaissance on the other resulted in an anti- foreign feeling. The English considered anyone who differed from them in behaviour, colour or worship as an alien in the English society. In fact, the English ethnocentrism

fastened upon differences in colour, style of life, and religion (Martin Orkin, 1987, 167). For this reason, the Englishmen excluded people who exhibited difference either in colour or in religious beliefs. The case of the Jews provided the best example of the existence of race prejudice based on religious difference.

The Jews constituted a rejected and marginalized minority as they belonged to Judaism. For the English Protestants, the Jews stood for the Catholic Church from which Protestant England sought to separate. According to Sharon Achinstein, the position of Jews was conditioned by the English' perception of the Jews in a newly self-conscious, protestant English national identity amidst conflicting currents of politics, theology, and race (2001: 15). The Jew as a racial 'other' was completely rejected from the society of the English. Further, as historical documents attest, the problem of the Jew in Christian England intersected with an emerging ideology of race to affirm a notion of English identity.

Besides religion, colour constituted evidence for race prejudice. According to Eldred Jones and Winthrop Jordan, there is ample evidence of the existence of colour prejudice in the England of Shakespeare's time (Orkin, 1987: 167). For the contact with overseas countries acquainted the Elizabethans with black people. In *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (1971), Eldred Jones notes that blacks from Africa had been present in England since 1554, chiefly in the capacity of slaves (Phillis N.Braxton, 1990: 3). The English saw the blacks as barbarous, treacherous and jealous. For instance, the treachery of blackmen was popularized in George Peele's play *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588). Therefore, the considerable number of blacks enhanced the Queen's decision to

expel the blacks out of the English realm in 1601. She was discontented at the great number of 'Negars and blackamoors' considering them as a threat to the Christian purity (Mangan Michael, 1991: 155). Evidently, this race prejudice was not confined to England alone, but it was rooted deeply in the Renaissance culture of all European countries.

### **Elizabethan/Shakespearean England, an Era of exploration:**

#### **The growth of contact with Italy**

After the decade of isolation that followed Henry VIII's Reformation, the Elizabethan age knew the rise of England as a powerful nation that showed a relentless desire to discover the world. In *The English Renaissance* (1951), Vivian de Sola Pinto sums up the mood of the Era stating that "the achievements of the mariners and travellers set the whole of the latter part of Elizabeth's reign against a vast background of wonder and enchantment" (quoted in Bayouli.T, 2002: 113). This spirit of exploration led the English to different parts of the world as the coast of Africa and the New World. At the same time, they visited European countries mainly Italy that was called 'the Mecca of all Elizabethan English men' (Holzknecht J.Karl, 1950:36). Of course, among all the other countries, Italy occupied a central position thanks to its precedence in starting the Renaissance age. John W. Draper stated that Italy was the Elizabethans' land of heart's desire, the luminous place that attracted English youth with its climate, culture and luxury (1946: 287). This is not without reason, for Italy was at the same time the place of knowledge and liberty.

The Elizabethans were eager to understand everything related to Italy either its history, or language and literature. In fact, Italy was exercising a great influence not only on literature, but also on learning and social life. All what

was Italian seemed of eminent significance, because “Italy filled the English imagination with the picture of a superior society” (Park, 1968: 342). As such, the English travellers flocked to Italy. What attracted them, above anything else, was learning and absorbing from the fountainhead of the fresh thoughts belonging exclusively to Italy thanks to the ‘Renaissance’. Francis Bacon pointed explicitly to the reasons that made the English travellers admirers of Italy. In his essay *Of Travel*, he justified travel as education or experience, for the learning of languages, for the surveys of governments and societies and for grasping worldly manners (ibid: 343). It was essentially, for this reason, that Thomas Hoby translated Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* ***The Courtier*** (1528) into English in 1561. Castiglione’s work was meant to teach the individual the right and appropriate behaviour. In addition, Thomas Palmer stated that Italy “moveth most of our travellers to go and visit it, of any other state in the world; and not without cause, it being an ancient nursery and shop of libertie” (ibid). This belief stemmed from the liberal life that the Italians enjoyed thanks to the secular spirit of the Italian Renaissance. Besides, the reason for which the English turned towards Italy was to take a model for their new Renaissance life. In other words, the English of the sixteenth century, or the ‘new men’ as Plumb referred to them, wanted to get rid of their barbarous and anarchic society through using the models of the ancients. As such, it was necessary for them to look toward the source of knowledge ‘Italy’ where they could learn the wisdom of the classical world that had already been adjusted to the modern necessities (Plumb, 1989: 148).

In addition to the English students who went to Italy, England had access to the Renaissance learning through the scholars who came from Italy. During

the Elizabethan period, the Italians were welcomed to England enthusiastically as literary advisers (Hale J.R, 1954:16). The interest in Italy may also be conceived in the growing knowledge of the Italian language. The latter was considered as important as Latin and Greek languages in Elizabethan England.

From their contact with Italy, the Elizabethan English acquired a full-length picture about the new philosophy of the Renaissance as well as its major proponents. They learned to admire the bright and lovely poetry of Francesco Petrarch. The latter's way of writing was taken as a model by Elizabethan poets as Shakespeare, Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. They also became acquainted with the writings of Tasso and Ariosto. Not the least, Niccolo Machiavelli stirred the imagination of the Elizabethan dramatists and had great influence on them, chiefly on Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene and William Shakespeare. Actually, Machiavellian ideas were prime ingredients in the Elizabethan theatre, particularly for Marlow and Shakespeare (Hugh Grady, 2000: 120).

In fact, the Elizabethans, despite their appreciation, had mixed views about Italy as a nation that was in many ways different from their own. It was a Catholic country rather than protestant. After the Reformation and the break with Rome, England became more religious than before while Italy showed more interest in secularism. Unlike England, Italy did not have a cohesive national identity but instead was composed of several city-states. This composition made some states more prominent than the others. Among other states, there was Venice, Florence, Rome, and Milan. Though the Renaissance flowed more strongly in all of the four cities, each state had its own reputation. For instance, Rome was the home of the Pope and Catholicism and starting from the

Reformation, it represented an antagonistic political and religious force against Protestantism in England. It was also the place of classical Roman history and civilization for which there was a great enthusiasm during the Renaissance. Another state was Florence, one of the most beautiful cities of Europe, and the birthplace of Machiavelli (1469-1527) who was known in England for his political thoughts mainly after publishing *The Prince* (1513). Above all, Venice had the most favourable reputation as a place of peace, justice and good government (Nostbakken Faith, 2000: 31). It succeeded to maintain freedom of thought and study against the rising tide of religious intolerance, and thus qualified as “the residuary legatee of the whole Italian Renaissance” (A.C Krey, 1947: 133). It is argued that, among all the other Italians, Renaissance Venetians constructed their identity in reference to the culture of antiquity. Bernardus Bembus wrote that the Venetians were called new Romans, and by the end of the fifteenth century, Venice was regularly called new Rome (Kallendorf Graig, 1999: 17). During Queen Elizabeth’s reign, in the 1570’s, England started increasing its trade in the Mediterranean and developed closer relations with Venice the ‘mistress of the seas’, a label that England acquired later.

Venice was the main Italian city that attracted English travellers. The English constructed a mythical picture about it with facts half-known, from the travellers and students, and half-imagined by those who had not gone at all to Italy. James Howell observed that “there is no out-ward appearance at all of poverty, or any decay in this city; but she is still gay flourishing, and fresh, and flowing with all kind of Bravery and Delight” (quoted in Parks G.B, 1968: 341). This praise continued throughout the sixteenth century, and the books of praise of Italy made a new beginning in the 1590’s. For instance, Lewis Lewkenor

translated the standard work on *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (1599), already written and published by Gasparo Contarini in (1543). Lewknor's work was, according to David McPherson, one of the central documents that transmitted the 'Myth of Venice' to England, where it had strong effects more than elsewhere in Europe (1988: 459). Moreover, McPherson argued that it was highly probable that Shakespeare relied on Lewknor's book, as a minor source, when he wrote *Othello* (ibid).

Even non-English travellers who had not seen Italy wrote in praise of Venice through what they heard. The considerable accounts on the 'myth of Venice', a name that corresponded to the idealized picture of the state, supplied the English writers with enough knowledge about the good qualities of Venice. Sir John Harington listed the Venetian virtues in saying "for freedom emulous to ancient Rome, famous for counsell much and much for armes" (Parks, 1968: 344). Shakespeare's contemporary Edmund Spenser considered Venice as the successor of the ancient great empires of Babylon and Rome: "Fayre Venice, flower of the last worlds delight;/And next to them in beauty drawth near, /But far exceeds in policie of right" (Qtd in Parks, 1968: 344).

Not all this praise of Italy, specifically of Venice, however, meant that the English were ignorant of the 'dark side' of Italy. They were aware of the existing faults and deficiencies in the Italian society during the Renaissance. For instance, in *The Schoolmaster* (1570), Roger Ascham noted the Italianate vices of immorality, civic factiousness, and atheism that characterized the Italian Renaissance life (ibid: 342). Despite their admiration of Venice, the English were aware of the decadence of its pleasures, corruption, immorality, political intrigue, greed and treachery. In *Piers Penniless* (1592), Thomas Nash

described Italy as “the academy of man slaughter” and as “the apothecary-shop of poison for all nations” (quoted in Watson George, 1976: 643). This was, in fact, real of the Italian Renaissance society, for Burckhardt himself argued that despite the luminous horizon of the Renaissance, “intrigue, armaments, leagues, corruption and treason make up the outward history of Italy” during the Renaissance period ( 1990: 74). This political chaos was akin to the English political environment of the sixteenth century. For England also saw widespread and pervasive conflicts over the accession to the throne.

Because of the prevailing corruption and moral decadence in Italy, the English religious men continuously warned about the English youth who came back from Italy contaminated by the new behaviours too different from the Protestant religious teachings.

### **Shakespeare and the Italian Renaissance**

During the 1590's, the decade considered as the full flower of the English Renaissance and growth of Tudor Humanism, Shakespeare was the most prominent of the living Elizabethan dramatists (Ford Boris, 1982: 68). As it was the case with his contemporaries, he had a continuous grasp of the deeper interests of the sixteenth century, particularly those of the Elizabethan period during which he lived and produced most of his plays.

The prevailing enthusiasm and growing interest for the Italian Renaissance affected Shakespeare both as an Elizabethan and as a dramatist who thought of dramatizing all the existing assumptions and ideas partly deriving from Italy. His knowledge and interest in Italy may be understood in his accurate depiction of Italian places and beliefs in his plays, and mainly in those, which he set in Renaissance Venice, the backdrop of the Italian Renaissance.



It is argued from the broad classification of Shakespeare's themes that there are essentially three great interests that stimulated his imagination. The first was the Renaissance culture of Western Europe. The second was England with its monarchy and nobility and the third was the history and legends of Greece and Rome (Highet Gilbert, 1957: 194-195). Though, according to the available historical sources, he did not travel to any country, he could construct an accurate picture of the Italian Renaissance society from the other travellers' tales. By the time of Shakespeare, Italian culture and literature permeated all of Elizabethan literature and drama. There were a lot of sources-both written and unwritten- that any Elizabethan could use to find everything about Italy. For instance, a great number of Shakespeare's social class including members of his own acting company Chamberlain's Men visited Italy.

Evidently, Shakespeare as a man of his age was not immune from the changes that were taking place in England. It is argued that the age, which produced Shakespeare, was an era of restlessness and continuous wave of change (Holzknecht, 1950: 1). He witnessed the rising tide of Humanism during the Elizabethan era and acquired a deep understanding of its philosophical foundations. At the time when he was writing his plays, English society was going through an important phase. For both the Renaissance and Reformation brought innovations on social platform, implying changes in the English way of life. Amidst the developing English society, Shakespeare's occupation with the life of man increased more than ever.

Following all what has been said in this chapter, we have come to conclude that the Italian Renaissance that started very early affected considerably the English Renaissance that started in the sixteenth century. In

Italy, the first seeds for the coming of a new age were planted with the return to the teachings of the pagan antiquity with its ideals of human life. From those ideals, the Renaissance thinkers constructed a solid humanist philosophy that gave the sole importance to man as an individual characterized by his subjective side and dignified apart from any condition of birth or origin. It started an epoch that put intense scrutiny on the worldly life of men with their changing mood, passions and circumstances. Nonetheless, when the study of man's nature transcended the individual to deal with whole peoples, the differences among peoples started to have considerable effects in shaping attitudes towards other races.

It is so important to note that all those different ideals that the Italian Renaissance thinkers had transplanted from the remote antiquity found a way to England during the Tudor reign mainly during the Elizabethan period that coincided with the flowering time of the English Renaissance. The main currents of the Italian Renaissance, as individualism and humanism, became gradually an integral part in the English life and found expression in the English Renaissance literature. Shakespeare as an Elizabethan English dramatist absorbed a lot from the Renaissance ideals that came from Italy and represented them in his plays.

