

Humanistic Characterization Yet Unattainable Miscegenation: A Contrapuntal Reading of Shakespeare's Humanism

Lina Saleh* 

Department of English Language and Literature, Salt Faculty of Human Sciences, Al-Balqa Applied University, Jordan.

Received: 11/3/2022
Revised: 28/9/2022
Accepted: 1/11/2022
Published: 30/10/2023

* Corresponding author:
lina.saleh@bau.edu.jo

Citation: Saleh, L. . (2023).
Humanistic Characterization Yet
Unattainable Miscegenation: A
Contrapuntal Reading of
Shakespeare's Humanism. *Dirasat:
Human and Social Sciences*, 50(5),
333–346.
<https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v50i5.798>

Abstract

Objectives: This study proposes a contrapuntal reading for the Oriental/Western interracial marriages in William Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. It aims to show that Edward Said's postmodern humanism provides intriguing insights which challenge the mainstream interpretations implied by Renaissance humanism.

Methods: The study deconstructs the point-counterpoint structure in the aforesaid plays to acknowledge the feasibility of different interpretations for the Oriental discourse using Said's postmodern humanism. It compares and contrasts Shakespeare's Renaissance humanism with Said's understanding of postmodern humanism to show that the latter underscores the necessity of inclusion and the triumphant integration of the Oriental in Western societies. The study opens the Shakespearean texts to new interpretations by examining their humanistic inclinations vis-à-vis postmodern humanism which puts its philosophical stances into effective practice in order to influence the global imagination, empower the "Other" and entail ideological change.

Results: Shakespeare's humanism mitigates his Orientalism but does not reverse the stereotypical representation of the "Other" as an individual with exotic cultural background who fails to have a normal relationship with a Western spouse. Shakespeare's latent advocacy of the stereotypical representation of the "Other" becomes manifest in the outcome of the marriage relationship with the Oriental. The cultural barrier hampers the successful union between the Oriental and the Westerner; accordingly, Shakespeare portrays this relationship as either tragic or comic.

Conclusion: The final conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that Shakespeare's mainstream Renaissance humanism informs his characterization, yet it does not reverse Oriental stereotypes nor does it condone miscegenation, if approached in the light of the tents of postmodern humanism.

Keywords: shakespeare, renaissance humanism, orientalism; Edward Said's humanism, miscegenation.

التشخيص الإنساني وتعذر اختلاط الأجناس: قراءة طباقية لنزعة شكسبير الإنسانية

لينا صالح*

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها، كلية السلط للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة البلقاء التطبيقية، الأردن

ملخص

الأهداف: تقدم الدراسة قراءة طباقية (كونترا بونتالية) لاختلاط الأجناس من خلال زواج الشرقي بالغربي في مسرحيات وليام شكسبير: عطيل، أنطونيوكليوباترة، و تاجر البندقية. وتهدف إلى أن توضح بأن النزعة الإنسانية في فترة ما بعد الحداثة بالنسبة لإدوارد سعيد تقدم رؤى مثيرة تتحدى تفسيرات الاتجاه السائد .

المنهجية: تفكك الدراسة البنية الطباقية في المسرحيات المذكورة وتقر بأمكانية وجود تفسيرات مختلفة للخطاب الاستشراقي مستخدمة نزعة سعيد الإنسانية في فترة ما بعد الحداثة. تقارن الدراسة نزعة شكسبير الإنسانية في عصر النهضة مع فهم سعيد لإنسانية ما بعد الحداثة حيث تؤكد الأخيرة على ضرورة التكامل والشمول المنتصر للشخصية الشرقية في المجتمعات الغربية. تستنبط الدراسة التفسيرات الجديدة للنصوص الشكسبيرية عن طريق تمحيص ميولها الإنسانية بمواجهة النزعة الإنسانية في فترة ما بعد الحداثة والتي تحول موقفها الفلسفي إلى ممارسات فاعلة تؤدي إلى التأثير في الخيال العالمي وتمكين الآخر وتفرض تغييراً أيديولوجياً .

النتائج: تخفف نزعة شكسبير الإنسانية من استشرافه لكنها لا تعكس الصورة النمطية لـ "الآخر" كفرد ذو خلفية ثقافية غربية تسبب بفشله في الحصول على علاقة طبيعية مع الزوج الغربي. يتجلى تكريس شكسبير الكامن للتمثيل النمطي لـ "الآخر" في نتيجة الزواج من الشرقي. يعيق الحاجز الثقافي الاتحاد الناجح بين الشرقي والغربي ووفقاً لذلك يصور شكسبير هذه العلاقة على أنها إما مأساوية أو كوميدية.

الخلاصة: الاستنتاج النهائي الذي يمكن استخلاصه هو أن نزعة شكسبير الإنسانية المتماشية مع التيار السائد لعصر النهضة هي التي تحدد توصيفه للشخصيات، ومع ذلك فإنه لا يعكس الصورة النمطية الشرقية ولا يتغاضى عن تمازج الأجناس إذا جرى تحليل هذه النزعة في ضوء مبادئ النزعة الإنسانية في فترة ما بعد الحداثة.

الكلمات الدالة: شكسبير، في عصر النهضة، الاستشراق، الإنسانية عند إدوارد سعيد، تمازج الأجناس.



© 2023 DSR Publishers/ The University of Jordan.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC) license
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Introduction

The greatness of William Shakespeare's (1564-1616) works resides in the fact that they lend themselves to a wide array of critical approaches proving their time-enduring quality and abundance of meanings. Though many centuries separate the time when Shakespeare produced his dramatic output and the advent of postmodern critical theories, these approaches provide new insights about his works and bring forth previously unexplored dimensions in his plays. Edward Said's (1935-2003) *Orientalism* is a case in point. In the words of Leslie G. Roman, "[w]hat is most movingly profound about the impact of the critique offered in *Orientalism* is its ability to speak almost prophetically in different ways to different historical times" (Roman 2006, 362). Said's notions of the West's imaginary dichotomy between the Orient and the Occident and the stereotypical representation of the Oriental based on binary oppositions in favor of the Westerner certainly find their resonance in Shakespeare's plays. One can definitely trace an Oriental discourse in these plays which constitutes a significant feature worthy of close investigation. In "Post-Colonialism in Shakespeare work," Alina Popa believes that "there is more to say about the connection between Shakespearean works and postcolonialism, as he became, during the colonial period, the heart of Englishness and a measure of humankind itself. The contents of Shakespeare's plays were derived from and used to establish colonial authority" (2013, 94). Several scholars have already explored the Oriental aspects in Shakespearean drama. The scholarship on Shakespeare's *Orientalism* revolves around two focal points. The first point is that his plays project an image of the Orient as an exotic, remote, and far-fetched place that is antithetical to the West. Shakespeare's allusions to the Arab culture and specific Eastern sites reflect an East/West dichotomy that goes beyond the geographical differences and encompasses the cultural variances between two polar opposites. The second important aspect of Shakespeare's *Orientalism* resides in his depiction of the Oriental as "Other" who is portrayed as being the inferior opposite of the Westerner. Critics have evaluated the stereotypical representation of the Oriental in Shakespeare's drama differently. Some are of the view that Shakespeare's Oriental characters are stereotypically molded according to the prevalent prototypes which misrepresent them as inferior "Others." In "The Oriental in Shakespeare," Mahmoud Al-Shetawi traces the misrepresentations of Jews, Moors, and Turks in Shakespeare's works in general and in *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* in particular. Al-Shetawi argues that "the Jew is characteristically drawn as cunning, vindictive and greedy; the Moor as foolish, rash and instinctively savage; and the Turk as barbarous, cruel and menacing...they are collectively portrayed as outsiders whose values and character conflict with Renaissance thinking and temperament" (Al-Shetawi 1998, 311).

