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The Great Elizabethan 'Other': An Examination of 'Black'
Characters in Four Shakespeare Plays

Velké 'odlišné' postavy alžbětinského dramatu:
Černošské postavy ve čtyřech Shakespearových hrách

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Anotace

Tato diplomová práce analyzuje postavy tmavé pleti ve čtyřech divadelních hrách Williama Shakespeara. Zaměřuje se na analýzu postavy krutého Aarona ze Shakespearovy tragedie *Titus Andronicus*, následně na postavu marockého prince z komedie *Kupec benátský*, který sice nehraje v komedii významnou roli, ale určitě stojí za povšimnutí. Dalšími postavami k analýze jsou zotročený Caliban ve hře *Bouře* a v neposlední řadě uznávaný Othello v tragédii o žárlivosti *Othello, benátský mouřenín*.

Úvodní kapitola je věnována Williamu Shakespearovi - stručně pojednává o jeho životě a díle. Následující kapitoly se detailně věnují výše zmíněným postavám černé pleti. Zabývají se především otázkou postavení těchto postav ve společnosti, jejich interakcí s ostatními postavami bílé pleti a jejich konkrétními osobnostními rysy.

Abstract

This work analyses black characters in four Shakespeare plays. It concentrates on the examination of cruel Aaron from *Titus Andronicus*, followed by an examination of the Prince of Morocco from the comedy *The Merchant of Venice*, who does not have a huge role in the play but who is worth mentioning. Other characters who are examined are the enslaved Caliban from *The Tempest* and last but not least honoured Othello from the tragedy of jealousy *Othello, the Moor of Venice*.

The first chapter tells us shortly the story of Shakespeare's life and work. The following chapters examine the black characters mentioned above in detail, above all their role in the society and their interaction with other (white) characters as well as their special features.

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1 Introduction

I have chosen the topic "The Great Elizabethan 'Other': An Examination of 'Black' Characters in Four Shakespeare Plays" because I was interested in how were black people perceived in Shakespeare's time and how Shakespeare integrates his black characters in the play. For the examination I have chosen the cruel character of Aaron from Shakespeare's early tragedy *Titus Andronicus*, the outstanding character of the Prince of Morocco from the comedy *The Merchant of Venice*, the character of Caliban from the play *The Tempest* (he is not believed to be a typical black slave, but still he has some major features which connects him with the black slaves) and probably the most famous character of Othello from the tragedy of jealousy *Othello, the Moor of Venice*.

In my work I concentrate on few aspects of these black characters: How they behave and if they behave the same way as white characters in the play or if they have any specific features. On the other hand how do the white characters behave to them – do they treat them in a different way just because of the colour of their skin? I characterise the racial remarks which occur in the plays. How do the black characters succeed in the world of white people? How does it look with their personal life and their relationships?

I also think that the topic is relevant to today's life. In 2008 the United States of America elected for the first time a black man as president. 95%

of the congress consists of white people, the majority of the inhabitants of the United States are also white, yet now they have a black president, who represents the most powerful man in the country. How will President Barack Obama succeed in his role?

In my work the black characters show a great deal of variety. Two are honest (Othello, Prince of Morocco), one is treacherous (Aaron). Some of them are powerful with a good reputation, white one has been enslaved (Caliban) and does not have any prestigious role in the society. Some of them are cruel, some of them are inoffensive, but all of them are targets of racial remarks of white characters.

Both good and evil characters are represented in the black characters by William Shakespeare. Yet they have one feature in common – they are all proud of the colour of their skin.

2 William Shakespeare, His Life and Work

2.1 Early Life

The date of birth of this famous playwright is not certain because there is no record of his birth, but it was probably some time in late April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. His baptism was recorded so his birthday is assumed to be the 26th of April. His parents were Mary Arden and John Shakespeare, who gained many prestigious positions in the community of the small town, which at that time counted circa 1500 inhabitants and 200 houses. Not much information is known about his youth. The next record we have of this excellent playwright is his marriage to Anne Hathaway in 1582.

2.2 Marriage and Family

William Shakespeare was married to Anne Hathaway, who was at that time 26 years old whereas William was just 18 years old. Their first child was named Susanna and was born in May of 1583, followed by the birth of twins – Hamnet and Judith in January 1585. It is commonly believed that Shakespeare was not with his family very often because some historical records show him in London during the following years where he started

his career as playwright as well as an actor. Not much is known about the life of Anne and their children except for the tragic fact that Hamnet died of an unknown cause in August 1596.

2.3 Career in London

In connection with Shakespeare we refer to the so-called “Lost Years”, two periods of time and those are 1578-82 (after he left grammar school until his marriage with Anne) and 1585-92 (the second period covers the seven years of his life in which he must have been perfecting his dramatic skills and collecting sources for the plots of his plays). We do not know certainly how he started his career in the theatre but most probably he was recruited by the “Queen’s Men”. The year of 1592 is important because in this year the first reference to Shakespeare in the word of theatre (mentioned in the death-bed biography of the dramatist M. Robert Greene) has come down to us:

There is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country. (Greene 1592:16)

After Green's death Henry Chettle (his editor) publicly apologized to Shakespeare, which meant that he was already a respected actor in

London. Some of his plays were already known at this time, including *Titus Andronicus*.

Shakespeare joined the theatre company Lord Chamberlain's Men and soon became a leading member. With this company he also performed before the Queen Elizabeth I. Shakespeare was:

the only one known who not only wrote plays for his company, acted in the plays, and shared the profits, but who was also one of the housekeepers who owned the building. For seventeen years he was one of the owners of the Globe theatre and for eight years he was one of the housekeepers of the company's second theatre, the Blackfriars, as well. (Rowse 1973:128)

Although acting and playwriting were not considered noble professions at that time, successful and prosperous actors were relatively well respected. Shakespeare was relatively rich and he invested the money in Stratford real estate. In 1597 he bought for his parents the second largest house in this town. Shakespeare also applied for a coat of arms for his family (which made him a gentleman). That was a clever step because also thanks to this his daughters married wealthy men.

It is commonly thought that he neglected his family in Stratford for many years when he was away in London. However it is just as likely that he made unrecorded trips to this town while he was trying to find success in London.

2.4 The Globe Theatre

The Globe Theatre is inseparably connected with the name of William Shakespeare. It was built in 1599 by two brothers - Richard and Cuthbert Burbage. The creation of the Globe is interesting – the two brothers owned the ancestor of the Globe called *The Theatre*. The Theatre endangered the increase in rent so that is why the Burbage brothers decided to dismember the building piece by piece and transport the pieces across the river (the south bank was cheaper) and build it there. The Theatre was then renamed The Globe. The shares were divided among the brothers and William Shakespeare, one of the leading members of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

The theatre was a close structure with an open courtyard where the stage was situated. There were special galleries around the open area – here were the places for the wealthier patrons who could afford the seat. The members of the lower class stood around the stage. Although the theatre was not that big, it is thought that the audience could have been almost two thousand people during a performance.

When reading plays, we must remember that Shakespeare did not mean his plays to be read or published, but he meant his plays to be played. He was writing for both the masses of people, many of whom were not able to read or write, as well as intellectuals who could. Visiting a theatre in Elizabethan times was a completely different experience than today. First of all the audience was not expected to stay calm and silent, they were

expected to be part of the performance, to feel the play and to react. People were eating, drinking and talking during the play. The theatre used daylight which makes also a large difference in comparison with today's theatre performances – perhaps the daylight made the play more natural, more believable. Another major difference was that women were not allowed to perform, so all female roles were played by boys. Plays used little scenery - that is why language was used to set the scene.