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## **The Renaissance Woman/man in Shakespeare's**

### ***The Merchant of Venice and Othello***

In this chapter, we shall try to study Shakespeare's portrayal of the Renaissance woman/man in his two Venetian plays *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and *Othello* (1603). Our aim is to demonstrate how Shakespeare reflected the real essence of the man and woman of the Renaissance period as being as ambivalent as the transitional age in which they lived. We will try to show how those men and women stood in a state of 'inbetweeness'. Of course, this may be explained through the Italian/ Venetian characters in the plays under study. The characters represent the men and women of the Renaissance who have gained awareness of their identities as independent individuals. The woman/man of the Renaissance behaved in a way that would serve her/his newly acquired identity as a separate subject, starting to develop an autonomous thinking in order to realize her/his personal will, independence and self-interest. Yet, the man/woman who experienced this transformation could not get rid of the past. In other words, the traditional ways envisaged in social and communal conventions were still exercising their impact on the 'individual'. As a result, the latter is kept wavering between two cultures each dictating its own precepts and foundations.

In order to explain the ambivalent mood of the Renaissance women and men, we shall proceed through an examination of the setting 'Renaissance Venice' that represents an important step to understand the position as well as the behaviour of the characters. Then, we will deal with the analysis of the major characters in the two plays. Through the characters, we will explain the main important themes.

## **The Renaissance Woman/ Man and the conflict of two cultures**

In the *Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, Shakespeare presents a category of women and men who stand for the typical individuals of the Renaissance. In both plays, the characters seem to represent the typical woman/man of the Renaissance who wishes to achieve her/his autonomous being and realize her/his personal identity. Throughout the development of the events of the plays, the actions, behaviours, or at least, the ways of thinking of the main figures supply the reader with an understanding of a stronger sense of individuality, a quality that the traditional type of women and men lacked. By a careful examination of their position towards conventional codes, their relations with their surroundings, and their individual aspirations, one can understand their consciousness about their existence as 'separate entities' or individuals who can stand by themselves and for themselves apart from any authoritative forces or established social conventions. They seem well aware of the meaning of subjectivity and what means to be 'a self'. This notion of 'self' or subjectivity, according to Baldwin Geoff, is analogous to individualism, the notion that appeared during the Renaissance (2001: 343). As a matter of fact, the very sense of the word 'individualism' entails a vision of both men and women as separate entities from the traditional collective life of family, community, and race.

Nevertheless, in spite of the displayed subjectivity, with its implied eagerness for freedom, independence and self-assertiveness of the characters, both women and men, in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, we cannot ignore their adherence, at the same time, to convention or tradition. They seem unable to break totally from conventions. This ambivalence in the character of either women or men derives from the transitional mood of the Renaissance period.

Since the emergence of the Renaissance individual coincided with “the decisive transitional moment” (John J. Joughin 2004: 22), the individual found himself amidst conflicting cultures of the old and the new. On the one hand, he possessed a tradition that instructed him to live in conformity, to imitate and to obey. On the other hand, he suddenly discovered a new opposing culture that opened his eyes to a sense of particularity, which necessitated the rejection of the traditional principles. Indeed, the Renaissance culture exemplifies a historical fracture from the culture of the medieval period. Patricia Parker explains that “the European Renaissance humanists were right to perceive a significant cultural rift between their era and the one that preceded it” (Quoted in Aram Veaser, 1989: 18).

### **The setting:**

The plays under study *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* are set in Renaissance Venice, the Italian multicultural and cosmopolitan state. The setting is of a great importance for our analysis as it represents the innate environment for the Renaissance. It indicates the culture that shapes and influences largely the actions of the characters as well as their relationships.

‘Venice’ where Shakespeare sets his plays, is the state known in England for its paradoxical quality envisaged in its two opposed realities; it is luminous and virtuous yet dark and corrupted. It stands at the same time for the ‘idealized myth’ and the exaggerated ‘dark’ reality (Nostbakken Faith, 2000: 32-34). Nonetheless, Venice is, Above all considerations, the birthplace of the Renaissance. Venice is the state where tradition rooted deeply in the life of its citizens, but at the same time the place that inaugurated the spirit that challenged the traditional patterns for the sake of the new ways.



In *The merchant of Venice*, the characters and actions move from the crowded city of Venice to the calm space of Belmont. Venice is conceived in the play as a public location, where people are involved in commercial exchange, and where they rely on public justice. By contrast, Belmont is a calm private place where everything moves in a quite usual way. Sigurd Burckhardt describes the two locations Venice and Belmont, respectively, as “the realm of law and the realm of love, the public sphere and the private sphere’ (Qtd in Richard Horwich, 1977: 191). While Venice is preoccupied with setting order and maintaining justice, the romantic Belmont is more interested in providing a secure environment for the lovers (ibid).

Likewise, in *Othello* the events of the play shift from the centre ‘Venice’ to the remote island of Cyprus. The latter itself, according to Alvin Kernan, is what we may call a ‘liminal space’ or a space ‘inbetween’, on the threshold (Platt Peter.G, 2001: 138). The two locations, Cyprus and Venice, reveal two contrasting worlds. kernan explains “Out at the far edge are the Turks, barbarism, disorder, and amoral distractive powers; closer and more familiar is Venice, *The City*, order, law and reason” (Qtd in Peter G. Platt, 2001: 138). Like in *The Merchant of Venice*, the movement is not to Venice but from Venice to another place. The movement of the play is from Venice to Cyprus, “from collective life to the life of the solitary individual” (ibid).

As we notice in the two plays, Shakespeare does not represent Venice as a community where everything is set in order, and everybody shares the communal beliefs. The reality of Venice of the Renaissance is well displayed in Venice of both *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. Shakespeare portrays the ‘doublness’ in the nature of Venice through the complex mood of the characters. The latter

represent the reality of the Venetian life that is ambivalent in many ways. It is virtues as much as it is vicious, it is an organized society where disorder and conflicts are inevitable, and it is at once traditional and modern. In fact, Venice was in a perpetual state of alteration that, according to Contarini's account, "every day altering and changing according to the tides of the sea" (Qtd in Platt, 2001: 131). This is true on a literal level, for the Venetian state was undergoing a gradual change in the way of life that came as a result of the Renaissance. Therefore, Shakespeare's account of Venice in the two plays is but a displayed picture about the Venetian Renaissance society. Through our reading of the plays, we can say that Shakespeare's Venice is an unstable place as it is usually recognized.

### **Characters and Themes:**

#### **Portia:**

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia anticipates from her first appearance onstage her dilemma. She seems struggling to balance her needs as an individual against the demands of the traditional patriarchal society in which she lives. She is aware of herself as an autonomous being and wants to realize her personal needs. Portia's awareness about her subjectivity may be understood in her great desire to be free and responsible for her own choice of a husband. In the first scene in which she appears, she inquires in a mourning-like and regretful tone about her denied right as an 'individual' to make the decision herself. This is apparent to the reader in her conversation with her waiting woman Nerrisa in Act I scene two:

O me, the word choose, I may neither choose whom I would,  
nor refuse whom I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter  
curb'd by the will of a dead father: is it not hard Nerrisa, that  
I can not choose one, nor refuse none? (I. II, 29)

This question reveals Portia's unhappy state in being subordinate to the will of someone else. In these lines, Portia appears like an individual who refuses others' intervention. She wants to experience her individuality through exercising her free will. In this implicit revolt against tradition, she is, in the words of Susan Oldrieve, like "a potential rebel" (1993: 91). If she wishes to realize her individuality, Portia must manifest her rejection of the established traditions that endowed the father with the necessary authority to control the life of his daughter. This relationship of father and daughter is, according to Juliet Dusinberre, capitalist in the Elizabethan period (1975: 123). By the norms of society, Portia has neither choice nor voice to express her individual aspirations; she should act according to the will of the father who symbolizes tradition and authority.

What is particular, however, with Portia's kind of individuality is the lack of determination. In other words, when we examine Portia's speech we feel her wish as well as her earnest need to be independent and free, we notice her awareness about the right she possesses as an individual to be responsible for her own decisions. However, in reality she is still reluctant to act as her sense of subjectivity entreats her to do. She seems in the stage of preparing for the acquisition of a truly independent status.

As the events of the play develop, Portia finds an appropriate occasion to prove her importance as an individual. Through her intervention to solve the problem between Shylock and Antonio, in Venice, she proves her worth as an individual; she reveals her over-mindedness, her courage and mainly the efficacy of her reason. This is demonstrated in her careful manipulation of the Shylock's bond and suit in the court. Her quick observation of the weaknesses

in the bond permeated her to reverse the course of things and save Antonio from Shylock's barbarity. In such terms, Portia proves the strength of her character to the extent that she exceeds men in intelligence and courage.

However, as we have already hinted, Portia is still caught in the maze of convention. She is unable to get rid of the ties that threaten her subjectivity. The will of her dead father represents social obligations and patriarchal authority over individual freedom. It is no wonder then that Portia finds herself in a state of a moral conflict between her desire for independence and a forced submission. In remaining, at last, obedient to her father, she expresses a form of identification with the common or conventional order. Carol Leventen refers briefly to Portia's submission to what she termed "cultural imperatives" (1991: 70). To explain, the latter are related to what the traditional society dictated to the individual. The cultural imperatives are the obligations set by the society in order to link and assimilate the individual to the ordinary course of things in a community founded on the collective essence at the expense of personal identity. They are the laws that enforce and maintain the social authority. Leventen argues that those 'cultural imperatives' are internalized by Portia so that she can accept easily to surrender to the norms (ibid). Indeed, Portia seems expressing more willingness to adhere than to reject or, at least, to ignore her father's will. The dilemma that takes hold on Portia's mind, in a kind of internal conflict between individual will and submission to the will of another, is best understood in Act Three, scene Two, while addressing her favourable suitor Bassanio:

I pray you tarry, pause a day or two  
Before you hazard, for in choosing wrong  
I loose your company; therefore forbear a while,  
There's something tells me (but it is not love)

I would not loose you, and you know yourself,  
Hate counsels not in such a quality;  
But lest you should not understand me well,  
And yet a maiden hath no tongue, but thought,  
I would detain you here some month or two  
Before you venture for me. I could teach you  
How to choose right, but then I am forsworn,  
So will I never be, so may you miss me,  
But if you do, you'll make me wish a sin  
That I had been forsworn: Beshrew your eyes,  
They have o'er-look'd me and divided me,  
One half of me is yours, the other half yours,  
Mine own I would say: but if mine then yours,  
And so all yours; O these naughty times  
Puts bars between the owners and their rights,  
And so though yours, not yours (prove it so) (III. ii, 65)

The stance in which Portia talks reveals, though implicitly, her position between the desire to realize her wish through helping Bassanio on the one hand, and following the provisions of the will on the other. She is torn between what she wants to do and what she can do. To be precise, Portia wants to choose Bassanio as a husband and she is aware of her own right to do so, but she is unable to transgress the imposed conditions of her “naughty times”. The latter prevent her to act as she really hopes to do. The social obligations, at last, seem much stronger than the individual will. Social traditions confine Portia’s subjectivity and prevents her from acting independently. Portia’s confinement, in fact, is reflected in the caskets. In other terms, Portia is imprisoned by the patriarchal social order just as her image is imprisoned in one of the caskets. We notice through our reading, that Portia often tells her suitors to find her hidden picture.

Portia’s position in the trial scene displays her conformity to the social norms. She is complicit with the other Venetians in the court as she engages in a decisive defence of Antonio against the undesirable Jew, Shylock. Indeed, she acts as an executioner of the established social law against the aliens. Portia declares:

Tarry Jew,  
The Law hath yet another hold on you.  
It is enacted in the Laws of Venice,  
If it be prov'd against an Alien,  
That by direct or indirect attempts  
He seek the life of any Citizen,  
The party'against the which he doth contrive,  
Shall seize one half his goods, the other half  
Comes to the privy coffer of the State,  
And the offender's life lies in the mercy  
Of the Duke only, 'against all other voice (IV, I, 93-94).

In this context, Portia endorses the social beliefs that reject and marginalize the foreigners without questioning their racist and inhumane stance. Paradoxically, though she experienced subjection and questioned the right of society in restricting individual will, she obliges Shylock to surrender to the will of the Venetian society. In such terms, Portia chooses to defend popular opinion rather than to support the individual.

Portia displays, once again, a paradoxical thinking in accepting to adhere to the institution of marriage. In other words, Portia who seems at the beginning valuing individual will and independence accepts to surrender to the authority of a husband. What is strange is that she wants to be free from convention conceived in the will of the father, but later on abandons her independence for the sake of the same convention that is the institution of marriage of the patriarchal society. Portia, in marrying Bassanio, submits both her person and possessions to her husband. She declares her complete devotion to Bassanio just after his choice of the right casket:

Happiest of all, is that her (Portia's) gentle spirit  
Commits itself to yours to be directed,  
As from her Lord, her Governor, her King.  
Myself and what is mine, to you and yours  
Is now converted. But now I was the Lord  
Of this fair mention, master of my servants,  
Queen o'er myself: and even now, but now,  
This house, these servants, and this same myself  
Are yours, my Lord, I give them with this ring, (III. ii, 70)

Therefore, one can certainly argue that Portia consciously throws herself into dependence. After being ‘the queen over herself’, ‘the master’ and the ‘super ego’, she reduces herself to a mere dependent ‘self’. She becomes the servant and the subject of the ‘Lord’ who can direct not only her actions but also her existence. In such circumstances, Portia adheres to the dominant patriarchal ideology that asserted “the analogy between the husband’s role in the family and that of God in the universe” (Rumeysa Cavus, 2003: 168). Under the powerful influence of this traditional belief, Portia loses her autonomy. In such conditions, what individuality remains for Portia, and what kind of freedom she may possess? As such, we cannot consider Portia as an individual who resists integration, but rather we can regard her as a woman who vehicles the norms of her society. We know that around the time of the Renaissance, either in England or in the Venetian society, the woman once married moves from the authority of the father to that of the husband. This is the rule that Portia follows. She conforms to the Christian doctrine that imposed total obedience to the father as well as to the husband. This is clearly stated in the fifth commandment in which the father’s and the husband’s authority is explained, “Wives submit yourselves to your husbands as into the Lord...children obey your parents as to the Lord...” (Qtd in Gallagher Dymphna, 1989: 17). These traditional beliefs still exercise a strong effect on Portia’s mind, and prevent her from taking an effective action. This is to mean to ignore the will of her dead father and act according to her subjective will.