On the other hand, some analyze Shakespeare's Oriental characters within the framework of Renaissance humanism. In this vein of analysis, these characters are sometimes considered as distinctive individuals rather than stereotyped "Others." Abdullah Al-Dabbagh recognizes two important features in Shakespeare's *Orientalism*: "his predilection for reversing stereotypes and his sympathy and identification with the outsider, and the "Other," in addition to "the philosophic underpinning of such works [as] a special expression of Renaissance humanism that transcends in this case the boundaries of class, race and culture" (Al-Dabbagh 2010, 3). Interestingly, Al-Dabbagh also cites *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Merchant of Venice* as examples of Shakespeare's reversal of Oriental stereotypes due to his advocacy of Renaissance humanism. This intriguing critical controversy about Shakespeare's representation of the Orient and Orientals reflects the multifaceted nature of his texts.

This study approaches Shakespeare's *Orientalism* contrapuntally in order to show that the changing meaning of humanism in the postmodern era has yielded new insights regarding his representation of Oriental characters. It distinguishes between the abstract philosophical stances of Renaissance humanism and the political aspirations of Said's postmodern humanism. Shakespeare's adherence to mainstream humanism mitigates the inferiority of other races but it does not change their reality nor does it condone miscegenation. The failure of the Oriental's attempt to establish a harmonious relationship with the Westerner exposes Shakespeare's latent belief in the impossibility of interracial marriages and debunks the claim of some scholars that he reversed stereotypes. It also attests to the limitations of Renaissance humanism which acknowledges the humanity of the Other but does not empower him as an individual. Thus, the study concludes that Shakespeare's humanistic characterization does not align with Said's postmodern understanding of

humanism which emphasizes the necessity of inclusion and social integration; moreover, the study shows that Shakespeare's characterization does not meet the political expectations of Said's humanism which aspires to positively affect the global imagination about interracial relations, change ideologies, and promote for harmony and tolerance.

The aforesaid plays notably share the presence of an Oriental character who encounters the Western culture within the context of love or marriage. They also have in common the fact that East/West relationship through love and marriage proves to be a total failure if not catastrophic. Shakespeare aptly uses these two particular kinds of human relationships so as to closely depict the innate characteristics of the Oriental as an individual in a cultural encounter with the Westerner. Shakespeare vividly portrays the backgrounds of these characters as being remote places surrounded with exotic traditions and rituals. From a postcolonial perspective, these racially charged human encounters serve Shakespeare's latent Eurocentric humanist agenda since they prove the superiority of the Westerners and emphasize the otherness and subalternity of Oriental characters through the unattainability of miscegenation. In *Othello*, the interracial marriage is portrayed as "an act of racial adulteration, violating the natural laws" (Michael Neill qtd. in Boyer 2015: 188). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare depicts the royal marriage as a military victory where Antony's conquest of Egypt includes his subjugation of Cleopatra's body (Boyer 2015, 198). In *The Merchant of Venice*, the sheer possibility of miscegenation evokes the prejudgments and the racial prejudices of Portia who associates dark complexion with the Devil (Harrington 2017, 54).

Approach: Contrapuntal Reading

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said proposes his contrapuntal method for approaching colonial texts. He borrows a musical concept where a point and an opposing counterpoint work together to create a harmonious whole; therefore, these independent melodic lines are inevitably interconnected. Saidian contrapuntal method of analysis goes beyond the traditional and mainstream understanding of texts in order to examine the texts' underpinnings and to reveal the suppressed discourses. In his opinion, reading a colonial text contrapuntally requires "a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts" (1993:59). Moreover, he emphasizes the significance of the critic's awareness of the presence and the interdependency of dominant and suppressed narratives in these texts by saying that

We must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them coexisting and interacting with others (Said 1993, 36).

Subsequently, employing the contrapuntal approach brings about the silenced histories offered in the text and juxtaposes them with the text's dominant meaning; Said believes that contrapuntal reading "must take account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of texts to include what was once forcibly excluded" (1993: 79).

In the words of R. Radhakrishnan "The point-counterpoint structure opens up the text to a lively debate between opposing points of view that converge dialogically around the same text" (Radhakrishnan 2012, 25). Thus, this article aims to approach these plays contrapuntally in order to show that the changing meaning of humanism in the postmodern era has yielded new interpretations for Shakespeare's characterization of Orientals. Within the framework of humanism and postcolonial studies, the article examines the plays' accommodation of multiple legitimate meanings depending on the changing implications of humanism as a developing critical concept. It contends that Shakespeare does not reverse stereotypes (as some critics argued) and that he is against miscegenation. It also suggests that Shakespeare's adaptation of his sources and especially the characterization of the Oriental were meant to serve dramatic purposes. These goals are achieved through comparing and contrasting Shakespeare's conceptualization of mainstream Renaissance humanism with Said's postmodern understanding of the same philosophy. The study underscores that humanism is a dynamic philosophy which underwent considerable changes throughout the past centuries proving that it is not a static ontological construct.

Critical Concepts:

a. Renaissance Humanism and Orientalism

Undoubtedly, secular humanism had a clear impact on the spirit of the Renaissance. This intellectual movement revived the interest in Classical antiquity and focused on the promotion of civic virtue. Isabel Rivers defines Renaissance humanism as “a view of life which displaces God and puts man at the centre” (qtd. in Mousley 2015, 19). Rivers bases her definition on the nature of the prevalent mode of education during the Renaissance, *Studia humanitatis*. These studies shifted the focus from medieval religious interests to secular matters. They thoroughly evaluated human character, behavior, and abilities. According to these humanists, Jonathan Dollimore believes that the individual became “the origin and focus of meaning” (qtd. in Mousley 2015, 15). In that vein, Andrew Mousley describes Renaissance humanism as “the unprecedented source of individualism” and “a key agent in its development” (2015, 16).

The growing interest in man and the belief in his worth and potentiality are quite manifest in the literary works of that era. Shakespearean drama is not exempt from the influence of Renaissance humanism. Mousley argues that “Renaissance texts and Renaissance humanists can be and have been enlisted on behalf of *mainstream humanism*” (2015, 16 italics added). Shakespeare’s characterization attests to his interest in depicting innate personal feelings and aspirations. His plays host a wide spectrum of distinctive individuals who exercise their humanity in various situations, tragic and sometimes comic. From the perspective of mainstream humanism, Shakespeare’s humanistic characterization does not seem to be exclusively Eurocentric since it encompasses individuals of other ethnic backgrounds such as Moors (Othello), Jews (Shylock), and Egyptians (Cleopatra).