It should be mentioned that theatre was not that popular with the Puritan authorities who were worried that it might distract people from their religious views. After Shakespeare's death they closed theatres down completely. Also during the Elizabethan times theatre were banned within the city walls of London (although the Queen Elizabeth I enjoyed theatre very much).

2.5 Later Years

William Shakespeare retired in Stratford in 1611 and lived comfortably for the rest of his life. In his will, he left most of his property to his eldest daughter Susanna. He died in April of 1616. There is his grave in Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon where we can read his epitaph:

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blessed be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones. (Schoenbaum 1990:13)

2.6 Shakespeare's Work

William Shakespeare was a fruitful playwright, during his life he wrote around sixteen comedies, seven histories, twelve tragedies and many poems and sonnets. Many of them (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*) were extremely popular and he made a lot of money thanks to these plays. Also nowadays Shakespeare is a very famous playwright whose plays are still popular and belong to the most performed plays around the world.

3 Shakespeare's "Moors"

This work examines the most famous Shakespeare's Moors – Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, The Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* and probably the most famous Othello, the Moor of Venice. A bit apart stands Caliban from *The Tempest* as he is not a typical black character.

According to one scholar, the word "Moor" has its roots in ancient Mauretania in North Africa, approximately modern-day Algeria and Morocco, but shifted northwest during the eighth century when people of mixed Arab and Berber descent, called Moro, conquered Spain and made it part of the Islamic empire. (Dickson 2005:261) However Shakespeare's use of this word is more generic and especially in Othello it still causes confusion. On one hand Iago describes Othello as Barbarian, which evokes the imagination that he is from Barbary in North Africa and therefore having lighter skin, on the other hand Othello calls himself black and Roderigo refers to him as "the thick-lips" which evokes more the imagination of him being more Negroid and therefore perhaps from sub-Saharan Africa.

Dickson also states that the words "Moor", "Blackamoor" and "Muslim" were often interchangeable in Shakespeare's period – all of them describing exotic, godless and brutish people. However in Shakespeare's work we usually meet the word "Moor", which is used by other characters to describe a black person rather than using the name of the character.

Shakespeare seems to be a bit more sophisticated than his countrymen because he never uses the word “Muslim” in this sense. Anyway none of his characters was Muslim – Othello was Christian, Aaron did not believe in any supernatural power, Caliban believed in his mother’s god Setebos and the Prince of Morocco knew that there are some gods but did not even know their name.

Shakespeare uses the word “Moor” in a common way. Even the full title of Othello sounds *Othello, the Moor of Venice*. Nowadays “Moor” can be sometimes considered as pejorative and racist, but Shakespeare uses it generally to describe a man with dark skin. If he wants to insult the character, he usually uses metaphors or just calls him “a devil”, “thick-lips” etc.

4 *Titus Andronicus*: An Examination of Aaron

4.1 Introduction to the Character

In the play *Titus Andronicus* a very cruel and treacherous man called Aaron tries to make as many terrible and cruel deeds as possible and there is no sign during the whole play that he would regret any of them.

Aaron is a black male. Shakespeare uses another skin colour to emphasise the individuality of the character and to separate him from the rest of the people in the play. The colour of his skin is often a target by racist remarks of other characters (see below) and makes him appear really as an individual. Hypothetically, the same character in the same play with white skin would be cruel and treacherous as well but the audience would perceive him in a different way from Aaron. The black skin represents the cruelty in the play and a black person, Aaron, is something like a devil sent from Satan to produce evil in this world.

Although Aaron seems to be completely emotionless, his son makes him show his feelings and Aaron shows his weak side. His son was born by the Queen of Goths and Empress of Rome, who was cheating on the Roman Emperor. Aaron sometimes speaks even to his son with the language which would be considered as racist these days.

As a black man Aaron needs to be completely different, because in Shakespeare's time one could not have met a black person very often in England and if one did, it was an unusual event and the person seemed like a completely different human being. Moreover according to the colour symbolism, black colour is usually connected with mystery, evil, death (in western cultures), sorrow or seriousness. All these apply to Aaron.

Aaron does not speak a lot in the play but when he speaks, his words are cunning and he is able to persuade people very easily to do what he wants. He even solves the problems which other people (white and often his superiors) are not able to solve. They listen to him and take his advice. When he speaks he chooses his words very practically and even his antagonists in the play listen to him very carefully. For example the Roman emperor does not expect anything bad of him, for he is just a servant who should serve his Queen.

Initially Aaron does not say anything. Therefore we get the impression that he is not such an important character in the play and have no idea how cruel Aaron is. At the beginning he stands in the background. His importance is only shown in the second half of the play. Instead, in the beginning there are characters which seem to be crueller (for example Titus Andronicus, who kills his disobedient son). The character of Titus who seems to be so cruel, completely changes during the play. From the strong victorious general he turns into a helpless person (at first, but eventually he mobilises his strength), gaining the sympathy of the audience.

Aaron is perfectly aware of his abilities and also of the difference in his appearance. He does not believe in God or in the Roman gods, which supports the idea that he represents the devil sent from hell to produce evil. In some cases he even expresses his superiority, i.e., that black people are better than white people.

4.2 The Name Aaron

The Name Aaron does not represent a typical name that was given to a black man, more it is a Hebrew name which we know from the Bible. Aaron, the brother of Moses, helped to lead the chosen people out of Egypt and served as a priest in Israel. Therefore the name would have positive associations for Elizabethan audience. Yet for Shakespeare,

Aaron is a thoroughly evil character unredeemed by any trace of remorse. Shakespeare's source for Titus is uncertain, but an 18th century chapbook preserves a version of a tale that Shakespeare may have known. The Moor in the chapbook is unnamed and is less important to the plot of its story than he is to Shakespeare's tragedy. It is likely, therefore, that Shakespeare fleshed out the character and chose its Hebrew name. The Biblical Aaron was Moses' elder brother and the first Hebrew high priest. By linking a black man with the 'blasphemous' Jews, Shakespeare invoked common prejudices of his day to establish Aaron as an archetypal villain, an alien creature devoid of moral scruples. (Davis 1995:36)

Shakespeare have chosen this Jewish name to distinguish the black male even more from the other characters in the play, not even by his appearance but also by his name. In Shakespearean times there was common prejudice against the Jews who were treated badly by Christians.

4.3 Aaron's Appearance and the Racial Question

The description of Aaron's appearance is given (except the one word "*the Moor*" stated at the beginning when the characters are introduced and anyway this does not appear in Shakespeare's first folio), through the remarks by other characters. Most of them are of course about the colour of his skin. These remarks seem to be very racist, although the phenomenon of the racism was unlikely the same in Shakespeare's time as it is our days. Aaron also uses racist comments when talking to his new-born son (see below).

Aaron seems very proud of himself and also of the colour of his skin. He sometimes mentions that having black skin is better than having white skin, which can be also considered as racist but in the reverse Aaron starts with these remarks after his mixed race son is born. Suddenly he realises that he is not alone as a black person and maybe he feels even more confident about the colour of his skin. Before the birth of his son hardly find any of these remarks can be found in the play.

Aaron sees the black skin as a privilege, the black skin cannot betray a black man. White skin represents a big disadvantage because blushing can tell other people that you are lying or hiding something. Black skin can hide everything and this could have helped Aaron when dealing with the white characters in the play – they were not able to read his face as much as the faces of each other.