If we relate Portia’s position and behaviour to the prevailing conditions of the Renaissance society, her hesitation will be considered as a normal response vis-à-vis the creed for individualism on the one hand, and the persisting

traditional collective life on the other. It is so clear that we cannot classify her as an individual who emerged abruptly in an instant out of a very remote established tradition, as Burckhardt's Italian individual. Portia, however, may be classified as a typical individual who lives the gradual change from the collective life of the community with its obligations towards individual freedom. This process entails coexistence between the traditional norms and the newly acquired modern values.

### **Jessica:**

Portia's counterpart in *The Merchant of Venice* is the Jewess Jessica. The latter stands for a truly rebellious daughter who has grown unhappy with the bounds of the father/daughter relationship. In other words, Jessica – unlike Portia- is represented by Shakespeare as an unfaithful girl who runs away to realize her complete independence from her father Shylock. We may classify her as an autonomous individual who seeks to live a separate and different life from her customs and her origin as a Jewess. As a free and conscious individual, Jessica chooses to break the restraints imposed on her by her Jewish identity. She affirms her subjectivity by breaking the ties with her community and choosing her own path without any consideration for her father's consent. In fact, her secret elopement with the Christian Lorenzo is highly significant. It demonstrates Jessica's desire for independence and freedom on the one hand, and her quest for individual self-interest on the other. Because, by marrying a Christian, Jessica satisfies her inner emotions and gains redemption. Moreover, the act of leaving her father's house is an explicit rejection of all that may bind her as an individual to the communal beliefs. In abandoning her father, she breaks away from her past and takes a new identity by converting to



Christianity. According to H.B Charlton, Jessica's leaving home is like a desecration of all what Shylock holds sacred (1966: 155-158).

Therefore, Jessica, though a minor figure in the play, attracts our attention as an unconventional daughter, a rebellious youth who seeks freedom outside the house of the blocking figure of Shylock. The latter, as we perceive him through Jessica's speech, may be compared to the "miserly fathers in Elizabethan and classical comedies, who are only fit to be the dupes of their children" (Paul Gaudet, 1986: 278). Actually, though Jessica rejects the authority, what she refuses more in Shylock is his Jewish identity. Jessica affirms her difference from her father and even from her Jewishness:

A lack, what heinous sin is it in me  
To be ashamed to be my father's child,  
But though I am a daughter to his blood,  
I am not to his manners. (II, iii, 47)

In these lines, Jessica expresses her subjectivity in a way that reaffirms the Renaissance humanist belief that the human being should not be identified by his birth but instead by particular individual traits. To explain more, Jessica refuses to be identified by the traits of her Jewish identity and negates any probable resemblance to her father in terms of behaviour. She substitutes the common identity with an individual identity that may identify her according to what characterizes her person not her race or ethnic group. The particularity of the individual identity that Jessica assumes is, powerfully, enforced by the way in which some characters differentiate her from what is common to the Jews. For instance, Lorenzo refers to her good nature as apposed to the villainous nature of Shylock. Lorenzo remarks, "If e'er the Jew her father come to heaven/ it will be for his gentle daughter's sake." (II. vi, 48). Gratiano remarks that she is "a gentle and no Jew" (II, vi, 53). Indeed, it had been a common conviction

before and during the Renaissance that the Jews were devilish, and were disassociated from any good quality. The 'gentle' or 'gentile' was thought to be as exclusively a quality of those races or nations that were not Jewish. For this reason, the characters often stress the opposition between Jew and gentle. By considering Jessica as a gentle, they distance her from her origin. Since she is gentle, automatically, she is not a 'Jew'. The virtuous qualities that she possesses make Salarino believe that "there is more difference between thy (shylock's) flesh and hers (Jessica's), than between jet and ivory, more between [their] bloods, than there is between red wine and rhenish" (III. ii, 63). Jessica herself believes that she is no longer a descendent from the Jewish lineage. She distances herself from her collective identity by referring to her father's countrymen as specifically his not hers "I have heard him swear/ To Tubal and to Chus, his countrymen" (III. ii, 74). Her speech explains her changing of country along with religion.

By examining the derogatory labels by which Shylock is referred to in the play, it seems as if he belongs to an extremely different ethnic group from that of Jessica. Jessica is viewed more as an individual following her own good qualities. Though not yet totally assimilated to the Christian world, the characters tend to differentiate her from her original identity. She is, in fact, described with the ideal qualities that the most distinguished Venetian women possess. If we take Portia and Desdemona, in *Othello*, as examples of these women, then we notice how they are referred to in the same manner as Jessica. The latter, like both Portia and Desdemona, is said to be fair, gentle, true and of good nature. Despite being the daughter of a Jew, Jessica in terms of behaviour

and virtue is represented as an equal to the Venetian women. She is the individual who breaks away from what is common to his origin.

Jessica's sense of subjectivity, however, is to be frustrated later in the play. Jessica seems willing to adhere to tradition once again within the Christian world. She abandons her father and all that ties her to the communal values, just to be afterwards integrated into another world. She becomes "part of the familial, social and divine harmonies that bond people together in a Christian society" (Qtd in Paul Gaudet, 1986: 278). In such terms, she is totally dependent on the Christian community. She loses her sense of individuality, and becomes once again just a member of a body; she is obliged to behave in accordance to the collective will of 'the Christian order'. Jessica seems unable to preserve her sense of individuality because of the power of the dominant ideology that conditions her acceptance by conversion. For, in order to be accepted among the Christians, she has to submit to their religion.

Jessica is in a state of opposition between independence and dependence. To explain, Jessica is independent from the community that she has already rejected for the sake of her individual will, but she becomes quite dependent on the community to which she chooses to belong. She asserts her subjectivity within her original community, and becomes completely submissive as she conforms to the Christian world. Paradoxically, Jessica longs for freedom and salvation through subordination in Christian marriage. After reacting against patriarchal authority, Jessica seems contradicting herself by her commitment to it within Christian matrimony. She seems, in fact, as someone who substitutes one sort of bondage by another. In her declaration "Fare well, and if my fortune be not crost, / I have a father, you a daughter lost" (II. v, 51), Jessica, we

understand, takes a surrogate father who is the Christian Lorenzo. She depends on the latter, as she has already been dependent on Shylock. Because, Lorenzo is in Jessica's mind the protector and the saviour from damnation. He is the person who will ensure her access to the Christian world and provide her with the Christian identity just in the same way as Shylock has given her Jewish identity. As such, Jessica is completely dependent, her entire destiny is linked to Lorenzo's will; she is in a great need for him "O, Lorenzo,/If you keep promise I shall end this strife/Become a Christian and your loving wife" (I. iii, 47). Her integration to the Christian community is conditioned by Lorenzo's position. Therefore, her individual will depends on the will of Lorenzo "who knows but you Lorenzo , whether I am yours" (II. vi, 53), and that of the Christian community in general. In such state, though, as a rich woman, she possesses the necessary means to realize her independence, Jessica cannot be autonomous. She is the individual who must conform and adhere to the traditions of the Christian patriarchy in order to be saved. It is her belief on the prevailing traditional view about the damnation of the Jews that keeps her in subordination. When Launcelot refers to her being damned both by father and mother, Jessica answers "I shall be sav'd by my husband, he hath made me a Christian" (III, v, 80).

The worst thing is that among the society of the Christians she is not totally integrated. In fact, she has sacrificed her Jewish father, her traditions and all her past only to meet constant reminders of her Jewish identity (Paul Gaudet, 1986: 286). We can argue, following this that in becoming Christian, Jessica, instead of taking a new identity, unites two opposing identities. For, though she rejects her Jewish identity, she remains the daughter to "Shylock's

blood”, the reality that she can never suppress. In this way, we can argue that Jessica is at the same time the Jew’s daughter and the Christian. Even though Jessica makes her choice to be a Christian through conversion, she can never be ‘a real Christian’. She is still regarded as a new comer to the Christian society, and thus unable to be completely assimilated.

The Christian characters in the play often refer to her innate identity as a Jewess. She is identified in quite contrasting views. On the one hand, she is a virtuous individual who chooses the ‘true faith’, on the other, though innocent, she descended from the deprived race. According to Launcelot, Jessica is “the most beautiful pagan” and “the most sweet Jew” (I. iii, 47). Lorenzo, who constantly refers to Jessica’s distinguished nobility, seems unable to forget her origin for “she is issue to a faithless Jew” (II. iv, 49). Though the Venetians esteemed her goodness and will to conversion, they cannot consider her as one of them. Jessica’s case proves Jerome Friedman’s belief that “the more ardently Jews sought acceptance as Christians, the more ardently Christians identified them as Jews” (Qtd in Janet Adelman, 2003: 11). According to Friedman, the Christians stress the difference of the Jew after conversion in order “to separate New Christians from Old Christians” (Ibid). Therefore, Jessica cannot escape her original identity as she wishes to do. Paraphrasing the idea of Normand Lawrence, Jessica partakes of the same physical substance as Shylock, and so shares the same racial identity (Mary. J Metzger, 1998: 58). This is what Shylock stresses, “I say my daughter is my flesh and blood” (III. i, 63).

Jessica, in her final speech in the play, seems as a disillusioned individual. She feels that, despite all her efforts to be a Christian, she is still a Jew. She avows, “I am never merry when I hear sweet music” (V. i, 100). This

sentence echoes her statement at the beginning “our house is hell” (II. iii, 46). As a Jew in Shylock’s house, Jessica was unhappy, the reason for which she escaped, and in Belmont ‘the paradise’ that she dreamed of, she still feels sad. Her sadness stems, perhaps, from her inner feeling that though she is living among the Christian, she cannot forget that she is the daughter of a Jew.

Therefore, Jessica’s case provides another example about the ambivalence of the woman/man of the Renaissance. Though she proves her individuality by breaking away from the Jewish community, she has to adhere to the Christian one. She affirms her individual will but at the same time, she surrenders to the will of the Christian order. Above all, Jessica is unable to transgress the traditional views about race. For despite the goodness of her character as an individual, she is still regarded as a member of a race.

### **Desdemona:**

In *Othello*, Desdemona is the main woman character who represents the Renaissance woman. She is, in the way her father refers to her, a quite, soft and gentle girl “a maid, so tender, fair, and happy” (I. ii, 32). However, at the same time, her decision and action at the beginning of the play makes her seem courageous, and self-assertive. For this reason, we conceive her as a ‘modern’ Venetian woman. We can classify her, borrowing the words of Jacob Burckhardt, as a figure who belongs to the “first born among the sons of modern Europe” (1990: 98). Desdemona conforms to this statement in the sense that she is unconventional and non-conformist modern individual. She displays her sense of modern subjectivity through following her individual emotions and wishes, uncaring for the popular opinion.

Desdemona is presented at the very beginning of the play as an unconventional daughter who leaves the home of her father and marries without his consent. Rodrigo, while informing Brabantio about the flight of his daughter, introduces Desdemona as a rebel in the first scene:

Your daughter (if you have not given her leave)  
I say again, hath made **a gross revolt**,  
Tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes  
In an extravagant, and wheeling stranger  
(Our emphasis I.i, 27)

The revolt to which Rodrigo refers is an explicit proof of Desdemona's desire to get her personal freedom. The revolt is a sign of manifested unhappiness under oppression. It is an act that permeates Desdemona to affirm her personality and exercise her will. Desdemona violates the norms of patriarchal conventions and follows her individual emotions. In so doing, she seems overvaluing her self-interest. She affirms her subjective side in breaking away from the established social laws. Her act resembles that of Jessica in the *Merchant of Venice* while she stands as a dramatic counterpart for the obedient daughter Portia. Desdemona asserts herself overtly without any fear or reluctance when she acknowledges her love for the person whom her father considers 'unsuitable'. She avows her personal decision to follow her own wish despite any displeasing reaction from her society. In this way, we cannot deny the powerful individuality of Desdemona. She confronts the entire community with its sacred codes and firmly established order of behaviour:

My noble father,  
I do perceive here a divided duty,  
To you I am bound for life, and education:  
My life and education both do learn me,  
How to respect you. You are the Lord of duty,  
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;  
And so much duty, as my mother show'd  
To you, preferring you before her father

So much I challenge, that I may profess  
Due to the Moor my Lord. (I,iii, 39)

Desdemona has defended her right to marry according to her own choice; she has made an autonomous decision, and married the 'Moor'. By examining her action and her speech, one can, undoubtedly, affirm that Desdemona has gone away from those traditional stereotypes of an obedient, silent and submissive daughter who cannot challenge the authority of the father. She has rejected the conventional way of marriage that was common around the time of the Renaissance. To be precise, instead of letting her father arrange for her marriage by choosing the suitable husband for her, as tradition entreated him to do, Desdemona asserted herself through taking the initiative of marrying according to her own will. Marriage in England around the sixteenth century, mainly among the property owning classes, was a collective decision of family and kin, not an individual one (Lawrence Stone, 1990: 70). Therefore, Desdemona does not only challenge her father but also the entire culture of the community around her. As such, she may stand for the modern Italian individual of whom Burckhardt said:

In face of all objective facts, of laws and restraints of whatever kind, he retains the feeling of his own sovereignty, and in each single instance forms his decision independently..." (1990: 279).