Critics are prone to commend Shakespeare’s global humanism and his openness to other cultures. Looking at him through the lens of mainstream humanism of the Renaissance, he is deservedly appreciated for his wide Knowledge and vivid portrayal of other nations, peoples, and customs from different parts of the world. No doubt that Shakespeare’s depiction of other cultures is marked by praiseworthy tolerance and understanding of other cultures. However, the idea that he reversed medieval Oriental stereotypes in his drama because of the overwhelming influence of Renaissance humanism is a claim that needs verification. A close investigation of Shakespeare’s characterization of the Oriental in *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Merchant of Venice* is bound to reveal counterpoints in his texts. It is true that Shakespeare maintains a humanistic perspective in dealing with these characters but a thorough textual scrutiny unravels the author’s racial undertones. Adjacent to the humanistic portrait of Othello, Cleopatra, Shylock, and the Prince of Morocco there lurks Shakespeare’s latent belief in the superiority of the Western culture.

It is important to highlight the fact that Orientalism was in vogue during the Renaissance. Incorporating Oriental elements within literary works in general and drama in particular performed a pervasive motif in the legacy of Jacobean and Elizabethan literature. In the words of Tahar Bayouli, “The representation of the Orient on the Elizabethan stage is also linked to and informed by a flourishing travel literature that increased the interest in and fascination with the Eastern world” (Bayouli 2009, 110). Shakespeare and his contemporaries were inspired by Oriental travelogues which fired their imagination with vivid images about new lands and peoples formerly alien to the British. Such images catered for the Renaissance English people’s taste who craved for further self knowledge as well as they craved for exploring the world around them. They were interested in the Orient as the cradle for Islamic culture and the source of Turkish conquests. Accordingly, the employment of Orientalism in drama satisfied a wide public appeal during the Renaissance.

The Orient represented a rich repertoire of raw materials of writers which included fascinating landscapes and prototypical Orientals. Bayouli states “[a] Turkish Sultan, a Moorish prince or a Mongolian warrior made a particularly interesting stage hero” (Bayouli 2009, 115). The interesting point that Bayouli raises in this article pertains to the fact that he tries to distinguish the Orientalism of Elizabethan drama from medieval and from eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Orientalism. He bases this distinction on the influence of Renaissance humanism as a philosophical and cultural movement on the literary output of that era. He remarks “[t]he evocation of the Orient in the plays of Marlowe, Greville and Shakespeare shows humanism in the sense that they comprehend a profound message on the unity of humanity beyond the divisions that must not necessarily separate and oppose” (Bayouli 2009, 126). Therefore, Shakespeare’s characterization of Orientals is in

accord with what Mousley terms as “mainstream Renaissance humanism” (2015, 16) which is marked by openness to other cultures and which seemingly exonerates Renaissance humanists from Eurocentrism. However, a postmodern humanist approach to the same texts would yield counter arguments to the mainstream interpretation; it exposes the Eurocentric aspects in these works and reveals the embedded inclinations of the author.

b. Said’s Posmodern Humanism

In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* which was published posthumously, Said devotes the second chapter of his book to discuss how the meaning of humanism underwent several changes in the twentieth century. The main drift of his argument in this chapter which he titles “The Changing Bases of Humanistic Study and Practice” is that the fundamental change of this enduring philosophy should be in its practice. He observes “the humanities and humanism are constitutively in need of revision, rethinking and revitalization. Once they mummify into tradition, they cease to be what they really are and become instruments of veneration and repression” (Said 2004, 32). Thus, Said’s insists that deeming humanism an abstract philosophy is reductive since it underestimates its ability to inspire ideological change once theory is put into effective political practice.

Fernando Sua’rezMu’ller explains Said’s postmodern understanding of humanism by claiming that Said’s

later thinking is not just characterized by a rediscovery of humanism, it is also marked by a positive foundation of the normative dimension of humanism. Critical thought cannot be restricted to the identification of certain mechanisms of power that obstruct and disturb the development of man; it also has to reveal a positive value or dimension of humanity carrying an ‘objective validity claim’ Sua’rezMu’ller 2014, 477

Evidently, Said believes that the focal interest of twenty-first century humanism goes beyond the mere recognition of the hegemonic practices which suppress marginalized groups. Said’s humanism has a wider scope since it aspires to transcend the philosophical and the theoretical stance. Stephen Chatelier clarifies the role of humanism:

As soon as a critique of humanism presumes a static “naturalized” existence, this critique fails to grasp the dynamic nature of humanism. This is not to say that we can completely avoid using language that suggests fixity or something ontological, but we can try to examine humanism not only philosophically but also with a keener awareness of its cultural politics. (Chatelier 2017, 659)

As such, Said’s humanism has cultural implications which should influence the global imagination. Said’s humanism does not only aim at exposing the cultural complicities which throw certain races into the periphery; it rather intends for this exposure to entail political intervention which empowers oppressed humans. This is where his post-humanism diverges from Renaissance humanism.

Humanism between Theory and Praxis in *Othello*

In his play *Othello, the Moor of Venice* (1604), Shakespeare was inspired by Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinthio’s prose story about an anonymous Moor in his *Hecatommithi* (1565). Shakespeare’s play takes several departures from the French translation of the original Italian story. Shakespeare’s adaptations greatly humanize Othello and magnify his status as an unmatched military general. Unlike Cinthio’s Moor who is arrested, tortured, exiled, and eventually killed to punish him for murdering Desdemona, Shakespeare’s Othello commits a memorable and dignified suicide. Cinthio’s ending relegates the Moor to an ignoble cowardly murderer. Shakespeare’s adaptations of the original plot intentionally humanize Othello to align with mainstream Renaissance humanism and to serve a certain dramatic goal of his play. This goal can be tersely summarized as producing a topical play which appeals to the Elizabethan taste which was saturated with humanism. Ferial J. Ghazoul argues “in *Othello*, Shakespeare does not simply present a portrait of an individual Moor in Venice; he presents a portrait of intercultural relations as conceived by an English Renaissance artist...” (Ghazoul 1998, 2).