Why, there's the privilege your beauty bears.
Fie, treacherous hue, that will betray with blushing
The close enacts and counsels of thy heart!
(Act IV.2, 116 - 118, p.72)

Shakespeare shocks also by having Aaron say the following words,
which could be interpreted as offensive when hearing:

Ye white-limed walls! Ye alehouse painted signs!
Coal-black is better than another hue
In that it scorns to bear another hue;
For all the water in the ocean
Can never turn the swan's black legs to white,
although she lave them hourly in the flood.
(Act IV.2, 98 - 103 p.71)

Of course that people in the audience take it personally (and as said in the first chapter the audience in Shakespearean times were not supposed to stay quiet during the performance). During Shakespeare times white skin was considered beautiful, people were proud of it and getting a tan was seen as the ugly complexion of peasant farmers. How could they have react when hearing Aaron to say that coal-black is better and that he would be ashamed to bear another hue? He uses a wonderful metaphor with the swan's black legs – just imagine the huge mass of water in the ocean and one small white swan. Although the swan is mostly white, her legs are black and nothing can change the colour, not even the huge ocean. Aaron is proud of being black but this metaphor could also mean that even if a black man would try everything to be white, he will still persist as black. The black colour is strong and resistant. A black man

cannot deny his origin. The other way round white people can never force a black man to be one of them because no matter how hard they try, they can never succeed.

However Shakespeare did not make the racial question the main point of the play, although it is a topic which supports the main plot. He just used the black colour to emphasize his character (the black colour represents evil). Thanks to the colour of his skin Aaron seems to stand out more than he would in the case of white skin.

Aaron just represents a completely different world for the majority of white people in the play (as a black man represents for white people in Shakespeare's time). He was like an alien, which differs so much that they are a bit scared of it and they find it even disgusting. In Act III when all the cruel things caused by Aaron are happening, it seems like the people somehow feel that he is responsible for that and they start to use racist remarks more than before. Although these remarks are often very nasty, Aaron does not seem to be bothered by them, and he is still proud of the colour of his skin.

For the Goths Aaron is a part of them. He is a lover of Tamora and an important servant and advisor to her sons. He also councils and advises wise and cunning tactics, and so he coordinates Tamora's politics. He was a hired warrior, much like Othello was by Italians. One of the characteristics of warriors was wit and cleverness because without these it can be very difficult to win a war. If a man wanted to be a good warrior to

be hired and paid for his job, he needed to be excellent at all cunning tactics.

There is nothing in the play that indicates that Aaron was a slave, he was a hired warrior. However once he uses the word "slave" when talking to his son: "Come on, you thick-lipped slave..." (Act IV.2, 176, p.74) Thick lips are considered to be one of the crucial marks of black people. His son was a mulatto, an offspring of the white Queen and her black lover, however this part of his body was similar to his father's.

Some examples how the white people express their superiority:

The remarks of the white people are more nasty and evil than Aaron's. Here are some examples of how imaginative people can be when thinking about black colour:

For example when finding Tamora and her lover Aaron in a forest Lavinia says: "Tis pity they should take him for a stag." (Act II.3, 71, p.33) Aaron is associated with an animal, a stag, which is even more highlighted by the fact that they are found in a forest. Animals were also often seen as an inferior kind without any feelings. One would not expect the beautiful and innocent Lavinia to say such words, however we should bear in mind that Aaron undergone a huge risk when making love with the Queen. Tamora (as the Queen of Goths and the wife of Saturninus) should represent the highest virtue, to be an example for all the people. Aaron would have been executed if the truth came out. This was also the reason why he decided to get rid of Lavinia and her husband, Bassianus, who commented the

situation in the following way, using the word Cimmerian. The legendary Cimmerians lived in darkness as written in the note on the page with the following words:

Believe me, queen, your swart Cimmerian
Doth make your honour of his body's hue,
Spotted, detested, and abominable.
Why are you sequestered from all your train,
Dismounted from your snow-white goodly steed.
(Act II.3, 72 - 76, p.33-34)

Bassianus seems to insist on the Queen. He is wondering how this could have happened. Why is the Queen cheating on her husband the Roman Emperor and right with the black man? He uses the worst language when describing Aaron – spotted, detested, abominable. How could the woman, who should represent an example for all women, lapse so much to make love with this ugly “animal” (and in comparison to Aaron he uses another animal - the Queen’s horse, snow-white goodly steed)? Aaron is here lower in estimate than the Queen’s horse. The answer is simple – the reason for all this was love and passion. Deep, both-sides love which makes people crazy and doing unexpected things. Tamora was married to Saturninus, the Emperor of Roman, however such marriages were contracted mainly for political reasons, mostly there was no passion in such relationships. Tamora has found passion in the relationship with Aaron by which Shakespeare meant to shock the audience (as the whole play is shocking by all the cruelty and special effects on stage).

Aaron is also associated with animals which are seen rather as ugly, such as a spider, a toad or a raven. However he does not really seem to be bothered by that, still remaining proud of the colour of his skin. Lavinia in the forest calls their love raven-coloured, which makes the audience imagine the blackest black: "Let her joy her raven-coloured love; This valley fits the purpose passing well." (Act II, 83-84, p.34). This description awakens the imagination.

In another scene, Titus uses the following words when hearing that the king will save the sons of this great warrior if he will send him his hand: "Did ever raven sing so like a lark that gives sweet tidings of the sun's uprise?" (Act III.1, 158 - 159, p.51) Of course this is a trap set by Aaron. For such a great warrior like Titus his hands are a treasure, an important part of his body which he needs to do his job properly. However Titus is happy to hear this news and praises Aaron with these words. He is ready to chop off his hand and send it to the king. However the king sends him back the head of his two sons. Again there is a lot of blood and special effects during the performance of this Shakespeare's play and the audience feels shocked, full of emotions.

It is not only the white people and the black man who are represented in the play – it is also the Romans and the Goths, who symbolise two different worlds. As one scholar comments:

Titus Andronicus is a sophisticated revenge tragedy, where the binary oppositions of good and evil, Roman and Goth, civilization and barbarism are systematically questioned. The aftermath of the unrelenting deconstruction of Roman values leaves Titus stranded

in a nightmare world, where Lavinia's body becomes his new 'map of woe' and her speechless complaint a new alphabet.
(Dobson 2001:479)

The Romans represent the civilized people with sophisticated culture, high virtues and beautiful architecture, whereas the Goths are presented as poorly dressed "white animals" that were put into a cage at the beginning of the play.

4.4 Cruelty as the Main Aim of Aaron's Life

Shakespeare's aim was to shock the audience, to horrify people. The play is full of violence, several characters get their hands cut off during the play etc. One of the most terrible scenes is when Lavinia gets her hands cut off and her tongue is cut out as well in order to keep her from disclosing the men who raped her. Another scene which terrifies the audience is when Tamora eats her sons, who were killed, cut up and cooked by Titus. All these scenes were followed with sensational effects on stage. Blood was shown everywhere. Marcus, Lavinia's uncle, is the first person who can see her after all the cruel things happened and he compares her warm blood to a bubbling fountain: "Would all my wealth would wake me!...Alas, a crimson river of warm blood, like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind, doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips, coming and going with thy honey breath." (Act II.4, p.44, 23-26)

The main aim of Aaron's life is cruelty. He causes most of the grief in the play, he builds up all the plans and strategies and other characters just follow his advice. He uses all his wit and cleverness to succeed in his strategies. Through his cunning, the family of Titus Andronicus is completely destroyed by him and this is exactly what Aaron was hired for. Aaron is an agent for Tamora to get revenge. He is a soldier and he obeys Tamora's orders, doing the greatest duty possible. Titus Andronicus killed her eldest son although she was begging him not to do it. Now she is the Empress of Rome so she has power to avenge her family (this was the main reason for her marriage). On the other hand Titus himself helped her – he should have accepted the title of emperor after his victory. His daughter and sons would have not suffered.

Aaron is very shrewd and clever and he employs all that to cause grief to other people. He is able to think up strategies and traps which no one else in the play is able to do. This is connected with his profession of a warrior, where all these characteristics are needed.