Although freedom of forming independent judgement for women was alien in Renaissance England, Shakespeare grants Desdemona an opportunity to "develop an independent consciousness of her own" (Juliet Dusinberre, 1975: 91). She asserts herself as an independent individual against the established patriarchal order of her society.



Farther, in her love for Othello the Moor, Desdemona reaffirms her greed for what is 'unconventional', 'uncommon' and 'unordinary'. She acknowledges that what attract her attention to Othello are his exotic stories that for her "were passing strange/wondrous pitiful" (I. iii, 39). Allan. D Bloom maintains that the stories of Othello offered Desdemona what she liked, "something beyond the conventional" (1960:152). Our understanding of Desdemona's preference of the 'unconventional' is more a sort of flight from what is common in the Venetian society towards anything that exhibits difference. This may be interpreted as an abandonment of the collective life for the sake of individual essence. This abandonment allows Desdemona to move towards her individual realm. She seeks for freedom that she is deprived of within the social boundaries.

Desdemona's subjective stance at the beginning of the play, however, is not developed throughout the play. She makes the first step towards self-realization, yet she stops her quest later on in the play. In other words, Desdemona appears in the subsequent scenes, not as we expect her to be. Once reading the beginning of the play, we feel Desdemona anticipating the achievement of a truly autonomous existence, but her life with Othello proves her too different from our expectations. As soon as Desdemona affirms her independent personality through her autonomous choice and decision, she transfers her submission to her husband. Paradoxically, Desdemona, who has asserted her individuality and unconventionality, turns to be conventional. On the one hand, she is in favour of subjectivity against convention; on the other hand, she seems to be traditional:

And so much duty, as my mother show'd  
To you, preferring you before her father,  
So much I challenge, that I may profess  
Due to the Moor my Lord (I. iii, 39).

In accepting the same role as her 'mother', showing obedience to her husband, Desdemona does nothing, but adhere to the conventional norms that deny individuality. In fact, the comparison to her mother foreshadows her submission, obedience and dependence on Othello throughout all the scenes of the play. Desdemona in her marital life seems very subservient to her 'Lord' Othello. Thus, by relegating her state to that of a mere servant for another person, she becomes dependent. She behaves blindly and unreasonably according to Othello's will. Lodovico, for instance, describes her as a "truly obedient lady" (VI.v, 105) and her speech reveals more obedience in such expressions as "it was his (Othello's) bidding.../we must not displease him" (IV.iii, 116). As such, she under-values her existence as an autonomous self. So, it becomes clear that Desdemona who wanted independence and freedom in marrying becomes herself dependent and loses her sense of individuality within the traditional institution of marriage. According to Geoff Baldwin, it is only when a self is unaffected by outside events or opinions that self could be regarded as free (2001: 36). In these terms, Desdemona may be considered as a free and independent self when she chooses to marry Othello despite of the popular opinion. Yet, once she becomes totally submissive in marriage, she loses her freedom. She loses her will as a free self when she let her life ruled by her emotions for Othello.

Desdemona's subjectivity as well as that of Portia and Jessica may be regarded as a subjectivity coded as disconnected since, as we have already pointed out, they do not continue their struggle to realize the required individuality. Though they display some traits of self-consciousness and desire for individuality, they do not maintain their views. Instead, they strive to free themselves from domination but later on, they accept other sorts of domination

and negate their subjectivity. Though they appear to have an inner life of reflection, emotion and choice, they are at the same time subjected to roles and relationships. In such terms, we cannot speak of a truly autonomous subjectivity. To enforce and clarify this idea, we can refer to Greenblatt who has pointed in his study of the Renaissance self-fashioning to the absence of the so-called autonomy. The reason is that the individual is constrained by the social and ideological system in force (1980: 256). Greenblatt believes that “if there remained traces of free choice, the choice was among possibilities whose range was strictly delineated by the social and ideological system in force” (ibid). In this case, it is the prevailing collective authority envisaged in the patriarchal system, in the Renaissance society, that prevents women from realizing their individual essence. Shakespeare places them in a moral and social context with obligations to others, and shows them as willingly submitting to those obligations. Therefore, we can maintain that they seem both modern and traditional. On the one hand, they stand for subjectivity, independence, and freedom and they seem able to exercise volition. On the other hand, however, they adhere to social conventions, and tradition. In fact, women, as represented by Shakespeare, live between two opposing states: that of ‘subjectivity’ and that of ‘subjectification’. To explain, Louis Montrose claims that individuals possess subjectivity when “they stand as agents of self-consciousness and initiators of actions” (1989: 21). Nevertheless, at the same time, when “positioning and constraining [individuals] within -subjecting them to- social networks and cultural codes that exceed their control they lose subjectivity and become in a state of ‘subjectification’” (ibid).

## **Othello: Individuality vs Ethnicity**

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, the hero, like the other characters, exhibits a very complicated and ambivalent character. However, unlike the Venetian characters, he is distinguished by his racial traits 'the black Moor'. The characters perceive him in quite ambivalent and contrasting views. As an individual, Othello is a self-conscious man, an experienced warrior, and a noble man. Yet, he is also the 'Moor', the 'other' and the different alienated figure. He is at the same time the best of men and the worst, the equal and the inferior, the seemingly independent self and the dependent man, the self-confident ego and the doubtful sceptical mind.

Othello, over all considerations, is the Moor but he is also the 'Moor of Venice'. So, though he is a foreigner, he is attributed to Venice. He is "neither an alienated nor an assimilated subject, but a figure defined by two worlds" (Bartels, 1997: 61). He is originally a Moor from the exotic eastern lands of Africa, and at the same time, he is the valiant Venetian hero. He is defined by both his ethnicity and his profession. Therefore, it is likely to place Othello within the two worlds that fashion him rather than by referring to his origin. In the words of Emily Bartels, Othello is the possessor of a dual, rather than a divided identity (ibid). His duality may be interpreted as self-contradiction or more precisely as ambivalence. As Camille Wells Slight argues, Othello is "not merely a Moor in Venice but the Moor of Venice" (1997: 384). This is to mean that he is both the racial 'other' in the Venetian society and at the same time the Venetian citizen.

On the one hand, Othello is defined according to his subjective traits and supplied with an individual identity gained thanks to his individual skills. On

the other hand, he is not exclusively viewed within the limits of individuality or particularity but rather according to his ethnicity. The last view is the traditional sight that confines the individual inside the communal or racial boundaries of the pre-Renaissance world.

### **Othello and the Signs of Renaissance Individuality:**

#### **Individual skill, Personal merit, and Self-confidence**

In the world of Venice, Othello is well known as a solid warrior, a defender of the state against its enemies, namely the Turks or Ottomites. He is a celebrity and “a condottiere who fights by contract for the Venetian republic” (Vaughan Virginia Mason, 1996: 35). Throughout our reading of the play it appears that every body, from the citizen to the Duke, is aware about Othello’s worth as a guardian of the Venetian state. The Venetians are in a great need for his services. He is the victorious leader who participates in all the Venetian wars and conquests in different lands “at Rhodes, at Cyprus and on other grounds, Christian’d and heathen” (I, i. 24).

Besides his military skills, Othello is renowned for the goodness of his character. He is admired for his personal noble qualities: honesty, devotion and loyalty to the Venetian state. He possesses the best qualities that the ideal Venetian gentleman may display. He is fair, just, dutiful, confident, and valiant. The Duke of Venice acknowledges Othello’s virtuous nature while addressing Desdemona’s father Brabantio “And noble Signior, /If virtue no delighted beauty lack, /Your son-in-law is far more fair than black” (I. iii, 43). In such terms, Othello’s racial trait of blackness is outweighed by the eminent qualities of his character. Since Othello is an individual whose “deepest values

are fully consonant with those of Venice's other inhabitants" (Slights, 1997: 384), he is likely to be accepted despite his racial difference.

It is true that Othello is not a Venetian citizen by origin and he is not linked to any kinship in the Venetian state, at least before his marriage with Desdemona, that may legitimate his position. Nonetheless, he could secure his being despite the constraints imposed on him because of his racial difference. Though, he is a foreigner, he acquires a good reputation, and reaches a powerful position as a renowned general just for one thing that is his individual skill in war. As such, Othello can be considered as a typical figure of the Renaissance individual who gains position and power through his 'individual talent' at the expense of birth and origin. He knew how to ascend the Venetian hierarchy and reach nobility thanks to his 'personal merit'. Othello could not have reached his favourable position if the origin or questions of legitimacy of birth were considered obligatory. However, since such old measures became unnecessary or, at least, secondary in the Venetian Renaissance world, Othello could use the alternative, which is no more than 'personal merit' to achieve his advancement. This is no wonder, in fact, if we consider the new criteria or requisites for nobility that emerged during the Renaissance in Italy. The standards that accompanied the humanist and individualist spirit of the time put power and position only on the hands of the person who best deserves them (Burckhardt, 1990: 27). In other terms, what matters in the Venetian society of the Renaissance, is deserving rather than belonging. Even though Othello does not belong to a particular Venetian family, he gains access to power by proving his ability. Othello, thus, reflects the Venetian/Italian individual who strives hard to get what he wants. He may perhaps represent 'the self-made man', in the

sense that he is an individual who builds his status and reputation just by his individual efforts.

Othello is represented in the play as the indispensable valiant warrior to the Venetian state. This is understood in Cassio's speech to Othello "you have been hotly call'd for/ when being not at your lodging to be found,/the senate hath sent about three several quests to search you out" (I.ii, 31). He is the saviour of the state in times of troubles, and the irreplaceable leader for the great missions.

The Duke: the Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus: Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to you. And though we have there a substitute of most allowed sufficiency; yet opinion, a more sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safor voice on you: you must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes, with this stubborn and boist'rous expedition (I. iii, 41).

Though there is already a military commander at Cyprus who is in the words of the Duke "of most allowed sufficiency", Othello remains the man who has no match. Othello has the proper sense of his own merit and is quite aware of his individual importance to the Venetian state. The latter's need for his services supplies him with a strong sense of self-confidence and eagerness for self-assertiveness. He seems so sure of himself that he stands as an equal to the Venetian signor Brabantio "Let him do his spite; /My services, which I have done the signiory/ Shall out-tongue his complaints." (I.iii, 30). Later on, Othello manifests his over subjectivity and trust when he refuses to avoid confrontation with Brabantio "Not I: I must be found. /My parts, my title, and my perfect soul/ Shall manifest me rightly" (ibid). Othello seems glorifying his own qualities, of which he speaks as 'individual possessions'. The latter, as he believes, will

sustain him against any threat. For this reason, he shows a great self-confidence in expressing his willingness to obey Brabantio and proceed to the senate:

What if I do obey?  
How may the duke be there with satisfi'd,  
Whose messengers are here about my side,  
Upon some business of the state bring me to him (I, ii, 32)

According to his speeches, Othello tends to represent himself as completely independent from the community in which he lives. In other words, he seems needless of any one but his own qualifications that give him all what he needs, title, position, and security. Once again, in the crucial scene at the senate, Othello overemphasizes his sense of confidence and certainty in the way in which he responds to the accusations of Brabantio before the Duke. His speech that stands out in great confidence implies a sense of over-trust and shows that he has no doubt concerning his knowledge of Desdemona:

I do beseech you,  
Send for the lady to the Sagittory,  
And let her speak of me before her father:  
If you do find me foul, in her report,  
The trust, the office, I do hold of you,  
Not only take away, but let your sentence  
Even fall upon my life. (I.iii, 37)

Othello, in his speeches, often uses the language of an autonomous self who has a separate essence and life from the others. For instance, in the third scene, when he retells his story by which he attracted Desdemona, he reveals the particularity of his identity through his own course of life. It is in this scene, more than elsewhere, that we can notice the awareness of Othello about his subjectivity. James L. Calderwood argues, "As storyteller in the senate, Othello aggrandizes himself as subject" (1987: 294). Othello seems like a biographer who distinguishes himself as an autonomous individual from other men through



showing the events that have shaped his life as well as the aspects that characterize his own character.