Shakespeare’s interest in Cinthio’s story has been the subject of different interpretations. A. C. Bradley observes that, unlike Shakespeare’s other tragedies, “...*Othello* is a drama of modern life; when it first appeared it was a drama almost of contemporary life, for the date of the Turkish attack on Cyprus is 1570” (Bradley 1960, 146). It is true that the Turkish threat to Cyprus was part of Shakespeare’s play; nonetheless his dramatic concern was not to explore this particular historical

event. He was more interested in exploring the character of the Moor, whom he names Othello. Shakespeare wanted to dramatize the tragedy of this mercenary general and his ill-fated marriage to a Venetian lady. The modernity of *Othello*'s subject matter, which Bradley refers to, pertains to the fact that it was a general European inclination to hire mercenary soldiers in wars. Gilbert John Millar explains in his article "The Albanians: Sixteenth-Century Mercenaries" that:

If one reads the military history of the sixteenth century, an obvious fact emerges—that few wars were ever waged on a large scale without reliance upon mercenary troops. The latter were drawn from many sources. Indeed, there was virtually no nationality that did not, at one time or another, provide its quota of professional soldiers of fortune. (Millar 1976, 468)

Recent research yielded sufficient evidence of the existence of black mercenaries in the English military of the sixteenth century. According to Imtiaz Habib, such evidence was drawn from parish records of All Hallows and the paintings of Kim Hall who "has furnished proof of domesticated blacks among the English aristocracy, in the numerous portraits of Tudor and Stuart nobility that show blacks as exotic menials" (Habib 1998, 18). Thus, Habib believes that "Shakespeare's *Othello* should be considered not just in the light of traditional sources for the play (such as Cinthio) but also in the contexts of black military service in Tudor armies and generally, of the unacknowledged blacks of sixteenth century England" (Habib 1998, 15). Definitely, Shakespeare's employment of the Oriental Moor endows the love tragedy with an attractive spell that appeals to his audience.

In the words of Onyeka Nubia, "by the beginning of the Tudor period until 1603 Africans in Tudor England seemed to be free to determine their status in the same way as other people. African people's status was not restricted by government legislation or policy. It was in the 'private sphere' of English society that status was determined. (2016, 38). The opening scenes of the play have the double function of establishing the grandeur of Othello's character as a military general and of foregrounding the fact that he is socially rejected as an exotic person who belongs to a different world. The views of Iago, Brabantio, and the Duke about Othello in the first three scenes of the first act reflect this discrepancy. Iago presents the first introduction of Othello through his speech with Roderigo. He speaks of him as an adamant decision-maker. However, the language and the images Iago and Roderigo use to describe Othello "draws on racist stereotypes in its categorisation of Othello as bestial and subhuman" (Mousley 2007, 46). They portray him as a black outsider who deprives Iago from a position he deserves and Roderigo from the woman whom he loves. Othello's lack of identity in the Venetian society manifests itself in the fact that Iago and Roderigo refer to him as the Moor rather than using his name. Othello is denied his individuality. His "menial" status, to borrow Habib's term, equates Othello with what he does rather than with who he truly is. His services define his identity in Venice. Roderigo says, "What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe/ If he can carry't thus!" (Bevington 1997, 1.1.68-9). Roderigo's remark suggests that a black Moor like Othello is not entitled to enjoy the privilege of marrying a beautiful Venetian lady of a high rank as Desdemona, in spite of his high military position.

In addition to that, Iago's intrigue for Brabantio purposefully emphasizes Othello's Moorish background whom he describes as "a Barbary horse" (Bevington 1997, 1.1.114); this dehumanizes Othello and relegates him to a hired foreigner of inferior status. Caroline Spurgeon argues that "The main image in *Othello* is that of animals in action," and that "More than half the animal images in the play are Iago's, and all these are contemptuous or repellent" (Spurgeon 1966, 335). The animal imagery Iago uses to describe Othello's marriage to Desdemona deliberately confines their relationship to a grotesque sexual intercourse in a way that infuriates Desdemona's father with anger and disgust, and debases Othello to a lustful usurping animal. These images unmistakably focus on Othello's black color and Moorish race. Iago howls to Brabantio:

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise!
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.
(Bevington 1997, 1.1.90-3)

The image of "an old black ram" violating a "white ewe" derives its force not only from the repugnant bestial sexual act but also from the contrast between black and white. Color imagery used in this scene and in other scenes underscore an

unnatural union of two polar opposites, things which are not meant to be together. They naturally exist to reflect difference and contrast rather than being combined or united.

Brabantio's response to the appalling news of his daughter's marriage to the Moor indicates the glaring difference between the abstract notions of Renaissance humanism and Said's politicized humanism. Brabantio is the father figure in the play who represents the Venetian culture or civilization. Hence, he plays a significant role in Shakespeare's adapted plot. Brabantio mentions that this marriage resembles a dream that he had previously. The panic which takes hold of him proves that the marriage symbolizes the nightmarish projection of his darkest fears. He immediately orders, "Strike on the tinder, ho! / Give me a taper! Call up all my people!" (Bevington 1997, 1.1.144-5). Once he encounters Othello, he accuses him of casting a spell on his daughter and using magic to seduce her. Brabantio avers that magic is the only logical explanation for such a situation that he describes to be "Against all rules of nature" (Bevington 1997, 1.3.98-103). Bevington argues that "we as audience can perceive the racial bias in Brabantio's view and can recognize also in him the type of imperious father who conventionally opposes romantic love. It is sadly ironic that he should now prefer Roderigo as a son-in-law, evidently concluding that any white Venetian would be preferable to the prince of blacks" (Bevington 1997, 1118). Brabantio's prejudice which targets Othello's race points fingers at the inability of the Venetian culture to genuinely tolerate the Other. Apparently, Renaissance humanism fails in establishing the "dialogical communities" Said aspires for and which can function "within politically and historically grounded, as opposed to ahistorical and abstracted, philosophical stances;" the Venetian society does not "embrace the complexities of peoples coexisting peacefully" regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. (Roman 2006, 360).

Othello trespasses the Venetian conventions and violates Brabantio's hospitality by trying to transcend the professional mercenary sphere and by aspiring for complete assimilation into the Venetian society. Brabantio considers such a marriage as a hired foreigner's transgression that should be taken seriously by the Duke and the senators. The matter involves national risks as well as domestic ones. He warns them "For if such actions may have passage free, / Bond slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be" (Bevington 1997, 1.2.97-101). In spite of that, Othello manages to retain his positive image when he explains the circumstances of his marriage to the Duke. His character in this particular situation is marked by poise, confidence, and charm.

In this scene, Shakespeare humanizes Othello by focusing on the emotional and mental capacities of the Oriental. The Oriental seems to be the Westerner's peer in his ability to love passionately and to argue logically. Examined contrapuntally, Othello's confidence is based on external factors rather than on innate characteristics in his personality. Desdemona's infatuation with him as a lover and the Duke's pressing need for his services as a soldier grant him solid ground to stand on. He gets scot-free on the charge of elopement with a high-ranked Venetian woman because of the testimony of Desdemona and the leniency of the Duke. The support of the Westerner rescues Othello from retribution. In the scene where Brabantio explains to the Duke his domestic catastrophe, the characters have symbolic cultural roles. Brabantio stands for the Venetian culture which is violated and even corrupted by a black Moor. His furious and indignant behavior reflects the rejection of Othello as an equal Venetian citizen, a Christian, or even an equal human being. The Duke represents the state's urgent need for Othello's military expertise regardless of his cultural background. To him, he was one of those Africans who "were known for their fighting prowess and used by European armies as expeditionary leaders or mercenaries in difficult or dangerous campaigns" (Habib 1998, 16). He adopts a mitigated judgment of the Moor's marriage to a Venetian lady and says, "I think this tale would win my daughter too" (Bevington 1997, 1.3.173). Then he turns to Brabantio and advises him to "Take up this mangled matter at the best" (Bevington 1997, 174-5). Desdemona, on the other hand, symbolizes the Venetians' enchantment with the exotic Moor. Her true love to him transcends the cultural differences and she eagerly succumbs to the temptation. She admits her love and exonerates him from her father's accusation of theft.