When Aaron plans the rape of all Roman women, he has already a plan in his head. There is again an apparent reference to animals because he uses the word "hunting" in connection with a forest.

My lords, a solemn hunting is in hand;
There will the lovely Roman ladies troop:
The forest walks are wide and spacious,
And many unfrequented plots there are,
Fitted by kind for rape and villainy.
(Act II.1, 112-116, p.28)

Aaron does not only plan the rape of all Roman ladies, primarily he offers a solution to her mistress's sons fight about who is going to have beautiful Lavinia – he advises them that they both can have her (to rape her), which they find as a great idea. Again, this is natural revenge for Tamora's eldest son's execution in Act I.

For all this planned cruel deeds a forest is suitable – a dark, black forest which can hide everything as well as the black skin.

An important scene in the play shows us exactly what Aaron thinks about all his bad deeds he has done and about all the misery he has caused. This scene is in Act V when the Romans catch him and plan for him a cruel death - they want to "set him breast-deep in earth, and famish him." (Act V.3, 179, p.105) However, Aaron is not scared and even in his last hour Aaron does not regret any of his deeds. The only thing he regrets is that he was not able to accomplish more of them. When Aaron is captured by Lucius and boasts about his evil deeds, he is unrepentant and unabashed by the prospects of death like a true warrior.

Ah, why should wrath be mute and fury dumb?
I am no baby, I, that with base prayers
I should repent the evils I have done;
Ten thousand worse than ever yet I did
Would I perform if I might have my will.
If one good deed in all my life I did,
I do repent it from my very soul.
(Act V.3, 185 - 190, p.106)

Aaron's words perfectly describe his character - he is in the world to produce evil (which is underscored by the fact that he does not believe in

God). He mentions that if there is a single good deed he has done, he repents it from his very soul.

He knows that he is going to die anyway but there is a choice he has to make – should he betray the Queen, the women he loves, or save the life of his beloved son? This complicated situation leads into the decision to set the priority to the life of his mulatto son. The son is also an offspring of Tamora so still there will live a part of her in this child. Originally the son should have been killed by the Goths by order of Tamora because it could have ruined her reputation. However, in this case Aaron does not think about her reputation and the son becomes more important to him.

A comparison to Titus lies in hand - Titus is presented as a cruel father who does not hesitate to kill his own son in name of honour and at the end he even kills his daughter Lavinia. Aaron values his son above everything.

One scholar states the following:

It doesn't say a great deal for Titus that even the villainous Aaron is more loving, if no less bloody, father to his newborn child: seizing the boy from (then stabbing) the Empress's Nurse, he refuses to let him be killed – something insisted on by Tamora, who will not tolerate the 'treacherous hue' of the baby's black skin.
(Dickson 2005:353)

Here can be again seen the difference between the two worlds – the Romans value the honour and virtue above all things, while for Aaron the pure love and the parental instinct prevail.

4.5 Aaron's Feelings of Love

One of the main topics in the play is passionate and sensational love between Tamora and Aaron. Tamora, the Queen of Goths, married Saturninus, the Roman Emperor, mainly for political reasons, to keep peace between the two kingdoms and neither love nor passion played any role in it. Tamora was much older than Saturninus but he knew that the marriage with her and the consequential peace will make him to be popular with people. However with Aaron the Queen experiences something more, beautiful feelings come when they are together. What else would it be than true love when Tamora says: "Ah, my sweet Moor, sweeter to me than life." (Act II.3, p.33, 51) True passion knows such professions of love. Aaron does not express his passionate feelings to her so noticeably (this is connected with the fact that he is a soldier), but he for example says: "Tamora, the empress of my soul." (Act II.3, p.32, 40) His love is more obvious through his deeds – he helps Tamora to revenge the death of her son killed by Romans, he represents for her the closest person in this foreign Roman world, she knows that she can trust him and follows all his instructions. There must be strong love because Aaron risks his own life when making love with the Queen, who should represent the highest virtue, an example for all. By this relationship Shakespeare shocks the audience as well – the Queen does not fit together with a black soldier.

In previous times some explanations occur which tend to make clear how is it with the colour of the skin. At that time people did not know anything

about pigmentation so as Christina Malcomson states (2004:445), the first part of *Titus Andronicus* lays out some of these fascinating claims and their implications: scholars have mistaken sunburn as the climate theory's explanation for dark skin, whereas the belief was that sun draws out heat and moisture, leaving the body externally black. Greeks and Romans made no claims that Africans were overly sexualized - if anything, they were seen as verging on impotence whereas it was the northerners, including the English, who were seen as licentious. This illuminates the character of Aaron. Aaron seems less interested in sex than the northerner Tamora.

However there is love and passion between the two and soon their son is born – a mulatto. Before their son was born, Aaron used to care just about himself and Tamora but once his son is born, a black person as well in the world of all white people, Aaron is not alone any more. Suddenly his son has first priority. Aaron even betrays the Queen because of his son (he tells the Romans about all the cruel deeds he has done).

Aaron has great plans for his offspring. From the moment of his son's birth his feelings for him occur and he is happy that there is somebody like him, his son, who is his blood and his heir. He is ready to take care of him and he wants his son to become a great warrior and command a camp. He is aware of the fact that he cannot provide him full comfort but the fact that he plans to feed his offspring with berries and roots will make his son even stronger and able to survive in difficult conditions because he will be used to it.

For it is you that puts us to our shifts.
I'll make you feed on berries and on roots,
And fat on curds and whey, and suck the goat,
And cabin in a cave, and bring you up
To be a warrior and command a camp.
(Act IV.2, 177 - 180, p.74)

However as soon as the baby is born he meets the hatred of the white characters because of the colour of his skin, which is proof of the Queen's disloyalty to Saturnine. After the child's birth it is endangered by execution but Aaron strictly interferes and saves his life for the first time by killing the nurse whose last words were: "A joyless, dismal, black, and issue! Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad." (Act IV.2, 66 - 67, p.70) Again a mulatto child is seen as an ugly joyless animal, a toad, which usually evokes rather negative feelings.

4.6 Expressions Associated with Aaron

There is a moment in the play when Lucius calls Aaron a pearl. "*This is the pearl that pleased your empress' eye.*" (Act V.1, 42, p.85)

Aaron is called "a pearl" which seems to be a bit strange at first sight. In our mind a pearl represents something beautiful, expensive, luxurious and perfectly white. However we should not forget that there are also black pearls, which are not very common (it also was very common to see a black man in Shakespeare's time) and which are even more expensive than the white ones. Anyway the word "pearl" does not express only the

physical qualities, but also deeper characteristics – it is something that we care of, something special, unusual.

At the beginning of the play the word “pearl” is used for the first time but in a completely different context. Here it means wealth, possession, the pearl is something expensive and luxurious. When Tamora becomes the wife of the Roman emperor, Aaron feels that certain advantages appear for him as well.

Away with slavish weeds and servile thoughts!
I will be bright and shine in pearl and gold,
to wait upon this new-made empress.
To wait, I said? To wanton with this queen.
(Act II.1, 18 - 21, p.24)

Thanks to the political marriage between Tamora and Saturninus, peace was created and Aaron assumes that he does not have to be a warrior any more. He is the closest person to the Queen, her lover, and he knows that he can use his capabilities in daily life to help her to avenge the death of her eldest son and to destroy the family of Titus and the whole Roman Empire. He is aware of the fact that he is the lover of the most powerful women in the empire.