Nevertheless, despite his over trust that we observe at the beginning of the play, Othello is radically transformed later on to someone who doubts everything. He is sceptic even towards his own self. The villainous plans of Iago, in fact, did nothing but revealed the hidden side of Othello's personality. After being stimulated by Iago's lies, Othello becomes uncertain and gradually his over self-confidence diminished. The more Iago advances in his plan, the greater is the loss of Othello's self-control. Othello becomes in a sort of dilemma "I think my wife be honest, and think she is not:/I think that thou art just, and think thou art not" (III. iii, 86). Othello believes and at the same time doubts his belief; he is so perplexed that he cannot reason. This scene contradicts the earlier one in which Othello relies blindly on Desdemona to speak for him in the senate.

### **Othello "under the veil of race":**

Though Othello seems on the one hand as an admired Venetian 'general' on the other hand, he is still the foreign Moor for the Venetians. As a type within the traditional norms that distinguish between the native and the outsider, Othello seems to be rejected as much as he seems to be assimilated. Othello, in such terms, is not the worthy individual but rather the man who is conscious of himself as a member of a different race and who is certainly regarded as such. Despite the emerging individual consciousness in the Renaissance, people were still holding the norms of their past. In other words, they were not radically uprooted from what they had already known as community, race, or party. This is what we notice as far as Othello is concerned.

For though being the respected Venetian general, he is still the Moor and he is conscious of being so. The other characters in the play, despite their knowledge of his worth as an individual, they still tend to identify him according to his racial origin. Othello, in such terms, cannot escape the dominant cultural ideology of the Renaissance in which race occupied an important place.

It is apparent throughout the play that Othello himself tends to define himself according to his race. He is not only the hired Venetian general, but also the Moor from the exotic lands of Africa. He refers to his past that determines his roots, community and over all his racial identity. Even when he expresses his pride of his “services”, he included his origin “...’Tis yet to know,/Which when I know, that boasting is an honour,/ I shall promulgate./ I fetch my life and being,/ from men of royal siege” (I. ii, 30). He affirms that he descends from Moorish nobility, his original community. The tales that he tells about his adventures include something of his Black race. He tells how he was “sold to slavery” and how he encountered the “Anthropophagi, and men whose heads/ Do grow beneath their shoulders” (I.iii, 38). Besides, Othello refers to his complexion that denotes his race “happily, for I am black, / and have not those soft parts of conversation/ That chamberers have...” (III.iii, 83).

For the Venetian characters, especially Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio, Othello is the black Moor who is in many ways different from them. Both his complexion, as ‘black’, and his ethnic origin are unpleasant for the Venetians. For this reason, the latter tend to see Othello as an unequal and even an inferior despite his dispositions as an individual. Eldred Jones remarks that in the characterization of Othello, Shakespeare progresses between “putting the man and the type as it were side by side on the stage” (1965: 87). This dichotomy,

between man and type, makes “one set of characters continually invokes the clichés of accepted belief, while the hero himself with aid of other characters sets up a different image” ( ibid: 88). This is why we often observe a contradiction between perceiving Othello as an individual and as a type. When the characters speak of Othello in terms of a skilled military commander, they endow him with the best attributes. However, when they refer to his racial origin, they dehumanize him. Though he is the ‘Venetian’ general, he is also the “wheeling stranger” (I. i, 27). Othello is the “valiant”, brave and “fair” man (I, ii, 43), but he is also the “lascivious” “old black ram”, and “thick-lipped”. This discrepancy in his description is related to his being both an ‘individual’ and ‘a type’. Indeed, we may expect this ambivalence from our reading of Shakespeare’s subtitle ‘the Moor of Venice’.

In terms of race, Othello is, therefore, an ‘inferior’ to all the Venetian characters. He is the worst of men because he bears the most distasteful traits that the Venetians/ Elizabethans attributed to the black people. In Shakespeare’s day, ‘Moor’ was just a shortened form of ‘blackamoor’ who was considered as the incarnation of evil. Therefore, as a blackamoor, Othello is drawn away from his favourable labels as an individual to be classified as a type or as an exotic ‘other’. In this sense, he is regarded with the western eye that transforms him to an inferior human being. Edward Said maintains, in his ***Orientalism***, that in reality the western or occidental people do not describe easterners as they really seem but rather tend to create an inferior image about them using unchangeable clichés (1990: 5-6). This is what we notice in the Venetian characters’ representation of Othello as a type. Desdemona’s father Brabantio who is an admirer of Othello ‘the bright general’, scorns his origin “For if such actions

may have passage free,/ Bond-slaves, and pagans shall our Statesmen be” (I.ii, 33). He accuses him of practicing witchcraft “she is abus’d, stol’n from me, and corrupted/ by spells, and medicines, brought of mountebanks” (I.iii, 35). Overall, Iago, more than any other Venetian, classifies Othello as a member of a different race whose character and behaviour reveal his exotic nature. It is through Iago’s speech, more than any other character, that we perceive Othello’s ‘otherness’ in the Venetian society. In several occasions, Iago refers to Othello’s deficiency in comparison with the Venetians. He describes him as a figure that lacks all what is good and attractive, as it is apparent in his speech to Roderigo “Loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties: all which the Moor is defective in” (II.i, 54). Actually, Iago and the other Venetians perceive him as an antithesis of the Venetian men. This is what Edward Said has referred to in declaring that “the Europeans” had great tendency to identify themselves “as against all ‘those’ non-Europeans” (1991: 7). Therefore, by endowing Othello with bad qualities, the Venetians would be recognized as possessors of all what is good.

It is clear then, that despite all his individual worth and subjective traits, Othello remains the Moor. His individuality cannot erase his racial difference; he is still regarded ‘under the veil of race’. As such, the individualism, which is claimed by the men of the Renaissance as Petrarch, Montaigne, or Jerome who stressed the particularity of the individual “IL n’est plus member, il est chef, il n’est plus... guelfe, gibelin chrétien: il est lui” (Qtd in Norman Nelson, 1933: 322) seems far from being set. For the views about types still submerged the subjectivity of men. As a result, the individual who is like Othello, and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, remains entrapped by the powerful racial ideology.

Othello, indeed, fails to situate himself within the dominant order. According to Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance self-fashioners as Othello fail to 'identify' and 'fashion' themselves and they end up discovering that 'authentic self' is tragically trapped in the contextual frames. The result, Greenblatt says, is that such individuals become victims and sacrificial scapegoats in their institutional structure (1980: 123-127).

### **Iago: Excessive egoism and the ethics of self- interest**

Shakespeare depicted the traits of modern subjectivity in *Othello* through his villainous character Iago who stands for the individual that emerged during the Renaissance in Italy. Like the ambitious individual who was a typical figure in Renaissance Italy, Iago stops at nothing to realize his own self-interest. It is argued that "The characters who seem most modern in their sensibilities are the villains" (Bruce, Young, 2008: 4). This is, in fact, true because the villains do not hesitate to act as they wish. They care absolutely for nothing and for no one despite themselves. Iago is ready to abandon community along with its traditions and conventions and live for the sake of his person. The sacred bonds that keep men and women subordinate to their communities can be, without a moment of hesitation, thrown away by a villain like Iago.

Iago is a good example of subjectivity displayed through an excessive 'egoism' that seeks just to serve the individual's self-interest whatever the means are. Iago is the typical Italian villain of the Renaissance whose philosophy is based on Machiavelli's belief 'the end justifies the means'. He is an individual who cannot see beyond the narrowest horizon of the self. According to Allan D. Bloom, Iago is eminently a private man (1960: 156). As such, he can care for no one but himself the reason for which he employs

ruthless hypocrisy, cruelty, and deceit no matter how he hurts others. This is the reality of Iago who is often portrayed as the Machiavellian villain, the selfish ego and tyrannous self. He may be considered as the despotic individual who hopes to exercise control over everyone else.

In fact, Iago sees himself as an autonomous and controlling ego; he uses his rational powers to manipulate the others in a way that ensures the realization of his peculiar objective. Even the way in which he speaks, reveals his consciousness of himself as an independent self from all the others. Thus, he acts in a way that serves him as a separate individual. His language reveals a self-confident man who is able to promote his interests and power over the rest of the characters. His conversation with Rodrigo at the beginning of the play demonstrates his determination to realize his aim that is to take revenge from Othello “I follow him to serve my turn upon him” (I.i, 24). Iago’s aim, besides taking revenge, is to regain his lost place as a lieutenant. For this reason, he pretends honesty and remains close to Othello, “not for love” but for serving his own interest “in following him, **I follow but myself**./Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty/But seeming so, **for my peculiar end**” (Our emphasis, I.i, 24).

It becomes clear, from his speech, that Iago reflects the subjective ‘I’ that exists for itself and behaves accordingly in a way that satisfies his wishes. Virtue for him is just a pretence that can help him to succeed in his treacherous plans. Though he knows that “Men should be what they seem” (III. iii, 77), he consciously, converts his identity from a corrupted creature to a seemingly honest man ‘I am not what I am’ (I.i, 24)). The false identity that he assumes makes him in the eyes of others, especially Othello, the most trust-worthy

fellow from whom one can expect good counsel. While Othello idealises his friendship, Iago remains close to him just for his corrupted ends:

Iago: thus do I ever make my fool, my purse:  
For mine own gain'd knowledge should profane  
If I would time expend with such a spine,  
But for, my sport, and profit (ibid)

Moreover, Iago prefigures the modern sense of self in viewing anyone other than himself as an obstacle and in considering himself as unconstrained by any external moral structures that do not fit his own self as an autonomous individual. For him, there is no reason to serve a morality created for common interest. When the play opens, Iago presents himself as an outraged victim. The responsible for his plight, as we learn shortly afterwards, is Othello since he has already appointed Cassio as his lieutenant depriving Iago of his desired office. Iago explains:

For certes, says he (Othello),  
I have already chose my officer. And what was he?  
Forsooth, a great arithmetician  
One Michael Casio, a Florentine  
That never set a squadron in the field  
Nor the division of a battle knows (I. i, 23).

Othello, before choosing Cassio, has already taken the position desired by Iago. For this reason, Iago considers both Othello and Cassio as constraints set in the way of his advancement. To get rid of these two obstacles, Iago plans a well-prepared network of villainous tricks. His plans hurt almost all the other characters in the play: Desdemona, Roderigo, and even his wife Emilia. His egoist actions culminate in throwing the entire community into chaos and disorder at the end.

Iago as in a Machiavellian fashion demonstrates that virtue lies in effective action that knows no moral restraints. This is apparent in his

villainous plans through out the play. He stands apart from any morality and opposes established norms of behaviour. He practices deceit and self-aggrandizement and stands away from truth, customs and divine order. As a selfish ego, Iago thinks himself unfit for the standards of Christian morality. He does not believe on all what the society holds as sacred like love and virtue. He believes, instead, on the limitless power of will to direct everything. He tells Roderigo:

Virtue? A fig, 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which, our wills are gardeners. So that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce: set hyssop, and weed up thyme: supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many: either to have it sterile with idleness, or manur'd with industry, why the power, and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. (I. iii, 44)

It is his lack of belief in what is virtuous or good that permeates him to engage himself in a war against them. He informs us, in his speech, that he will destroy the virtuous and good image of Desdemona "I will turn her virtue into pitch, and out of her own goodness make the net that shall enmesh them all" (II.ii, 69).

Following his behaviour, Iago is seen as an assertive ego who creates for himself the laws according to which he must behave. All that is usable for his interests, as an individual, is suitable and all the standards that serve the interests of the community are said to be useless. In Iago's ethics, personal interest overlaps collective interest, and immoral means work better than the naïve Christian beliefs. The treachery and vice that Iago employs were, in fact, inherent in the Renaissance life. Such immoral qualities grew out of the collapse of the traditional institutions, the weakening of collective ties and the adoption of self-interest as a moral measure (Roberta Garner, 1990: 56).



Beyond Iago's behaviour lies a need for independence from the domination of others. Iago seems an individual who cannot endure leaving under neither the control of another individual nor the impositions of social norms. He is someone who longs to be himself the controller of every thing and of every one. As Caroline Leigh Lamonda argues, Iago practices vice "because he deeply resents the social order that forces him into an undeserved subordinate position" (1995: 246). Acting in a self-centred way, would ensure Iago a dependent status. Iago's subjectivity seems to be unconstrained by any moral or social code. He is apparently free from all social and moral bounds. Therefore, it is more likely to consider Iago's behaviour as a result of a strong sense of egotism. Burckhardt explained that "unbridled egotism showed itself in its most terrible shape" (1990: 274) during the time of the Renaissance even among the highly developed Italians. Nevertheless, Iago's excessive individualism results in his tragic end. In acting against social norms, he betrays even himself because his fate is linked to that of the community that he resents.

### **Shylock: the Oppressed Individual**

Shylock is quite aware of his difference from the other Venetian characters in the play. Though he is leaving in a community different in many ways from his own, he retains his sense of particularity by defending his Jewish identity. From the beginning of the play, Shylock is willing to preserve what differentiates him from the rest in Venice, that is his identity "I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following: but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you" (I.iii, 34). He refuses any activity that may result in his integration to the Christian world. As such, Shylock is portrayed to some extent as an independent individual who lives by

his own among an entire community set against him. His independence is sustained by his good economic status; his commercial activities in the Rialto earned him a considerable fortune.