Othello's elopement with Desdemona clearly depicts his awareness of his liminal cultural and political status in the Venetian society which allows him only limited access and conditioned privileges. Ania Loomba perceptively describes the cultural liminality of Othello and the fragile boundaries between communities in Venice by saying that

On Shakespearean and other early modern stages, the outsider is not safely 'outside' at all – like the older figure of the

wild man, he or she threatens to cross over the boundaries of racial or ethnic or religious difference. Othello is not simply an alien who crosses over by marrying Desdemona, he is also the exotic outsider who alone is capable of defending Venice against other outsiders such as the Turks. (qtd. in Mousley 2015, 48)

Othello's situation replicates the status of black Moors in Tudor England whose philosophical stance on humanism is not translated into political actions which protect the civic rights of blacks in Western societies. Nubia's declaration that "African people's status was not restricted by government legislation or policy" (2016, 38) can be interpreted as an act of deliberate political negligence and marginalization. Moreover, Nubia thoroughly investigates letters written in 1596 and a proclamation drafted in 1601 attributed to Queen Elizabeth who felt dissatisfied with the growing African population on English lands and wished to deport them "as if they were slaves" (2016, 11). The "Proclamation and the Letters were certainly not sufficiently cogent legal instruments to mainstream colour or racial prejudice into English jurisprudence" (Nubia 2016, 37), and they "did not achieve the deportation of any Africans" (Nubia 2016, 23). Although the Proclamation remained a draft and was never executed, Nubia does not mention that any counter legal actions were taken to preserve the rights of black Moors in Tudor English society. This exemplifies the limitations of Renaissance humanism which does not prescribe any "political intervention" to govern human relations.

Othello deliberately challenges Venetian social conventions when he marries Desdemona without the consent of her father. Habib interprets Othello's need to marry Desdemona from a postcolonial perspective. To understand her viewpoint, one has to consider Othello as someone who is culturally colonized by the Venetian civilization. The wars he is hired to fight in mean nothing to him. He does not belong to the Venetian society nor does he fight for a cause. He is being used by the Venetians as a tool to fulfill a certain mission. Adopting the postcolonial terminology, Habib argues that Othello's marriage to a Venetian woman represents the colonized alien's dream of possession of the colonizer's woman, [and] the disprivileged black's ultimate ambition of sexual equality with the white man" (Habib 1998, 23). Othello's marriage to a Venetian lady means to him the complete assimilation into the Venetian society. The subjection of Desdemona sexually symbolizes the subjection of the civilization she represents. A proposal to her father would have never granted him this satisfaction. The moment Brabantio knows of his daughter's willful approval of the marriage, he abruptly disowns her. Without the slightest quiver of remorse, he considers her dead and changes the subject. It is not disgrace that wrecks Brabantio's heart; after all, Desdemona gets officially married. It is the horror of her marriage to a black Moor that kills him.

Miscegenation exposes Shakespeare's Eurocentric humanism. In the play, the social encounter with the Oriental proves his emotional and intellectual inferiority. On the emotional level, Othello's entire existence seems to hinge upon Desdemona's love. He compares her to the "fountain" from which he derives life:

But there where I have garnered up my heart,
Where either I must live or bear no life,
The fountain from which my current runs
Or else dries up....
(Bevington 1997, 4.2.59-62)

Desdemona's love makes him complete and balanced but dependant. Her influence on him resides in her ability to appease "the conflict in him between the past and the present, the remote and the local, the free and the confined" (Doren 1953, 192). On the intellectual level, Iago's superior mental abilities enable him to manipulate Othello's emotions. The shrewd villain is aware of the fact that beneath Othello's calm exterior there lurks a turbulent ocean of wild emotions which, stereotypically, reflect his Moorish race; he stirs Othello's emotions and forcefully steers them to his desired end. He knows that "Emotion excites [Othello's] imagination, but it confuses and dulls his intellect" (Bradley 1960, 154).

Pertinent to the argument of this paper is to discuss how Othello's jealousy turns into a destructive power which brings to the surface the cultural gaps between Othello and Desdemona and ultimately leads them to their inevitable doom. Othello's jealousy takes complete hold of his senses. Iago's poison obsesses his mind with filthy images of his wife's infidelity. The success of Iago's intrigue of Othello echoes his intrigue of Brabantio at the beginning of the play. Again

with Othello, Iago targets his color and race. Like magic, they accomplish Iago's mission. Even more shocking, Iago insinuates that Desdemona's preference of a black man to her Venetian suitors indicates her perverse nature. Thus, Othello bids "the tranquil mind" and "content" farewell (Bevington 1997, 3.3.364). Jealousy and suspicion shatter Othello's and Desdemona's marriage. They become alienated from each other. Othello admits, "Perdition catch my soul / But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, Chaos is come again" (Bevington 1997, 3.3.98-100). Desdemona's love is Othello's anchor. Without her love, he lacks peace, tranquility, and content. He returns to the chaos and the perplexity he experienced prior to her love because he loses his sense of belonging to the Venetian society.

Mark van Doren argues that "The jungle in Othello is ever enemy to his garden" (Doren 1953, 201). Doren rightly believes that what destroy Othello's happiness are intrinsic traits in his personality. If we think of Othello's *hamartia*, we will conclude that it is his decision to kill Desdemona. However, the person who takes this decision is "this magnificent human being who is turned by Iago into chaos, into a beast" (Spencer 1942, 130).

Cultural differences which bring Othello and Desdemona together so romantically at the beginning of the play separate them so tragically at its end. Desdemona becomes a Venetian moral enigma to her husband. He says, "O curse of marriage, / That we can call these delicate creatures ours/ And not their appetites" (Bevington 1997, 3.3.284-6). Bradley explains Othello's predicament by saying that "he is not an Italian, nor even a European; that he is totally ignorant of the thoughts and customary morality of Venetian women; that he had himself seen in Desdemona's deception of her father how perfect an actress she could be" (Bradley 1960, 157). Thus, the possibility of her loose morality regarding marital fidelity tortures him. He becomes pathetically haunted by foul and filthy images of her sin.

In equal perplexity, Desdemona finds herself puzzled by her husband's attitude towards her. He suddenly becomes a stranger whom she cannot understand. This is quite manifest when he strikes her in public for no clear reason. His obscure anger does not change her feelings towards him. Desdemona tries to find excuses for him and waits for his anger to subside as obscurely as it started.

The catastrophic failure of miscegenation is the responsibility of the oriental. Othello's real decline starts when Iago provides him with the ocular evidence for Desdemona's treachery. Deprived of Desdemona's love and loyalty, Othello's sense of insecurity surfaces. The relinquished Turkish threat gives his insecurity a further plunge. Desdemona's love and his military glory abandon him. Consequently, "Africa ['s attempt] ... to breathe in Venice" (Doren 1953, 202) is aborted. Instead, Othello is reduced to a man "... whose hand, / like the base Indian, threw a pearl away/ Richer than all his tribe" (Bevington 1997, 5.2.356-8). Othello smothers Desdemona in a barbaric way. This violent act represents a desperate retaliation for Othello's inability to legitimize his integration into the Venetian society.