4.7 The Symbol of Hands

During the play hands play an important role. Lavinia and her father Titus lose their hands thanks to Aaron’s cunning tactics, but behind this there is

something more than just a cruel deed. For Titus, hands symbolised his power, he represented a famous and brave warrior whose hands were his treasure - without them he would not be able to make his career and gain all the reputation. As Russ McDonald mentions in the preface:

The noun "hand" is used (in its singular or plural forms) almost eighty times in Titus, more than in any other play...The hand here affords Shakespeare a symbol of agency. Titus's fame rests on his military skill ("which of your hands hath not defended Rome?"), his "warlike hand" is an emblem of his achievement (Lavinia: O, bless me here with thy victorious hand), Titus "with his own hand did slay his youngest son", the opening quarrel between Saturninus and Bassianus concerns the right to the imperial (held in the hand)... (*The Tempest*: xlv)

Immediately after the rape the scene with full of emotion appear. The scene begins with the following note: "*Enter the Empress' sons [Demetrius and Chiron], with Lavinia, her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out, and ravished.*" (Act II.4, p.43) During this scene the audience is confronted by Lavinia's violated body and Shakespeare again shocks the audience.

Aaron tells Tamora's sons to cut off Lavinia's hands and chop off her tongue in order to keep her from disclosing the villains. Aaron also gets Titus's hand by persuading him that if he brings the hand to the emperor, he will not kill his son. Titus is more than happy when he hears that and he does not wait any minute to have his hand cut off. When hearing the Aaron's message he calls him a lark: "Did ever raven sing so like a lark that gives sweet tidings of the sun's uprise?" (Act III.1, 158 - 159, p.51) Again here occurs an association with the colour of Aaron's skin. He is

compared to a raven that usually symbolizes death. Titus cuts off his hand but he does not get his son back alive. Aaron gets all the hands, a symbol of power.

4.8 Possible Sources

There were some speculations about the creation of *Titus Andronicus*. As James D. Carroll mentions in his *Gorboduc and Titus Andronicus*, there has been increased interest in George Peele as the author of at least the first act of *Titus Andronicus*. (Carroll 2004:51)

In this study Carroll compares some parts of Shakespeare's *Titus* and Peele's *Gorboduc*. He analyses the vocabulary, the way of writing and using some specific words which as he states were rarely used by Shakespeare (e.g. Commonweal, reproachful, ruthless, aloft etc.). However there is no direct evidence which can prove that Shakespeare is not the author of *Titus Andronicus*.

Also in *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Dobson 2001:478) is referred to the fact that "*Titus Andronicus* has no direct sources and that the play has often been connected to a narrative which, although surviving only in an 18th-century chapbook, was believed to derive from a much earlier version of the Titus story which Shakespeare dramatized."

5 *The Merchant of Venice*: An Examination of the Prince of Morocco

5.1 Introduction to the play and Sources

The Merchant of Venice is a comedy because of the plot surrounding the love between a man and a woman which is with many obstacles, but the play also concerns religious conflict between the Christians and the Jews. One of the main characters is Shylock, an old Jew, who is representing a typical Jew abused by the Christians of Venice. He is eventually robbed and deserted by his own daughter who converts and marries a Christian and is forced himself to convert to Christianity. In him the main characteristics of the Jews are combined: Shylock represents a successful businessman who is clever at dealing with money. However the religious conflict appears as not the only important topic which is covered in the play – another big topic is love. Love between individuals and hatred between the two religions.

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare

brings together two widely known folk-tale motifs, the story of the pound of flesh and the story of the three caskets. Many of the play's most important elements are already present in the Florentine writer Ser Giovanni's version of the pound of flesh plot, a story known as '*Giannetto of Venice and the lady of Belmont*'. (Dobson 2001:288)

For the purpose of this thesis a special character occurs in the play – the Prince of Morocco, a black man who aims to get the hand of rich and beautiful Portia, but first he has to choose the right casket.

5.2 The Prince of Morocco

The Prince of Morocco is one of the suitors to Portia, the Lady of Belmont. The suitors to Portia have a very difficult task to fulfil before one of them is allowed to marry her. Her father set it up that only the man can marry her who chooses the right casket based on a riddle. They can choose between three caskets - gold one, silver one and leaden one. In each casket there is a message which indicates if the suitor has chosen the right one and if he can marry Portia. Of course she knows which one is correct but she is not allowed to tell anyone. There is another risk for the men who choose the wrong casket: they are never allowed to make love to any lady.

The Prince of Morocco does not play a major role in the play. His act is short but for the purposes of this thesis he is outstanding because he is black which results in a memorable appearance among all the suitors who arrive to win Portia's hand. Black skin is also the reason why Portia does not even think of him as of a potential husband. She rather condemns him

before getting to know him better. According to the words below, Portia does not care if he is a good person. His black skin is an obstacle for her and even if his soul were as good as a saint he has no chance to gain her fancy.

If I could bid the fifth welcome with so good heart
as I can bid the other four farewell,
I should be glad of his approach.
If he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil,
I had rather he should shrive me than wive me.
(Act II.2, p.135, 122-126)

His black skin seems to be a big obstacle for Portia. In one line she compares two complete opposite attributes, those of a saint and a devil. The Prince of Morocco combines both of these elements. He is presented as a good man who gained some overview about the world. No deeper investigation of his character is possible because he appears only for a short time, but some features indicate that he is quite clever and knows a lot of history and mythology, although his versions sometimes vary from the reality. Yet for Portia he looks like a devil, and she associates his black skin with evil.

The Prince of Morocco is aware of the fact that his skin is different, which is shown in his very first sentence in the play, where he thinks of himself to be a near acquaintance of sun. For the majority of people sun is a symbol of something positive, of a new life or a brand new day. Sun causes that people have better mood, and almost everyone likes sun:

Mislike me not for my complexion,
the shadowed livery of the burnished sun,
to whom I am a neighbour and near bread.
(Act II.1, p.150, 1-12)

He is proud of his complexion, although he is aware of the fact that Portia takes an intense dislike to him thanks to his appearance.

He is proud of being black, knowing that because of the colour of his skin he is equal to other people. The only reason he would think of being white is to gain Portia's love. He compares himself to a white man born in the north, as they have both the same colour of blood. His language is very poetic, showing that he would like to be Portia's husband. He is in love with her and shows her his sympathy:

Bring me the fairest creature northward born,
where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles,
and let us make incision for your love
to prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.
I tell thee, lady, this aspect of mine
hath feared the valiant, by my love.
I swear the best –regarded virgins of our clime
Have loved it too: I would not change this hue,
Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen.
(Act II.1, p.150, 1-12)

The reaction of Portia is as it is supposed to be - very diplomatic. We know that she is embellishing under this context when she says: "In terms of choice I am not solely led by nice direction of a maiden's eyes." (Act II.1, p.150, 13-14) She says that if her father would not have scanted her then the Prince of Morocco would stand "as fair as any comer she has

looked yet". Very interesting here is the use of the word "fair", which at Shakespeare time stood only for the fair colour. Nowadays we use it also to describe fair chance, fair behaviour etc. This word was used as a reaction at his speech about his skin but could also be connected to the fact that when the Prince of Morocco for the first time appears on the scene he is dressed completely in white, which makes a contrast to his black skin.

During his choice we can follow his thoughts. First it is apparent that he is not really religious when he says: "Some god direct my judgement!" (Act II.7, p.184, 13) The word "some" shows that he knows about the existence of some deity but he is not really sure which god to choose. From this we can see that he is neither a Christian nor a Muslim.