Nonetheless, Shylock is never seen as an individual or even as a human being who deserves respect, at least, in terms of humanity. Being judged in terms of his racial origin, he is seen as an inferior racial 'other'. Shylock is an individual who struggles under "the political and social sanctions of Christian authority" (Susan Oldrieve: 1993: 97). The latter wants to impose its will on Shylock by making him convert to the Christian religion. The final scene of the play portrays him as an individual who is oppressed by the Christian social order. He surrenders, forcedly, to the will of the Christian community. His conversion is not an act of conviction and will, as it is the case with his daughter, but rather an imposed condition for 'survival'. Though he resents Christianity, Shylock accepts conversion as a means by which he may cope with the powerful political and social pressures. Shylock is, therefore, not free to retain his identity and control over personal and private concerns, instead he is obliged to surrender to the ideology in force. His passage from the stage of resistance to that of submission may be explained by what Greenblatt calls the "unbreakable nature of the dominant power". To be precise, Greenblatt sees the "submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially outside the self-God, a sacred book, a religion, an institution..." (1980: 9) as the only possible act, because resistance fails in front of the strength of the dominant power.

At the end of the trial, Shylock loses everything he considers valuable, his identity, his money and his revenge. He is simply usurped of his

independence, autonomy and freedom. He is forced to be content in conformity “I am content” (IV. i, 95). Shylock, in fact, is just like Portia in the sense that both of them are deprived of individual free will and oppressed by social traditions. The former is the victim of the racial ideology that denied the individual right for freedom of worship, just as the latter is oppressed by the rules of the patriarchal system.

From our analysis of the main characters in terms of representing the themes of the Renaissance period including subjectivity, individual will, independence, self-interest and tradition, we have come to conclude that the characters embody the divergent attitudes of the Renaissance time. The women and men of the Renaissance stand for the ambivalent mood of the transitional period. As we have seen in our analysis, they stand in the threshold of modernity, not solely traditional but not yet modern. They are wavering between the traditional patterns of life envisaged in social conventions, communal ties, and moral laws on the one hand, and the Renaissance fresh beliefs on subjectivity, individual will, independence and ethics of self-interest on the other. In fact, neither men nor women of the Renaissance were free, as Burckhardt believes, to fashion an individual self, a personal identity independent of the values and demands of a society structured around the communities of family and race. Burckhardt envisioned Renaissance men as rejecting the corporate values that had determined personal identity in the Middle Ages, and Renaissance women as enjoying a new equality with men. However, this belief seems to be of mythical foundations. Because, though they gained awareness of their individuality, they are not able to live as truly independent and free individuals. For, as we have explained in our examination

of the characters, the Renaissance women/men are still controlled by the traditional beliefs on family, community, and race. The Renaissance woman remains in a state of subjection either to the father, as in the case of Portia, or to the husband as it is the case with Desdemona and Jessica. Further, the individual, either man or woman, is still identified in terms of collective racial identity attributed to him by the community, as it is the case of Othello, Jessica and Shylock.

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## **Romantic Love, Intensive Hatred and the Effects of Racial Difference in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*.**

This chapter sheds light on an important aspect that characterizes the subjective side of the individual that is the inner human passions. We will try to examine Shakespeare's portrayal of the emotional life of men and women of the Renaissance as individuals who have gained awareness about their inner emotional life. Shakespeare's depiction, as we will try to demonstrate, reveals a clash between the inner individual feelings and the outer collective attitudes about human differences. We will examine the romantic love along with the intensive hatred, in the plays under study, with reference to the prevailing Renaissance views about the existence of difference among societies, races and peoples. We shall try to show the effects of the social conventions concerning racial difference on the feelings of the characters in terms of both love and hatred. The inner side of the human character, as Shakespeare depicts it, is far from being independent, it is surrounded with tension, suffering and extra-personal circumstances. Thus, the individual emotions are often confronted by authoritative forces set against them.

In order to realize our objective, we will deal with the examination of the love relationships between the Venetian characters and the foreign ones: Portia, Prince Morocco, Prince Arragon and Bassanio, Jessica and Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice*, Othello and Desdemona in *Othello*. Then, we will deal with the antagonism between the Venetians and the foreign others 'the Jew and the Moor'. At the same time, we will analyse both the effects of social conventions on their feelings as well as the reaction of the community towards their behaviours.

## **Romantic lovers:**

### **Christians, Jews and Moors in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello***

Shakespeare has given full expression to the romantic character of man and woman of the Renaissance through the characters who are involved in love relationships in the plays under study. The characters, regardless of their difference, are endowed with the same inner character. That is, as individuals, the Christian, the Jew and the Moor are represented as having the same human feelings, they are able to love and to hate in the same manner. However, the problem that we perceive is that when they come to transcend the racial circuit and fall in love with a partner who belongs to another ethnic group, things go out of the normal stream. The result is a stark opposition from the community that judges any love relationship as an outrageous offence committed against the norms and established conventions.

### **Portia, The Prince of Morocco, and The Prince of Arragon:**

The plot of *The Merchant of Venice* includes Portia's strange venture to find the suitable suitor. Among the several men who long to marry her, we find the Moor Prince Morocco, Prince Arragon and the Christian Venetian Bassanio. Portia by the norms of her father's will is unable to choose, but she expresses her attitude towards the suitors. As she resents some of them, she likes the qualities of some others.

The Prince of Morocco is distinguished from the other suitors for his deep love for Portia. He comes from the far lands of Africa in hope of being the suitable marry for the fair lady of Belmont:

I tell you Lady this aspect of mine  
Hath fear'd the valiant, (by my love I swear)  
The best regarded virgins of our clime  
Have lov'd it too: I would not change this hue,



Except to steal your thoughts my gentle Queen (II.i, 39)

His love for Portia is so profound that his attempt to win her will determine his lot “Good fortune then, To make me blest or cursed’st among men” (II. ii, 40). In revealing his love for Portia, he wants to overweight his disadvantage ‘black complexion’ by his sincere emotions. The Prince seems aware about his weak position as he addressed Portia just when he met her “Mislike me not for my complexion” (II.ii, 38). His deficiency lies in his unpleasant black skin. Nevertheless, he still keeps hope to win the lady’s heart in being judged in terms of his virtue and affection. Indeed, the Prince acknowledges his equality to Portia in terms of nobility:

As much as I deserve, why that’s the Lady.  
I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes,  
In graces, and in qualities of breeding:  
But more than these, in love I do deserve (II.vii, 54)

The Prince of Morocco, in fact, speaks to Portia in a tone that reveals his idealization of this lady. His language is like Petrarch’s while addressing his beloved Laura. As in the Petrarchan tradition, Morocco seems to consider Portia as a perfect divine beloved. He refers to her as a divine creature that seizes the hearts of the most worthy men “from the four corners of the earth they come/To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing Saint” (II. vii, 55). He speaks of “her heavenly picture” as “an Angel in a golden bed” (ibid).

However, his love is judged unworthy, and his attempt to seduce Portia by expressing his deepest emotions is deemed to failure because of his complexion. For as we notice even before he sees Portia, his love is quite unwelcomed. Portia undervalues the Prince’s love for he is too different from her in complexion. She does not care for his noble spirit and pure love “if he hath the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive

me than wive me” (I.iii, 32). After hearing all his praise and sincerest feelings and seeing his deepest grief at her loss, Portia remains indifferent. The feeling of difference seems overweighing any probable affection. It is the colour prejudice that swept the Renaissance society, which prevents Portia to think of such a union, she declares “let all of his complexion choose me so” (II. vii, 56). Portia is the vehicle of her community’s attitudes; she measures with the same insight of her environment. To be precise, the Italian or English society tended to classify the black-skinned people as extremely different race from their own. Therefore, they are unfit to be integrated to their pure race. Portia speaks of the Moor as the “devil” which accords with the Elizabethan superstitious belief that devils and evil spirits sometimes took the form of Moors. Indeed, as we have already mentioned in the previous chapter, Portia values much tradition and communal conventions, and act according to them. For this reason, she is unable to let any kind of emotion direct her. She is quite unlike Desdemona who gives full reign to her inner emotions and marries the Moor Othello. Portia’s inner side, by contrast, is so affected by the prevailing Renaissance race prejudice that she cannot fall in love with someone inferior to her.

Similarly, Portia responds negatively to the suit of The Prince of Arragon. The latter, like Prince Morocco, is a stranger. He comes to Belmont in hope of winning the lottery of the caskets. He decides to rely on his personal judgement in choosing the right casket. He says “I will not choose what many men desire,/ Because I will not jump with common spirits,/ And rank me with the barbarous multitudes” (II, 9, 59). His choice of the silver casket, however, does not help him to win. But, what is important is Portia’s response; she is indifferent

towards Arragon's failure. For Portia, this stranger is undesirable, just as the Moor Prince Morocco.

### **Portia and Bassanio:**

The response of Portia towards Bassanio's suit, however, marks a striking opposition. The love of "a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier", as Nerissa introduces Bassanio, seems to be the ideal for which Portia longs. Being a union of two equals, the love relationship of Bassanio and Portia becomes a romantic story. Bassanio is introduced by the messenger as "an Ambassador of love" (II, 9, 61) who has come with gifts of rich value to win his lady's love. Bassanio is the antithetical image of the Prince of Morocco and the semblance of Portia. For this reason, the latter shows a great willingness to marry him.

Portia judges the Prince of Morocco as unworthy of her love; she rejects him in a way that reveals her sense of superiority over him. However, when Bassanio wins the lottery, she expresses how much she overvalues him:

I would not be ambitious in my wish,  
To wish myself much better, yet for you,  
I would be trebled twenty times myself,  
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times  
More rich, that only to stand high in your account, (III.ii, 70)

Portia's speech explains the great difference that she sees between Bassanio and the Moor. She places the former above the ordinary men while she reduces the latter to an inferior 'other'.

### **Jessica and Lorenzo**

The subplot in *The Merchant of Venice* consists of the unusual love relationship that unites two extremely different individuals, the Jew and the Christian. Belonging to two antagonist racial groups, Jessica and Lorenzo set the example of the determined individuals who follow but their inner emotions.

They could transgress the conflicts between the Christians and the Jews. They are in fact, paraphrasing the idea of Paul Gaudet, a testimony to the powers of love and its self-sacrificing nature (1986: 278).

Their love is unordinary because the only natural relationship that could bound the Christian and the Jew within the culture of the Renaissance society was that of dislike and enmity. For the Christians, the acceptance of such a relationship is conditioned by conversion. That is the Jew should be cleansed from his Jewishness, for the only good Jew is the one who converts to christianity. Since Jessica is willing to substitute her Jewishness with Christianity, and at the same time, she is gentle and virtuous, Lorenzo finds her deserving his love:

Beshrew me but I love her heartily.  
For she is wise, if I can judge of her,  
And fair she is, if that mine eyes be true,  
And true she is, as she hath prov'd herself:  
And therefore like herself, wise, fair, and true,  
Shall she be placed in my constant soul (II.vi, 53)

However, what is characteristic of their love is that, unlike Portia and Bassanio, they are obedient to no bonds. Their union is fulfilled through a secret elopement from the community. Jessica abandons her father and community, and Lorenzo does not care for the Christians' antagonism with the Jews. Sigurd Burckhardt referred to the relationship of Lorenzo and Jessica as an unhealthy relationship that could never escape the harsh reality of inequality between them. He states that "their love is lawless, financed by theft and engineered through a gross breach of trust" (1968: 224).

The love between Jessica and Lorenzo seems built on a heavy lack of trust. There is the absence of tranquillity and comfort that we perceive in the relationship of Portia and Bassanio. This is perhaps is the result of the nature of

their love, for the former are unequal in terms of race while the latter resemble each other in all terms. Jessica is uncertain about the sincerity, and strength of Lorenzo's love, and she ignores his intentions. This is what we understand from her question to Lorenzo in the elopement scene "And now who knows/But you Lorenzo, whether I am yours?" (II.vi, 52).

### **Othello and Desdemona:**

The relationship that unites Othello and Desdemona is grounded on the principles of romantic idealism (E.Stoll, 1946: 50). Through these two distinguished characters, Shakespeare delves deep into the mysterious emotional life of the individual. Though socially such reciprocal love between a Black-man and a white woman is judged strange and illegitimate, Othello and Desdemona retain their feelings for each other.

The source of Desdemona's love for Othello is the adventures that Othello has narrated to her. For her youthful spirit, such a man who has experienced many things and became a strong warrior is the ideal lover. He is the romantic hero who may protect her. Therefore, she does not care for his dark complexion or for being old-aged. Othello explained the reason of Desdemona's love: "she lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd, /And I loved her that she did pity them" (I.iii, 39). Desdemona confesses her deep emotions for Othello:

That I did love the Moor, to live with him,  
My downright violence, and storm of fortunes,  
May trumpet to the world. My heart's sabdu'd  
Even to the very quality of my Lord:  
I saw Othello's visage in his mind" (I.iii, 41).

Desdemona declares the spiritual nature of her love for Othello as she sees him in his mind. This denotes the spiritual nature of her emotions. Jarde R. Curtis refers to the union of Desdemona and Othello as "the marriage of true minds"

(1973: 192). Their minds or souls are, indeed, unaffected by the ideology in force. As in the current Renaissance Platonism and Petrarchism, Desdemona loves in Othello his spiritual features. His mind stands for his virtue, and noble soul. In such terms, Desdemona does not see Othello through her eyes but rather through her mind, that informs her about his noble spirit. She is beholding Othello's beauty with the eye of the mind that, in platonic terms, enables her to see the reality of beauty instead of its superficial shadow.