The Surrender of Humanism in *Antony and Cleopatra*

In *Antony and Cleopatra* (ca.1607), Shakespeare violates Aristotle's unity of place as he sets the events of his tragedy between two continents. "*Antony and Cleopatra* moves back and forth across the Mediterranean in its epic survey of characters and events" (Bevington 1997, 1293) only to portray the magnificent setting for a multifaceted love tragedy. Shakespeare's Orientalism crystallizes in this play through his advocacy of binary oppositions in his representation of West and East. Just like Othello and Desdemona, Antony and Cleopatra belong to different worlds and different cultures. The passionate love relationship of Antony and Cleopatra symbolizes the perpetual conflict between West and East, masculinity and femininity, reason and passion. Antony who appears in *Julius Caesar* as the vital sportsman and the shrewd demagogue is pathetically ensnared in the oriental beauty of an Egyptian Queen who causes his downfall.

In *The Imperial Theme*, G. Wilson Knight thoroughly examines Shakespeare's humanism in the play. His renowned chapter, "The Transcendental Humanism of *Antony and Cleopatra*," investigates how the two royal protagonists transcend the natural realm through love, and demonstrates that "in this play human nature is given no limited framework" (Knight 1965, 210). Shakespeare's absorption of Renaissance humanism and the mobility of man in the Chain of Being are reflected in his depiction of human nature which "can sink to animalistic baseness or rise to a position of 'an angel and the son of God'" (Tourki 2014, 77). Shakespeare's expansion of the geographical scope of the play and the frequent reference to the "world" in the text accentuate "imperial magnificence and human grandeur" (Knight 1965, 210) and allows him to present

a version of humanity which is “doubly idealized in war and in love (Knight 1965, 215). Shakespeare associates the valiant Roman soldier and the voluptuous Egyptian queen with cosmic attributes which are atypical of ordinary human beings. The extravagance in their characterization stems from Shakespeare’s humanistic belief in the glory and the nobility of mankind which verges on divinity.

The character of Cleopatra is very intriguing and controversial. From a historical viewpoint, her name has always been associated with oriental beauty and seduction. She has been also the epitome of the dignified and charming Egyptian Queen whose life was no less dramatic than her death. Shakespeare captures the essence of her personality and charisma in his fictional character. He endows her with an aura of majesty that shrouds her demeanor, speech, and gestures. Just as he does in *Othello*, Shakespeare deliberately elevates the character of Cleopatra only to serve a dramatic function. Even her manipulative nature is portrayed as part of her feminine charm rather than as a vice. David Bevington comments:

Cleopatra is a “lass unparalleled” (Bevington 1997, 5.2.316), whose greatness is elusive and all the more enthralling because it is so mysterious. She rises above her counterpart in Shakespeare’s source...in which she is an impressive queenly woman but still essentially a temptress causing the lamentable fall of the hero. (Bevington 1997, 1295)

The play starts in *medies res* and when Cleopatra is already engaged to Antony in an infamous relationship. It is Enobarbus who describes this middle-aged Queen whose charm was able to bind the noble Antony’s will to her own. He describes the theatrical behavior she adopts to maintain her royal and majestic stature in public. Upon inviting her to supper, she imposes her will on Antony as she suggests that he should be her guest, and he accepts. He also describes her unique and irresistible charm which ironically resides in her morally despicable nature. She has a paradoxical nature; she quenches lust and inflames it simultaneously. Priests acknowledge her sins and yet bless her for them. Enobarbus says:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety. Other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests Bless her when she is riggish.

(Bevington 1997, 2. 2.245–50)

Cleopatra’s impact on Antony is portrayed as a matter of casting a spell or practicing magic rather than an ordinary love relationship. She has a paralyzing effect on him that deprives him of free will. She manipulates him in love and in war, on land and at sea. Her contradictions and her inconsistency provoke in him a mixture of feelings. His heart and soul are attracted to her charm but his mind is perplexed and repulsed by her inconsistency. The passionate love which binds him to her and the ebbs and the flows of their relationship create in him chaos. The noble and valiant Antony is torn between his military glory and his lustful love to this Egyptian enchantress. His Roman values and nobility are tested against Cleopatra’s voluptuous nature. When her fleet retreats and causes his loss, he eventually returns to her proving once and for all that his love to her is more powerful and more binding than anything else. It seems to be impossible for him to abide by his decision that he “must from this enchanting queen break off” (Bevington 1997, 1.2.135) which he takes after the death of Fulvia. He helplessly addresses her as “Egypt” to assert her overwhelming grandeur. He confesses his weakness and her supremacy even to the teachings of his gods:

Egypt, thou knew’st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by th’ strings,
And thou shouldst tow me after. O’er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew’st, and that
They beck might from the bidding of the gods
Command me. (Bevington 1997, 3.11.55-60)

In spite of the aura of majestic greatness which surrounds Cleopatra, she stoops to preserve her status as Antony's consort. She uses her physical charms to seduce him as she previously did with Julius Caesar. She compares Antony to a fish which is caught and entrapped. Bevington comments, "Cleopatra boasts that she 'angled' for Antony on many occasions, catching him the way fishermen 'betray' fish, and that, when she had 'drunk him to his bed,' she 'put my tires and mantles on him, whilst/ I wore his sword Philippan' (Bevington 1997, 2.5.10-23)" (Bevington 1997, 1294). Shakespeare debases her royal status because he represents her as an experienced seductress who brags about her skills.

Shakespeare portrays Egypt as an exotic brothel-like part of the world where the Romans think their former hero loses his glory. Antony describes Egypt as a place where beds are soft. Cleopatra surrounds herself with lustful maids who attend for her drunken guests. Charmian, whom the soothsayer exposes her sensuality, dreams of being the widow to three kings. Cleopatra seems to be the Queen of seduction and sensuality. This is even enhanced by the oriental atmosphere associated with the Egyptian civilization she belongs to. Doren describes the world in which Cleopatra is placed. He says,

...a world which is ancient yet not stale, complacent yet still hungry,
and as becoming in its vileness as it is cultivated in its virtues. Its
infinite variety is a quality of its air, its land, its water, its animals,
its clouds, its language, and its people. (Doren 1953, 236)

Cleopatra's unholy matrimony with Antony relegates her to the rank of a prostitute. She prostitutes her body to the Roman colonizer in the name of love. Her sensual love to Antony deprives her of the honor, the chastity, and the poise fitting for the Queen of Egypt. She makes a scene when she knows of Antony's marriage to Octavia and loses her temper in front of a messenger. She is infuriated with jealousy to the extent that she drags a dagger to kill the messenger who brings her the news. She also stoops to inquire about the physical attributes of her rival.