He fulfils one of the main characteristics of a prince – he is very self-confident. When reading the messages which are on the caskets he is persuaded that he deserves the Queen because of his qualities and love:

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.
(Act II.7, p.186, 31-34)

Therefore the Prince chooses the gold casket, which turned out to be a bad choice, although it seemed logical to choose this one, because for a special lady the best material (gold) is suitable. He does not show only

logical thinking, but also his knowledge of the world. He knows that there was a popular golden coin in England:

Never so rich a gem
Was set in worse than gold.
They have in England
A coin that bears the figure of an angel
Stamped in gold, but that's insculped upon,
But here an angel in a golden bed
Lies all within.
(Act II.7, p.188, 55-59)

The award for his choice is a message, which signifies to him that he is thinking too much materialistically, that money is not everything in one's life. It sounds like a nursery rhyme but it contains an old truth that "all that glitters isn't gold" and one should never be misled by first sight. The Prince of Morocco has thrown away his chance to marry Portia and at the end of the rhyme there is said that the he is nor wise nor bold:

All that glitters isn't gold,
Often have you heard that told.
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold.
Gilded tombs do worms infold.
Had you been as wise as bold,
Young in limbs, in judgement old,
Your answer had not been inscrolled.
Fare you well, your suit is cold.
(Act II.7, p.188-190, 65-73)

The Prince of Morocco failed to choose correctly and he is forced to leave. Portia's reaction again shows her racial prejudices when she says: "A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. Let all of his complexion choose

me so.” (Act II.7, p.190, 79-80) The British audience must have felt relieved as well because *The Merchant of Venice* was supposed to be a comedy with a happy ending. Would it be a happy ending if Portia had married the Prince of Morocco? Not for Portia and nor for the British audience who were predominantly racist at that time.

With these Portia’s words the Prince of Morocco leaves the scene and it seems that this is the end of the story concerning the prince with black skin, but at the end another person who is somehow related appears in the play. Lancelot is mentioned to have an affair with a black woman: “I shall answer that better to the commonwealth than you can the getting up of the Negro’s belly. The Moor is with child by you, Lancelot!” (Act III.5, p.250,33-35) It is not quite clear from where the women came but it may have been a gift from the Prince of Morocco to Portia.

6 Othello - The Moor of Venice: **An Examination of Othello**

6.1 Introduction to the Character

Othello, a black soldier, gained an excellent reputation. At the beginning of the play, Othello represents an example of a good warrior – brave, experienced and successful. Although we do not know how old Othello is, we know that he is much older than Desdemona, somewhere in his middle years. He has been participating in warfare since he was seven years old: “For since these arms of mine had seven years’ pith, till now some nine moons wasted, they have used their dearest action in the tented field.” (Act I.3, p.32, 83-85) During the play Othello undergoes a hard exam – to stay resistant to jealousy – and he fails. Othello lost everything (including beautiful and faithful Desdemona and his reputation) thanks to his jealousy, which was evoked in him by the treacherous Iago.

6.2 The Name Othello and Desdemona and Possible Sources

There have been many attempts to link the Shakespeare play to a true story. According to one scholar, Christophal Moro, a lieutenant of Cyprus, returned from the island in 1508 after having lost his wife. Besides

meaning 'Moor', 'Moro' may also mean 'mulberry' which could have been related to the strawberry of Desdemona's handkerchief. (Davis 1995:358-359)

Davis also states that:

The Origin of Othello is unknown...There are some slight indication, however, that another source has been lost. It is not typical for Shakespeare to be that inventive with names. It has been speculated that Othello is an Italianizing of Othman (Osman) the founder of the Ottoman Empire...Another possibility is Reynold's *God's Revenge against Adultery* in which Othello is an old German soldier, there is also an Iago, and the eight story is said to be an Italian one. (Davis 1995:359)

Othello does not seem to be logically linked to an Italianizing of Othman, the founder of the Ottoman Empire, because in the play Othello is employed to fight against the Ottoman Empire so it is not likely that Shakespeare used the name from the enemy to derive the name of Othello.

Another important character in the play is Desdemona, Othello's beautiful wife. The name Desdemona is derived from the Greek word *dysdaimon* which means "ill-fated". (Davis 1995:89) This name perfectly describes the character from Shakespeare's play as Desdemona is the one who is condemned to death although she is innocent and faithful. She loves her husband from her very heart and she is really unhappy that Othello does not trust her. The same source states that Othello stands for a diminutive from the name Otto.

Shakespeare derived most of the plot from a story in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565), which he must have read either in the original Italian or in a French translation published in 1584. (Dobson 2001:330)

6.3 Othello – A Reputable General of the Venetian Forces

Before Othello comes on to the stage, Iago indicates that Othello is a powerful man: “Three great ones of the city, in personal suit to make me his lieutenant, off-capp'd to him ... but he; as loving his own pride and purposes, evades them, with a bombast circumstance horribly stuff'd with epithets of war.” (Act I.1, p.12, 8-14) Othello is powerful, self-confident and proud. He does not allow the three powerful people mentioned above to change his decision. Instead he has already chosen a lieutenant on his own and he is not going to change anything. The audience still did not hear the name Othello, the characters use the pronoun ‘he’ when talking about him. However it is apparent that they are talking about a powerful black soldier with a prestigious role in the society, who is self-confident and has the right to decide about particular roles in the military.

Another sign of Othello's power comes when Othello argues with Brabantio about the marriage and the duke comes to stage to tell him that he is employed to war. At this place Othello is first mentioned by name:

Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you
Against the general enemy Ottoman.

(To Brabantio)

I did not see you; welcome, gentle signior;
We lack'd your counsel and your help tonight.
(Act I.3, p.31-32, 48-51)

The duke greets first Othello, whereas he overlooks the reputable senator Brabantio. The compelling state interest appears in this case more important for the duke than personal relationships and social conventions.

Although Iago hates him, he confirms that Othello is a good warrior: "Another of his fathom they have none, to lead their business." (Act I.1, p.20, 153-154)

Othello has a royal blood, which is mentioned only once during the play:

'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, and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reach'd.
(Act I.2, p.22, 19-24)

While Othello keeps this fact secret, people value him for his skills and not for his origin which they do not know about. However, Othello is ready to make this secret public but he does not want to boast. If Brabantio knew about Othello's royal blood, he might not be so strictly against the marriage.

6.4 The Passionate Love between Othello and Desdemona

Othello and Desdemona represent an extraordinary couple in many respects. They deeply love each other, but unfortunately their love is determined to destruction. Before the play begins, a secret marriage between Othello and Desdemona has taken place, which shocks a lot of people, because Othello is older than Desdemona and mainly, he is a Moor. Othello is a black general and Desdemona a beautiful fair woman, therefore many people cannot understand how this could have happened. Desdemona's father Brabantio, a Venetian senator, tries to find an explanation and he thinks that his daughter must have been bewitched:

She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so preposterously to err,
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
Sans witchcraft could not.
(Act I.3, p.32, 60-64)

Although Othello was a successful and reputable warrior Brabantio cannot understand why Desdemona decided to choose him – he is older than she is, his skin is black and she is a beautiful young woman who could have married many rich Italians in Venice. His opinion is if she was not deficient, blind or lame of sense, she could not have made this decision. Later after realising that his daughter really fell in love with the

Moor, he rejects her and says that she was not his daughter any more and that he was glad not to have more children.

The duke, who highly esteems Othello and who is a witness of this dispute, tries to comfort Brabantio: "Good Brabantio, take up this mangled matter as the best. Men do their broken weapons rather use than their bare hands." (Act I.3, p.38, 171-174) By this metaphor the duke tries to explain to Brabantio that although the marriage to Othello is at least strange, it is not that bad and it could be worse (Othello is a reputable man). Anyway, the comparison of Othello to a broken weapon is a bit strange considering the fact that he is a famous warrior. The duke also defends Othello in a different way: "If virtue no delighted beauty lack, your son-in-law is far more fair than black." (Act I.3, p.44, 288-289) It can again be seen that Othello is an honest man with a good reputation and Brabantio should value him for his personality and not care so much about the colour of his skin. About this quotation also one scholar states that "The division between outward appearance and inner reality will prove a crucial – and increasingly malignant – idea in *Othello*, but for the moment it seems that at least some Venetians recognise that a man who happens to be black need not to be a savage." (Dickson 2005:260)

However Brabantio is unable to carry the grief that Desdemona caused by this marriage and during the play we learn that he subsequently died.