Desdemona maintains our perception of her love as a spiritual phenomenon by her reference to the immortality of her feelings. She declares the profundity and purity of her love that sustain her fidelity to her husband. Her love is free from all circumstances; it cannot be affected even by Othello's change of mind. She tells Iago:

What shall I do to win my Lord again?  
Good friend, go to him: for by this light of Heaven,  
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel:  
If e'er my will did trespass'against his love,  
Either in discourse of thought, or actual deed,  
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense  
Delight them: or any other form.  
Or that I do not yet, and ever did,  
And ever will, (though he do shake me off  
To beggarly divorcement) love him dearly,  
Comfort forswear me. Unkindness may do much,  
And his unkindness may defeat my life,  
But never taint my love... (IV. ii, 112-113).

As such, it is no exaggeration to speak of Desdemona's love in terms of Platonic love. For the latter is a "life-long" love based on "the noble disposition" (Plato's *Symposium* Qtd in Scott Buchanan, 1977: 136), not on the unstable bodily beauties that end with time.

Desdemona's continued love for Othello proves how much erroneous and superficial is Iago's understanding of the reality of her emotions. Iago considers

Desdemona's love just as what he sees as "merely a lust of the Blood" (I,iii, 44). Following this, "it can not be long that Desdemona should continue her love to the Moor" (ibid). He informs Roderigo that Desdemona will recognize her mistake after living with the Moor, and that her love will be ended soon:

Loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties: all which the Moor is defective in. now for want of these requir'd conveniences, her delicate tenderness will find itself abus'd, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor, very nature will instruct her in it, and compel her to some second choice" (II. i, 54)

Desdemona's course of love, however, differs totally from Iago's supposition. In response to Othello's fear during their reunion that "not another comfort like this/ succeeds in unknown fate", she says:

The Heavens forbid  
But that our loves  
And comforts should increase  
Even as our days, do grow (II.,i, 53)

These lines reinforce the spirituality of her love. She sees the passage of time not as a threat to love but rather as a promise of its growth and continuity. Indeed this is what happens; she remains sacrificially true to her love for Othello even as she dies:

Emilia: Oh, who hath done this deed?  
Desdemona: No body: I myself, farewell:  
Command me to my kind Lord: Oh, farewell (V.ii, 129).

Likewise, Othello loves the 'gentle Desdemona' despite 'imputation and strong circumstances'. Though he is well aware of his difference from her, he is unable to ignore his emotions. Kirschbaum maintains that "Othello loves Desdemona so much that it is questionable whether in human terms he loves her at all" (Qtd in Stoll, 1946: 50). Like Desdemona, Othello's love exceeds a mere physical attraction; it is a creed of the soul. He is attracted more by

Desdemona's soft and gentle character "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd/ And I loved her, that she did pity them" (I, 3, 39). His feelings are moved by her capacity to sympathize with human suffering "And often did beguile her of her tears" (I.iii, 38). For Othello, Desdemona is "[his] soul's joy" (II. i, 53), the only person who ensures his comfort. He loves her so much that anything in his life is conditioned by her presence; if he loses her, Othello will lose everything. To Othello "his wife is not a woman but the matrix of his universe" (Stoll, 1946: 50). When Iago is trying to convince him about Desdemona's infidelity, Othello declares that his life will be turned upside down if the accusation is proved:

Farewell the tranquil mind; farewell content;  
Farewell the plumed troops, and the big wars,  
That makes ambition, virtue! Oh farewell,  
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,  
The spirit-stirring drum, th'ear-piercing fife,  
The royal banner, and all quality, (III. iii, 85)

After discovering the villainous plan of Iago, Othello confesses that though being "one that lov'd not wisely", he is a man who loved "too well" (V. II, 137).

However, such love between a Moor and a Venetian woman, despite its profundity and purity, gains no support in a society where racial differences are much at play than the norms of humanity. The entire community is outraged by the behaviour of Othello and Desdemona because they have acted without any respect for the prevailing norms of racial difference. Kiernan Ryan explains:

In loving and marrying each other, Othello and Desdemona instinctively act according to the principles of racial equality and sexual freedom which are still not normative, still far from generally accepted and practiced even in our days, let alone in Shakespeare's" ( Qtd in Serageldin,1998: 38)



It was quite an unusual thing to hear of such a union of love between a black man and a white woman in England or elsewhere in Europe by the time of Shakespeare. Therefore, The Venetians in the play consider Othello's love for a Venetian white woman quite denigrating of their sense of honour. The Black Moor is an unnatural mate for a European and thus an unacceptable husband for a white woman like Desdemona. They cannot be convinced by any way that the relationship that gathers Othello the Moor and Desdemona is that of love. They consider it as a work of witchcraft that seduced the fair Venetian Woman. The way in which the characters respond to the news about the marriage of the couple reveals clearly the unnaturalness of their union. Roderigo reports that Desdemona is "transported with no worse nor better guard,/ But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier, /To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" , and that she tied "her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes/In an extravagant, and wheeling stranger" ( I.i, 27). Othello is the most unsuitable lover among all men because neither his race and origin nor his complexion fit for a Venetian woman. Brabantio explained overtly how inferior is Othello to Desdemona to the extent that love cannot explain her acceptance of the Moor:

For I'll refer me to all things of sense,  
(if she in chains of magic were not bound)  
Whether a maid, so tender, fair, and happy,  
So opposite to marriage, that she shunn'd  
The wealthy curled darling of our Nation,  
Would ever have (t'incure a general mock)  
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom,  
Of such a thing as you: to fear, not to delight? ( I.ii, 32)

Brabantio denigrates Othello to the extent that he reduces him to "a thing" that provokes fear. This is a common belief that the Elizabethans often held about the ugliness of the exotic people. He is too inferior to be a husband for a beautiful white woman as Desdemona. Brabantio's tone of 'inferiorization'

stresses once again the strangeness of such a union between two antithetical figures:

A maiden, never bold:  
Of spirit so still, and quiet, that her motion  
Blush'd at herself, and she, in spite of nature,  
Of years, of country, credit, everything,  
To fall in love, with what she fear'd to look on. (I. iii, 36).

Desdemona's father refers to the unconventional mood of his daughter's union with the Moor, because, in fact, it emerges out of a set of antithetical dispositions. Desdemona has nothing in common with the Moor. Their marriage differs from the conventional marriages that are generally supported by money, beauty, and similarities of position and education. Nonetheless, their love, which is purified of all accidental and physical elements, would be certainly, as Allan D.Bloom puts it, a love of the true rather than of the familiar ( 1960: 136). Indeed, it is rareness that makes of their love such a refined spiritual passion.

### **Intensive Hatred: The Individual and his 'Racial Other'**

#### **Antonio Vs Shylock:**

The central problem at the heart of *The Merchant of Venice* is the bond that involves two individuals: Antonio and Shylock. As we learn from the events of the play, the relationship that unites the two is that of antagonism. It is important to mention that during the early modern period the main elements that were causing antagonism were cultural and religious differences. Each of Antonio and Shylock expresses an extremely intensive hatred and disgust towards the other. Though their affairs in the Rialto as merchants play an important role in triggering enmity between them, the real reason for their antagonism lays in their difference from one another. This difference is not, in

fact, related to their persons but rather to their two opposed races and religious beliefs. Their hatred stems from the fact that they are unable to look to each other in terms of individuality. To be precise, both Antonio and Shylock's perceptions are conditioned by the conventional attitudes of their communities; they see each other as representative of his community. Therefore, their inner emotions are restricted to a profound hatred.

Antonio and Shylock's individual feelings are corrupted by what we may call remote established opposition between Christianity and Judaism. Shylock's hatred for Antonio is just an equation of the Jew who hates the Christian. Shylock declares "I hate him for he is a Christian.... / He hates our sacred Nation and he rails.../ Cursed be my tribe if I forgive him" (I, iii, 34). In these terms, it seems that Shylock considers his negative feelings as a duty. Since Antonio hates the Jewish Nation, Shylock must take revenge in behalf of "[their] sacred Nation" (ibid). Reciprocally, Antonio's feelings towards Shylock are expressed through his harsh language as he describes Shylock:

Mark you this Bassanio,  
The Devil can site scripture for his purpose  
An evil soul producing holy witness,  
Is like a Villain with a smiling cheek,  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart,  
O what a goodly outside falsehood hath (I. iii, 36)

In his attack against Shylock, Antonio seems reproducing the established stereotypes about the Jews. His association of Shylock with the 'devil', 'evil', and 'villain' demonstrates that he sees Shylock through his Jewishness. For all these derogatory labels were held, in the Western communities, as the common qualities that determine the Jews. As such, what stimulates Antonio's feelings of disgust is Shylock's racial difference.

Shylock alludes to another reason for Antonio's hatred, which is also related to Judaism that is the Jewish practice of usury or money lending. Shylock reminds Antonio "you call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, / And spet upon my Jewish gabardine, / And all for use of that which is mine own" (I. iii, 38). Antonio defends the Christian belief that forbids usury, and sets himself against such practice by intervention in Shylock's bushiness.

Shylock finds an opportunity to confess overtly his hatred and anger towards Antonio. The bond that consists of taking a pound of flesh near the heart of Antonio demonstrates the intensity of Shylock's hatred. The forfeiture of the bond will satisfy the Jew and cure his injuries:

To bait fish withal, if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge; he hath disgrac'd me, and hindr'd me half a million, laughed at my losses, mock'd at my gains, scorned my Nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what's his reason? I am a Jew (III. i, 63)

Shylock seems in this speech extremely outraged by Antonio's racist hatred. He feels his 'otherness' in the way in which he is often treated. Antonio is the vehicle of the attitude of the Venetian Christian community that considers Shylock as the 'inferior other'. Therefore, Shylock's feelings towards him are poisoned to the point of asking for a pound of his flesh to calm his wounded self. What he feels towards Antonio is not an ordinary dislike, but it is "More than a lodg'd hate, and a certain loathing" (VI. i, 84)). It is, indeed, Antonio's bad treatment that makes Shylock so determined to obey his emotions and act in the same way any Christian would act, if he was in his place:

If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility, revenge! If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example, why revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" (III. i, 63).

Shylock's hatred and desire for revenge is, therefore, not a product of his villainy but only a response to the Christian hatred for the Jews on the one hand, and a re-acting of the Christian way on the other. Ryan Kiernan observes:

Shylock's bloodthirsty cruelty is not simply the result of the Venetians' treatment of him, but the deliberate mirror-image of their concealed real nature. The revenge declares itself as a bitterly ironic parody of the Christians' own actual values, a calculated piercing of their unconsciously hypocritical facade (Qtd in Serageldin, 1998: 27)

Antonio, as all the Venetians, considers Shylock as an undesirable outsider who disturbs the tranquillity of Venice by his villainy. In response, Shylock holds the same attitude and feelings towards him and towards the Christians in general. In other words, Shylock compares Antonio to a rat that disturbs his being "What if my house be troubled with a rat,/ And I be pleas'd to give ten thousand ducats/ To have it ban'd" (VI. i , 84). Since he cannot kill him, his remedy is to express his hatred as he says, "Hates any man the thing he would not kill" (ibid).

Besides, the conflict between Shylock and Antonio stems from their two opposing cultures. The Jewish culture is completely different from the Christian one. For this reason, Shylock rejects any aspect or behaviour that is part of the Christian traditions. He declares:

Yes, to smell pork, to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into: I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following: but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you. (I, iii, 34).

Shylock explains that there is something more than religion that triggers his hatred towards Antonio "I hate him for he is a Christian: / **But more**, for that in low simplicity/ He lends out money gratis, and brings down/ The rate of usance here with us in Venice" (our emphasis, ibid). In these lines, Shylock alludes to a

serious cultural aspect that differentiates him from the Christians. He refers to the Jewish practice of usury that is regarded as an unchristian practice. Antonio, for Shylock, declares war against usury when he lends money without taking interest. So, the conflict may be interpreted as a clash between two different cultures.

Following what we have already said about the relationship between Shylock and Antonio, we can say that the Jew's dislike for Antonio is a justified feeling. Shylock is simply defending himself against an oppressor who is always trying to marginalize him. But, if this is the case with Shylock, what justification can we provide for Antonio's poisoned feelings? In fact, the latter's feelings of hatred towards Shylock may be explained in terms of anti-Semitism. In his work *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948), Jean Paul Sartre explains that the anti-Semite is a pitiful individual who is desperately trying to assert his or her superiority over others (Sartre, in Jay.L Halio, 2000: 143). When we examine Antonio's mistreatment of Shylock, we find that he behaves as an anti-Semite who tries to affirm his superiority over another man 'Shylock' who stands for the 'other'. His 'inferiorizing' tone aims to increase the distance between himself and the Jew. According to Sartre, "the existence of the Jew merely permits the anti-Semite to stifle his anxieties at their inception by persuading himself that his place in the world has been marked out in advance" (ibid: 142). Following this, we may say that Antonio's psychological state is, in fact, at the origin of his feelings. Indeed, at the very beginning of his speech, Antonio hints to his troubled existence and to his lack of self-knowledge "I know not why I am so sad, It wearies me.... /I have much ado to know myself" (I, I, 23).