Cleopatra is equated with Egypt. Antony actually calls her Egypt several times in the play. The sexual subjection of her body to a Roman signifies the submission of Egypt as a country to the Roman Empire. The grandeur of her rank goes beyond the rank of one country. Egypt is described as the third of the world which is Antony's share of the Roman Empire. In her being, Cleopatra represents the East which succumbs willfully to the West. In terms of political status, Antony is Cleopatra's peer. He is a noble man and a Roman hero. His valor and nobility are highly commended by the Romans. In his life, he is compared to the sun and to a star. After his death, his enemy laments the loss and says that the whole universe should mourn the loss of such a great man. However, Antony's high status does not make him the appropriate choice for Cleopatra. He is the Roman colonizer.

Just like Othello, Cleopatra is dependent on Antony when it comes to her safety and equilibrium. She feels weak and defeated without Antony. "To Cleopatra, when Antony dies, all distinction and difference have disappeared" (Spencer 1942, 175). To her, "Young boys and girls/ Are level now with men" (Bevington 1997, 4. 15. 67-8). In spite of her weakness after Antony's death, she refuses to be manipulated by Caesar. Her discretion prescribes her actions. She refuses to be the victory trophy in Caesar's parade in Rome.

Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras. Saucy lictors
Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedians
Extemporally will stage us and present
Our Alexandrian revels; Antony
Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness,
I' the posture of a whore. (Bevington 1997, 5.2. 214-21)

The appalling and humiliating picture of herself in the posture of a whore makes her resemble Antony in his dignified suicide. Although she reproaches Iras for calling her Empress, she decides to meet her eternity in her best majestic attire. She orders her maid, "Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have/ Immortal longings in me" (Bevington 1997, 5. 2. 280-1). Not only does she decide to put an end to her life the way she thinks appropriate, but she also fanaticizes about her reunion with her "husband" Antony. Cleopatra defeats Caesar with her dignified death and denies him the pleasure of humiliating her. However, even her dignified suicide can be interpreted as a purely selfish and narcissistic act. The middle-aged Cleopatra is certain that she cannot manipulate the young Caesar as she did with the previous two.

A contrapuntal deconstruction of the play's finale would lead to contradictory humanistic interpretations of the dignified suicide of the two lovers; are they victors or losers? Within the framework of Renaissance humanism, Antony and Cleopatra manage to triumph over "an anti-human fate;" for according to Mohamed Ali Tourki, "The colourings of their suicide do not suggest a fall or a fallen existence but rather a triumphant transcendence instead of a fatal collapse. The final lines uttered by Antony and Cleopatra imply that they could morph fortune's damnation into another instance of greatness: a final confirmation of their larger-than-life persona" (2013, 64). The lovers redeem their royal glory by their willful suicide; furthermore, they aspire for a more exalted union in the afterlife.

Caesar's decision to bury them in the same grave reveals counterpoint interpretations; it is an anti-humanistic political act which condones interracial union only after death. The tragic outcome of Antony and Cleopatra's legendary love contradicts with Said's understanding of postmodern humanism. In "Said's Political Humanism: An Introduction," Bashir Abu-Manneh clarifies that Said borrows the constitutive motifs of his humanism from Auerbach's whose conception "seeks 'a spiritual exchange between peoples,' 'the reconciliation of peoples' ...that hastens mutual understanding and serves common purpose' [and] concludes 'our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation'" (2018, 5). In spite of their quasi-divine humanity and the grandeur of their political status, Antony and Cleopatra fail to accommodate their interracial love on earth because of their cultural differences. Shakespeare's remarkable portrait of the characters does not alter the fact that he did not adapt the ending to fulfill a humanistic wish of the possibility miscegenation. Miscegenation fails in reality and in art.

Unredemptive Humanism in *The Merchant of Venice*

In *The Merchant of Venice* (ca. 1596), Shakespeare's Renaissance humanism manifests itself in his tolerant portrait of a number of outsiders in the Venetian society. Shylock the Jew and his daughter Jessica are ostracized on the basis of their religion. Although Shylock is not the protagonist of the play, he plays a central role in the plot. The significance of his character stems from the fact that Shakespeare uses him to discuss the then topical issue of Renaissance anti-Semitism. Mika Nyoni argues that the play "was partly influenced by the trial and execution in 1594 of Roderigo Lopez a Jew and Queen Elizabeth's physician who had been a highly respected and trusted man until the enmity of the Earl of Essex ruined him" (2012, 680). Shakespeare humanizes Shylock when he sheds the light on the psyche of the Jew and the unfair discrimination practiced against him. In Shylock's renowned speech which he starts with "Hath not a Jew eyes?," Shakespeare allows him to exercise freedom of speech and to object to the unjust rules of society. Shylock logically catalogues the similarities between a Jew and any other human being. The passionate force of his speech reflects Shakespeare's endorsement of the humanist belief in the equality of all humans.

Al-Dabbagh commends Shakespeare's humanistic approach and argues that "the great achievement of the play...lies in its exposition of Renaissance anti-Semitism and its sympathetic identification with the alien other" (Al-Dabbagh 2010, 44). Al-Dabbagh bases his argument on Shakespeare's individuation of the character of the Jew rather than on Shylock's status in the Venetian Society or the plot's dénouement. The strong animosity Antonio feels towards Shylock represents the Venetian's negative perception of the Jews. Nyoni believes that the "Jew" is synonymous with evil in the play (2012, 662). Antonio refers to Shylock as the devil while other characters stigmatize Jessica as a beautiful pagan. Harold C. Goddard in *The Meaning of Shakespeare* does not indulge himself in intentional fallacy and instead he focuses on the dramatic effect of the appearance and the speech of the Jew on the Elizabethan audience. He observes "whatever the poet intended, most of his audience must have made the Jew an object of ridicule or contempt, or both" (Goddard 1951, 81).

The other outsider in the play is the Prince of Morocco. Just like Othello he is a Moor who seeks to marry a Venetian lady.

The Prince of Morocco is one of Portia's suitors. As a minor character, his lines are rather limited; however, they are indicative. His awareness of his Moorish origin surfaces when he says to Portia "Mislike me not for my complexion, / The shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun, / To whom I am a neighbour and near bred" (Bevington 1997, 2.1.515-7). As a character in a comedy, it is very likely that his appearance on stage is bound to arouse the audience's laughter due to his strange looks, outfit, and speech. He is also subject to Portia's ridicule. She talks to him graciously because of his high rank. After his departure, however, she expresses her relief that he chose the wrong casket. She wishes that all the men of his origin should miss the right casket. It can be noticed from her attitude that she is repulsed by the idea of miscegenation. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare does not include the Other in the play's reconciliatory closure. Even in a comedy, his humanism does not entail any redemptive acts which deliver the Other from the injustices of a biased society. This is quite evident in the humiliating defeat of Shylock at court where Venetians forfeit all his wealth and force him to convert to Christianity. The pathetic failure of his retaliation on Antonio's racial prejudice underscores the limitations of Renaissance humanism. Conversely, Said's postmodern humanism emphasizes that "the language of democracy, of equality, of power sharing, of justice, of secular self-governance must not be co-opted by ideologues but must be reclaimed and reinfused with practical meaning for human relationships" (Mitchell 2005, 463). Law is used to legitimize the victimization of Shylock not to redeem his otherness.