Othello stays calm and he is ready to explain how it could have happened. He did not use any witcheries, but rather gained Desdemona thanks to his personality and mainly thanks to his narrative skills. He used

to frequent the house of Desdemona and also Brabantio liked his military narratives.

Her father loved me; oft invited me;
Still question'd the story of my life.

...

She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
That heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story,
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd,
And I loved her that she did pity them.

(Act I.3, p.37, 161 - 169)

From these Othello's words can be seen that appearance did not play any role when they fell in love with each other – it was much deeper. Desdemona was impressed by all the dangers Othello had to survive, e.g. being sold into slavery, and she admired him for his braveness and his experience – he travelled almost all over the world. Neither Desdemona nor Othello had any other reason for the marriage than love.

6.5 The Jealousy and the Development of Othello

Othello – The Moor of Venice is a tragedy of jealousy. It is jealousy (evoked by Iago) which destroys all the beautiful feelings between Othello and Desdemona and destroys the true deep passionate love.

Desdemona and Othello experienced a glamorous time with each other until Iago enters into the relationship in order to destroy Othello, who did

not make him his lieutenant and who might have spent the night with his wife. It does not represent a difficult task for Iago because Othello believes him and considers him to be an honest man. Iago is aware of it: "The Moor is of a free and open nature, that thinks men honest that but seem to be so, and will as tenderly be led by the nose as asses are." (Act I.3, p.48, 390-393) Iago knows Othello and his weak sides very well and he is ready to misuse it.

Relying on Desdemona's open-heartedness and Othello's absolute trust, Iago deftly turns each and every "virtue" into a flaw, and each character into their own most destructive enemy. In this sense he rewrites *Othello* itself, which begins like a comedy, with a marriage achieved against all odds by a rebellious daughter (like, say, *The Merry Wives* or the *Dream*), followed by a storm that presents deliverance, not evil – and yet which turns into monstrous tragedy, one that, as Iago boasts, does indeed trap everyone. (Dickson: 2005:262)

Described by Iago as "of a constant, loving, noble nature, Othello will prove to Desdemona a most dear husband." (Act II.1, p.66, 284-286) During the play his personality changes under the influence of jealousy.

Iago is very clever at making treacherous plans, for he knows how to manipulate with people mainly thanks to the way he speaks. For him it is very easy to make people to trust him. When talking with Othello about jealousy, his words sound very clever. Iago uses his control over language – hinting and insinuating, never stating.

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock

The meet it feeds on;
Poor and content is rich and rich enough,
But riches fineless is as poor as winter
To him that ever fears he shall be poor.
Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend
From Jealousy!
(Act III.3, p.104, 170-178)

He compares jealousy to a green-eyed monster. By the rejection of jealousy he makes Othello think about this issue. First Othello stands calm when he answers: "For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago; I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove." (Act III.3, p.104, 189-190) Othello still seems to be self-confident enough. He still trusts Desdemona mentioning that she had eyes so she knew that she is marrying an older black man. However during the play he becomes more and more suspicious.

When talking with Iago Othello defends Desdemona until Iago mentions the following words, which make Othello to doubt for the first time:

Ay, there's the point: as - to be bold with you -
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends -
Foh! One may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural.
But pardon me; I doo not in poison
Distinctly speak of her; though I may fear
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms
And happily repent.
(Act III.3, p.108, 227-237)

Iago makes Othello aware of the fact that he and Desdemona do not match together very well and that their relationship seems to be against

the nature. Iago accuses Desdemona of unnatural thoughts and persuades Othello that there is a great chance that one day she will wake up and leave him for another man, who will be of the same complexion and "clime". This is the breaking point in the play - from now on, Othello becomes more and more suspicious, crazy and violent. The change of Othello is immediate, as according to Dickson "It has been calculated from internal references that, once in Cyprus, the action of the play occupies no more than 33 hours – just under a day and a half." (Dickson 2005:265)

Othello's jealousy is absurd because Desdemona deeply loves him and she was aware of the fact that at first sight they do not match together. Her words

"I saw Othello's visage in his mind." (Act I.3, p.42, 250) prove her feelings – she felt in love with him for deeper and more exciting reasons than his appearance. Such love has usually a great chance to overcome their differences, which unfortunately was not the case of Othello and Desdemona - useless jealousy destroyed their relationship.

With the decrease of Othello's personality, his language decreases as well. At the beginning of the play his language is poetic and melodic, however as the change of his personality proceeds, his way of speaking becomes more and more violent and he uses more nasty words. One of the most shocking scenes is shown when Othello accuses Desdemona of being a whore:

Othello: Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
to write 'whore' upon? ... Impudent strumpet!

Desdemona: By heaven, you do me wrong.

Othello: Are you not a strumpet?

Desdemona: No, as I am a Christian:
If to preserve this vessel for my lord
From any other foul unlawful touch
Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.

Othello: What, not a whore?

Desdemona: No, as I shall be saved.

Othello: Is't possible?

Desdemona: O, heaven forgive us!

Othello: I cry you mercy, then:
I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
That married with Othello.

(Act IV.2, p.158, 70-87)

This scene shows the complete decline of Othello. He used to be a reputable and honoured general who had everything – a good position in the society and a loving wife. Now he is about to lose both - his reputation already suffered when he hit his wife in public. In this scene, he behaves very ironic, he is rude, insulting and hurting loving Desdemona by calling her a whore. Othello seems to be out of his mind and Desdemona cannot understand what happened with her good loving husband. She tries to explain him that he is mistaken but soon she realises that there is no chance that he would listen to her and take into consideration her explanation. He taunts her with his own certainties and refuses to listen to her denials.

Othello's madness increases and he decides to kill Desdemona as this seems to be an accurate punishment for her disloyalty. Desdemona is sleeping and he makes himself ready for this cruel deed but still some doubts occur.

It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood;
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
(Act V.2, p.185, 3-6)

Othello's idealising imagination transforms Desdemona to a stone – alabaster, absolute whiteness. He is getting ready for the cruel deed but still his love is alive. He adores her beauty, especially her glamorous white skin and he even kisses her. His language changes and is again very poetic and full of metaphors. He does not want to disfigure Desdemona but he thinks that he should kill her still. Otherwise, she will betray more men.

His decision to kill her was not a sudden one, but was planned and Othello is aware of the fact that there is no way back. If he kills his wife, there is no way to gain her back again. Othello uses a wonderful metaphor when he compares Desdemona to a rose:

But once put out thy light,
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethan heat
That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd the rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again.
(Act V.2, p.184, 10-14)

Othello is saying good-bye to his wife and it can be seen that at the bottom of his heart he does not want to kill her: "I must weep, but they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly; it strikes where it doth love." (Act V.2. p.186, 20-22) As Dickson states "Othello is a hero, not a devil, and ends the play an isolated and tragic figure. The calculating killer of an innocent white girl, he might easily have been the lurid villain of racist stereotype, but instead, crucially, he becomes another victim." (2005:258) Desdemona is the one who represents the biggest victim of all the gossips. She represents an incredibly strong woman whose love is so deep that even when she is dying she stays loyal to her husband and claims that he did not kill her.