## **Iago Vs Othello:**

The play of *Othello* is about love but at the same time, it is about its absence. The strong love that we notice in the play is, in fact, echoed by an intensive hatred. The latter is mostly triggered by racial difference that makes the individual dislike his racial other. In the play, Iago always refers to Othello with his racial label 'the Moor'. Though he presents understandable motives for his strong resentment of Othello, the aspect of racial difference plays an important part in his resentment. Othello, according to Iago, has deprived him of his desired military office and occupied his sexual territory by having a relationship with his wife Emilia. Yet, the strongest motive for his hatred stems from the racial difference of Othello. The latter, for Iago, is a parvenu, a member of a lower race who came to take away what is originally the right of the native 'Iago'. Othello represents a threat to Iago, since the more Othello proves his worth and equality, the more Iago loses his sense of superiority.

Actually, Iago's discourse reveals explicitly the true reason behind his disgust for Othello. In all his speeches, he does not refer to 'Othello' by his name; instead, he speaks of the 'Moor'. He confesses to Roderigo, "I have told thee often, and I tell thee again, and again, I hate the Moor" (I.iii, 45). Because of his extreme hatred, as he declares, "I do hate him as I do hell pains" (I.I, 28), Iago decides to do everything that may destroy the Moor Othello and support his own position. Indeed, his opposition towards the marriage of Othello and Desdemona reinforces our understanding of his hatred as a product of racism. Iago considers Othello as unfit for a Venetian woman as Desdemona, for "an erring barbarian" like Othello is too inferior for a "super-subtle Venetian" (I.iii, 45). It is clear then that Iago's fanatical hatred is explained by the hatred of the racists for such a union between a black Moor and a white woman.

Iago's poisoned emotions are manifested in the bitter language that he employs to describe Othello as his racial 'other'. He behaves as an Orientalist in the sense that he endows Othello with the most derogatory labels that serve to dehumanize and 'inferiorize' him. For instance, he describes him as "an old Black ram" (I.i, 26), "an erring barbarian" (I.iii, 45), and "the lusty Moor" (II.ii, 56). In more than one occasion, he refers to Othello as the devil for his black complexion. According to Edward Said, the Western people or the Orientalists stress the inferiority of the 'others' to highlight the differences between them and those of other races namely the Orientals. Their aim is to maintain the superiority of the westerners over the others (1991: 2-3). In fact, the aim of Iago, in dehumanizing Othello, is to prove his racial superiority. As individuals, Othello is much more valued for his skill, virtue, and nobility, than Iago. For this reason, the latter resolves to use the weak aspect in Othello's character that is his racial 'Otherness'. It is only in terms of race, that Iago can manifest a kind of superiority over Othello.

Iago decides to push Othello to act in a way that will maintain the existing stereotypes. In other words, Iago aims to stimulate Othello's jealousy to make him lose his self-control and appear as a barbarous, inhuman creature. In this way, Othello's noble image along with the respect and love that he has previously acquired will disappear. In fact, Iago succeeds, at last, to make of Othello the barbarous man whose jealousy exceeds his reason and control. Therefore, Iago's successful manipulation of Othello serves as a good example of the strength of the dominant ideology that Greenblatt refers to as the "unbreakable structure" (1980: 9).

In fact, Iago's inner emotions are influenced and corrupted by the racial ideology of the Renaissance time. His hatred towards Othello the Moor is only



the extreme manifestation of the social context in which he lives. In other words, Iago may stand for any individual who is grown up in a community that does never accept difference in terms of race. Though the ambitious and vengeful evil portrayed by Iago originates from within himself, it also arises as a result of the social environment in which he dwells. Despite the image of the independent egotist and isolated individual that Iago displays, as we have seen in the previous chapter, he is in fact the product of society. The social conventions on race prejudice have affected deeply his subjective side. The consequence is that his lack of love results in tearing the fabric of the same society that planted in him the seeds of hatred.

Our intention in this chapter has harboured on the analysis of the emotional life of the Renaissance man/woman as portrayed by Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. From our study, we have come to conclude that even the very essence of the inner character of man and woman is affected by the prevailing Renaissance attitudes and ideologies about racial difference. The individual emotions seem to be under the influence of the social conventions as we have already noticed in the case of Portia, Antonio Shylock, and Iago whose feelings are largely determined by the social beliefs on racial difference. A number of individuals, however, as Othello, Desdemona, The Prince of Morocco, Jessica and Lorenzo could transgress common conventions about race prejudice. But, the predominant social ideology is still trying to control the emotions of the individuals so as to preserve the traditional order. We have noticed this fact throughout the examination of the reactions of the community towards the non-conformist choices of the individuals.

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## **General conclusion:**

Throughout this research, we have tried to highlight the Renaissance themes in Shakespeare's Venetian plays *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. We have attempted to demonstrate the ambivalence of the Renaissance men and women as representative of the transitional mood of the Renaissance society. We have relied in our study on the New Historicist assumptions that put considerable emphasis on the importance of the historical context in the interpretation of literary texts. In addition, we have referred in our analysis of the plays into Edward Said's *Orientalism*.

We have started our study by introducing the general historical background for the Italian Renaissance aiming to explore the major aspects of the movement. As we have seen, the Italian Renaissance planted the seeds of individualism and humanism and started radical transformation in the social life. The change was incarnated in the new beliefs that the movement aimed to set as the principle foundations for a modern life as apposed to the precepts of the medieval epoch. It presented a reconsideration of the position of man in society and the universe as a whole, by stressing the dignity of man and the particularity of his personality. The Renaissance attracted attention to the notion of singularity in opposition to the medieval collective spirit. It instructed man about his individuality and freedom drawing him away from the communal collective identity. All the Renaissance ideals, as we have explained, were transported to England during the English Renaissance and became inherent in the English culture especially during the age of Shakespeare.

The general atmosphere of the Elizabethan Renaissance society in which William Shakespeare had written the majority of his plays, including *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, was characterized mainly by a growing

religious intolerance and anti-foreign feelings. The Elizabethans were increasingly willing to defend their English identity through defining it in opposition to those who were non-English. They excluded from the English society all the foreigners who exhibited difference in terms of religion, skin colour or behaviour. The Moors and the Jews constituted the main 'othered' people in the Elizabethan society. Despite these conditions, the Elizabethan era marked the rise of England as a powerful nation. Thanks to the spirit of openness, discovery and exploration that was encouraged by Queen Elizabeth I, the Elizabethans came into contact with different countries mainly Italy. The latter attracted the attention of the English thanks to its precedence in starting the Renaissance. The English grew fascinated by the fresh ideas and beliefs to which the Renaissance gave birth. As a result, the ideals of the Italian Renaissance became an integral part in the English Renaissance of the sixteenth century.

Having taken into consideration the Renaissance context of the plays, we have tried to examine Shakespeare's portrayal of the Renaissance woman/man. We have concluded that the Renaissance woman/man is not solely the individual who stands for subjectivity, individual will and self-interest but also the man/woman who is still living a traditional life with its social conventions. The Renaissance woman/man is in fact an ambivalent individual who possesses the traits of two opposed cultures, that of tradition and that of modernity. The Renaissance women and men, as depicted by Shakespeare, despite their acquired sense of individuality are still subjected to the traditional social conventions. They may be described as hybrid individuals in the sense that they embody both of the medieval traditional beliefs and the fresh modern ideas. They belong at the same time into two epochs that symbolize two cultures.

The Renaissance woman, though she moved some steps away from the typical traditional woman, remains unable to achieve a complete independent status. She is still linked to either father or husband and controlled by the communal laws of the patriarchal order. Similarly, Renaissance men, though in principle have a more privileged position, are not able to live and behave in terms of absolute individual freedom. They are obliged to conform to the social norms of behaviour in their community. Besides, speaking in broader terms, the individual is still identified in terms of the collective identity of race. The traits of individuality that the Renaissance considered as the standards of evaluation seem insufficient. Therefore, the sense of individuality, freedom and autonomy that historians, like Burckhardt, claimed for the individual of the Renaissance seem far from being set in reality.

In fact, our arguments about the persistent dependence of the individual, both man and woman, have been reinforced by examining the emotional side of the character of the Renaissance woman/man. Taking into consideration the predominant ideological social conventions about racial difference, we have examined the relationships that bind together the characters who belong into different races. By analysing their feelings, we have found out that the individual attitudes about the 'racial other' are most of the time shaped by the established social beliefs. The individual who is supposed to believe on the specificity of individual identity fails to regard the 'racial other' in terms of individuality. He succeeds, instead, to bear for the 'other' a strong hatred activated by the common attitudes. As such, the achievement of an autonomous status and the development of the acquired sense of individuality are rendered impossible by the strength of the conventional codes. The Renaissance

woman/man remains in a constant struggle with the dictates of the established social order.

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## Résumé :

Notre thèse s'intitule « La représentation de la femme/homme de la Renaissance dans les pièces de William Shakespeare *Le Marchant de Venise* et *Othello* ». Elle a pour objectif l'exploration des thèmes majeurs de la Renaissance à travers les pièces théâtrales de William Shakespeare *Le Marchant de Venise* (1596) et *Othello* (1603). Elle vise à examiner la représentation de la femme et de l'homme de la Renaissance à travers les principaux personnages vénitiens. Pour mener notre étude, nous nous appuyons sur les hypothèses théoriques de « New Historicism » qui soulignent l'importance du contexte social, historique et culturel dans l'étude et l'interprétation des textes littéraires. En effet, le contexte de la Renaissance détermine en grande partie la représentation dramatique des femmes et des hommes de cette époque. Nous avons divisé notre travail en trois chapitres. Le premier est consacré à l'historique général qui représente une étape nécessaire pour cette analyse. Nous avons introduit les principaux aspects de la Renaissance italienne en se concentrant sur la nouvelle philosophie de l'humanisme et l'individualisme avec sa nouvelle perception de l'Homme. Puis, nous avons donné un aperçu de l'époque élisabéthaine/ Shakespearienne en Angleterre, dont on manifeste l'intérêt anglais pour la Renaissance italienne. Dans le deuxième chapitre, nous avons examiné la femme/homme de la Renaissance en tant que représentant des thèmes divergents de cette nouvelle époque : la subjectivité, la volonté individuelle, l'indépendance, l'intérêt personnel, la tradition, les liens communautaires, et les conventions sociales. Dans le troisième chapitre, nous avons examiné la vie émotionnelle de l'individu par rapport aux conventions sociales qui prévalent sur la différence raciale. Enfin, nous avons conclu que l'Homme de la Renaissance vis dans un état de « inbetweeness ». Les femmes et les hommes de l'époque étudiée incarnent les attitudes et les pensées ambivalentes de la période transitoire. Par conséquent, l'Homme de la Renaissance ne peut jamais être identifié comme individu transgressant des impositions de la vie collective organique.

## ملخص

تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلي عرض و استكشاف المقاصد و المواضيع الإجمالية لعصر النهضة الاروبية من خلال تجلياتها في مسرحيتي وليام شكسبير (William Shakespeare) تاجر البندقية (*The Merchant of Venice*) (1596) وعطيل *Othello* (1603) حيث نسع من خلال هذا العرض إلي دراسة كيفية تقديم وتصوير شكسبير للمرأة/الجل المنتسب إلي عصر النهضة وهذا عبر الشخصيات التي يعرضها في مسرحيته. من اجل تحقيق مسعانا اعتمدنا أساسيا علي ما تنص عليه النظرية التاريخية الجديدة (New Historicism) من أهمية معالجة العمل الأدبي كعمل يمثل المرحلة التاريخية التي كتب فيها. لقد تطرفنا في الفصل الأول إلي عرض شامل ل"الزمان" أو السياق المتعلق بالمدونتين وصاحبهما ولقد أخذنا بعين الاعتبار الظروف التي انبعثت فيها النهضة في ايطاليا بالإضافة إلي أهم مبادئها الإنسانية المتعلقة بحرية الفرد رجلا كان أو امرأة كما أننا عرضنا الظروف الاجتماعية التاريخية والثقافية لعصر شكسبير (Elizabethan England). في الفصل الثاني سعيانا إلي عرض أهم المواضيع المتمثلة في الاستقلالية الحرة الفردية، مبدأ المصلحة الذاتية، الروابط الاجتماعية والتقاليد التي تعبر عنها الشخصيات. في الفصل الثالث والأخير ركزنا اهتمامنا علي الحياة العاطفية للشخصيات الرئيسية مع التركيز علي اثر الاتفاقيات الاجتماعية السائدة حول الاختلاف العنصري والعرق. وأخيرا استنتجنا أن المرأة والرجل أو عموما الفرد في عصر النهضة الاروبية يجسد المواضيع المتناقضة التي هي ميزة المرحلة الانتقالية من ثقافة العصور الوسطي إلي الثقافة الجديدة ونظرا لهذا فلنستطيع أن نعتبر انه في حالة من الحرية و الاستقلالية التامة فهو في معظم الأحيان يمثل لمقتضيات الحياة العضوية و يعرف بهوية مشتركة للمجتمع والعرق الذي ينتمي إليه.