Conclusion

Analyzing the representation of the Oriental in these three plays shows that Shakespeare utilizes the Oriental character in his drama because Orientalism was in vogue in the Elizabethan era. As a dramatist, Shakespeare was interested in providing a material that appeals to his audience. Shakespeare's adaptation of the material he borrows has the double merit of making the character more effective and more suitable for the role and of distinguishing his characters from other sources. Shakespeare exalts the Oriental and situates him/her in a noble status to make his/her downfall more dramatic. According to Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero, he has to be a character of high rank. Othello and Cleopatra tumble from their glory and commit tragic suicides. Interestingly, the *hamartia* of these characters is closely related to their cultural backgrounds.

The passion associated with Othello and Cleopatra's background plays a major role in the two works. On one hand, their passion intensifies the two love stories and renders them more romantically exotic. The obstacles which face the lovers are as large as the difference between East and West. They are culturally different and their love is opposed by their societies. On the other hand, their passion leads to the downfall of the Westerner in a way that can be interpreted that Desdemona and Antony can be taken as cautionary models for deviating from the Western mainstream way of thinking which does not condone miscegenation. They go astray and their downfall is dramatic but logical. In the case of Portia and the Prince of Morocco, the idea of miscegenation is ridiculed and cast away.

It cannot be denied that Shakespeare's plays provide a considerable number of "Others" who are portrayed within the framework of Renaissance humanism. This is quite manifest in the portrayal of the "Other" as a loveable person with admirable traits. Shakespeare's belief in the potential of the human being is not exclusive to the Westerner. The Westerner in these plays is also fallible and is not without negative qualities. This quality of Shakespeare's texts invites argument and counterargument and renders his drama a rich mine for contrapuntal readings. This aligns with Said's conviction that "humanism is not about withdrawal and exclusion. Quite the reverse: its purpose is to make more things available to critical scrutiny as the product of human labor, human energies for emancipation and enlightenment, and, just as importantly, human misreadings and misinterpretations of the collective past and present (Said 2004, 22). This democratic critical impulse in Said's humanism distinguishes his philosophy from its previous namesakes and renders contrapuntal interpretations vital and enriching.

Said's notion of humanism goes beyond the recognition of the humanity of the "Other." His humanism prescribes the inclusion of the "Other" in the society rather than being rejected and cast away. The essence of his understanding is perceptively captured in the picture on the book cover. A book marker is placed inside a book and it reads "admit all." The idea of inclusion is emphasized on several levels as a practice rather than a rigid and abstract philosophical stance. Inclusion according to Said can be practiced in the tolerance of multiculturalism as a legitimate practice. It is also encouraged on the level of criticism in the form of embracing interpretations that are based on multiculturalism.

Shakespeare's internalization of Renaissance humanism does not align with Saidian twenty-first-century revision of the

same philosophy. The humanistic characterization of the Oriental in *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Merchant of Venice* does not entail tolerance of miscegenation. In the first two plays, the interracial marriage ends tragically. The “Other” is the hero of a tragedy of his own making. The third play exemplifies the unattainability of miscegenation in a different vein i.e. a comic one. The “Other” is given an equal chance like the Westerner but he is ultimately rejected and ridiculed. The general conclusion that can be drawn from Shakespeare’s representation of the Oriental in these plays is that his humanism informs his characterization and serves his dramatic purposes. However, Shakespeare’s advocacy of Renaissance humanism does not result in a triumphant embrace of other cultures nor does it uniquely reverse the long-held stereotypical representation of the Oriental as “Other.” His dramatic legacy does not provide inspirational artistic models which participate in changing the global imagination about the feasibility of miscegenation.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Manneh, B. (2018). Said’s Political Humanism: An Introduction.
- Al-Dabbagh, Abd. (2010). *Shakespeare, the Orient, and the Critics*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Al-Shetawi, M. F. (2013). Arabic adaptations of Shakespeare and postcolonial theory. *Critical Survey*, 25(3), 4-28.
- Bayouli, T. (2009). Elizabethan Orientalism and its contexts: the representation of the Orient in early modern English drama.
- Boyer, A. (2015). The Other Interracial Marriage in *Othello*. *Shakespeare*, 11(2), 178-200.
- Bradley, A. C. (2016). *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. anboco.
- Bevington, D. (Ed.). (1992). *The complete works of Shakespeare* (pp. 1-526). New York: HarperCollins.
- Chatelier, S. (2017). Beyond the Humanism/Posthumanism Debate: The Educational Implications of Said’s Critical, Humane Praxis. *Educational Theory*, 67(6), 657-672.
- Doren, M. (1953). *Shakespeare*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.
- Ghazoul, F. J. (1998). The Arabization of Othello. *Comparative Literature*, 50(1), 1-31.
- Goddard, H. C. (1962). *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press.
- Habib, I. (1998). Othello, Sir Peter Negro, and the blacks of early modern England: Colonial inscription and postcolonial excavation. *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 9(1), 15-30.
- Harrington, G. (2017). “Shadowed Livery”: Morocco in ‘The Merchant of Venice’. *Linguaculture*, 8(1), 53-62.
- Knight, G. W. (1965). *The Imperial Theme: Further Interpretations of Shakespeare’s Tragedies Including the Roman Plays*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd.
- Millar, G. J. (1976). The Albanians: Sixteenth-Century Mercenaries. *History Today*, 26(7), 468-72.
- Mitchell, W. J. (2005). Secular Divination: Edward Said’s Humanism. *Critical Inquiry*, 31(2), 462-471.
- Mousley, A. (2015). *Re-Humanising Shakespeare*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Nubia, O. (2016). *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, their presence, status and origins* (Doctoral dissertation, University of East Anglia).
- Nyoni, M. (2012). The Culture of Othering: An Interrogation of Shakespeare’s Handling of Race and Ethnicity in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 2(4).
- Said, E. (1993). *Culture and imperialism* Vintage. New York.
- Tourki, M. A. (2014). The Place of the Gods: Biblical, Tragic, and Humanist Modes in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*.
- Popa, A. (2013). Post-colonialism in Shakespearean work. *Annals Constantin Brancusi U. Targu Jiu, Letters & Soc. Sci. Series*, 91.
- Suárez Müller, F. (2014). Towards a Synthesis of Humanisms in a Cosmopolitan Age: The late philosophy of Edward Said. *Literature and Theology*, 28(4), 476-490.
- Radhakrishnan, R. (2012). *A Said Dictionary*. USA: Willy-Blackwell.
- Roman, L. (2006). This Earthly World: Edward Said, the Praxis of Secular Humanisms and Situated Cosmopolitanisms. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 27(3), 357-368.
- Said, Edward W. (2004). *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Spencer, Th. (1942). *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*. London: Macmillan.
- Spurgeon, C. (1966). *Shakespeare’s Imagery and What it Tells Us*. London: Cambridge University Press.