After Desdemona's death Othello gets to know from Emilia (Desdemona's lady-in-waiting) that his wife was faithful and deeply loved him. Emilia now explains him everything and Othello realises how foolish he was. He also only hurts but does not kill Iago, which shows that he was not a cruel person and was just misled by Iago. The tragedy ends with Othello's suicide. Othello realises that he lost everything just thanks to foolish jealousy, which was invoked by Iago. He knows that soon the story about all things which happened will be spread among people and he would like the story to be true:

Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe. (Act V.2, p.206, 339-345)

Othello kills himself, because he does not see any reason why to live further – his loving Desdemona is dead and he would go to prison, which would be for such a reputable general a shame. This is the end of honourable Othello. He dies kissing his wife, whom he loved till the end: “I kiss’d thee ere I kill’d thee: no way but this; Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.” (Act V.2, p.206, 360-361)

6.6 Race in Othello and Racial Remarks

Othello is often a target of racial remarks. However, usually other characters are talking about him in such a rude way when he is not present. As already said before, Othello is a honourable and reputable soldier so most of the people value him for his deeds and characteristics. In most cases, it is Iago or who is very inventive in offensive metaphors. At the beginning of the play he describes the relationship of Othello and Desdemona: “An old black ram is topping your white ewe.” (Act I.1, p.16, 88-89) or “You’ll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you’ll have your nephews neigh to you.” (Act I.1, p.18, 111-112) or “Your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs.” (Act I.1, p.18, 116-117). Their deep love is here reduced to a brute animal lust, when Othello is compared to a black old ram and a Barbary horse.

Later when confronted with the claim that Othello is jealous, Desdemona answers: "I think the sun where he was born drew all such humours from him." (Act III.4, p.124, 26-27) One scholar comments on this statement:

Although critics have traditionally dismissed this statement as Desdemona's inability to accept the truth about violently heated Africans, Floyd-Wilson demonstrates that Desdemona's view was based on a time-honoured Aristotelian theory about the relationship between environment, climate and the 'humours', that mixture of bodily elements that determined personal disposition. Calling the theory 'geohumoralism', Floyd-Wilson argues that it defined for centuries the ethnicity of south and the north as extremes in opposition to a temperate middle, namely Greece and Rome. From this perspective, Africa and England had a great deal in common: they were both primitive and barbaric, but in inverted ways. Whereas England's cold climate sealed up the pores, kept the hot and moist humours within, and gave rise to a warm-blooded, strong, but slow-witted people, Africa's warm climate drew out the warm humours, and left people cool and dry, that is, dispassionate, intelligent, but physically weak and cowardly. Thus Africa was linked with wisdom, piety, philosophy, prophecy, and genial melancholy, and not with sexual passion. (Malcomson 2004:444)

Othello is also often described as "devil", "thick-lips" or simply "the Moor". The surprising thing is, except the few shocking scenes at the beginning of the play, *Othello* is not a play that explores racism in any real detail. *Othello* is mainly tragedy about love and jealousy.

When *Othello* first appeared around 1604, there would have been no question of a black man taking the lead – apart of anything else, few were resident in London. Shakespeare's theatre was well practised at illusion – just as boys played girls, white actors played black roles such those in *Titus Andronicus*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*.

7 *The Tempest*: An Examination of Caliban

7.1 Introduction to the Character

Caliban is one of the most interesting of Shakespeare's characters but when thinking of Caliban we should ask ourselves an important question: How can we be so sure that he is black? Does there appear any evidence in this play? Shakespeare does not tell us definitively that Caliban's skin is black, yet still we can infer some similarities with the way whites have characterised black people, especially in his behaviour and finally in the way Caliban is treated and regarded by Prospero. Also there is mentioned in the play that Caliban's mother's origin was African so this also evokes the imagination of black skin.

7.2 Source for the play

One of the possible sources for *The Tempest* is a ship accident in 1609 (two years before the play was published). The ship went to Virginia to develop the colony there which was just founded but it crashed near the Bermuda Islands. For all the people it was a kind of surprise to see the islands in reality because the islands were thought to be the land of devils. In reality there was beautiful nature, rich on different kinds of animals and

fruits. (Dickson 2005:325) It is possible that this inspired Shakespeare to write the first part of the play (the play also begins with a ship crash). He may combine both elements - the ship crash from 1609 (in this accident also all people stayed alive as well as all the characters in the play and they also liked the island) and the original thought of the islands being the land of devils (Caliban may represent a kind of devil). Anyway after the ship crashed, people could have seen that there are no devils on the islands - this could correspond to the characters in the play which were not afraid of Caliban because they felt he was not a devil at all.

7.3 The Name Caliban

The origin of the name Caliban is unclear. There can be found two explanations of this name. One of the explanations is that the name came into existence through the word "cannibal" (interchanging of letters in his name) but there is not any direct evidence in the play that he was cannibalistic.

There is nothing in the play to indicate that he was cannibalistic unless we consider that his food consists of crabs, marmosets, and scammels (snails), which he promises to find for Stephano. Their low nature may be akin to his own." (Coles 1983:62)

Another explanation connects this name with the word "Carib" which stands for inhabitants of the Carribean in general. There appears a

question now: Is it possible that *The Tempest* is situated on one of the Caribbean islands? We know that Prospero and Miranda had been chased out of Milan but would it be possible for them to go so far away from Milan on “a rotten carcass of a boat, not rigg’d, nor tackle, sail, nor mast, the very rats instinctively had quit it.”? (Act I, Scene 2, 147 – 149)

According to *The Shakespeare Name and Place Dictionary*,

the origin of the name is uncertain but most critics favour the theory that the name is an anagram of 'cannibal'... Another possibility is the town Calibia, located on the African coast between Tunis and Hammamet on Diego Ribeyro's map of 1529. Another suggestion has been that Caliban is modeled on a West African prince living in London. His name was Dedery Jaquoah, son of King Caddibiah of the river Cetras in Guinea. The prince was baptized John on 1st of January 1611. Also offered as origins are 'kalebon', Arabic slang for 'vile dog', 'cauliban' a Gypsy (Romany) word for 'black', and 'Kaleeban', the satyr of Kalee in Hindu scripture. (Davis 1995:75)

As we can see there are many explanations and theories about the origin of the name Caliban. The most favoured theory is that the name Caliban is an anagram of 'cannibal'.

7.4 The Appearance of Caliban

Briefly Caliban is described as a monster but this does not cover the whole creature. Shakespeare presents him as half fish and half monster. An excellent description is relayed by Trinculo (a jester) who says about him that he was “a strange fish, legged like a man and his fins are like arms“. (Act II, Scene 2, 28 - 35) Then he realised that Caliban was not a

real fish so he decided that he is “an islander, that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt“. (Act II, Scene 2, 37)

These words may echo the reaction of European people when they first landed in Africa and when they first saw black people. These people seemed to be strange und unnatural for them. For sure black people were also surprised to see white people because they have never seen any before and this must have been the same with Caliban.

Also Miranda (Prospero´s daughter) says about Caliban that she did not particularly enjoy looking at him. This means that she still did not get used to his appearance although she grew up on the island and has become acquainted with him for quite a long time.

When Stephano (a drunken butler) first discovers Caliban, he develops some ideas about what can be done with this creature. First he wants to bring Caliban to England, have him painted and show him at fairs in order to earn excellent money. There can be seen another parallel to colonization – white colonizers often took Indians and Africans to Britain and showed them at fairs for money.

Nobody is really scared by Caliban´s appearance, but they are only surprised and also a bit curious but nobody is afraid of him - this is very surprising because Caliban is described as "half fish and half man, but with human head and limbs. His trunk should be elongated and covered with scales and provided with fins. Prospero calls him a tortoise, and Trinkulo states that he looks and smells like a fish, a plain fish and marketable." (Coles 1983:62)

We can maybe imagine him better when realising how Prospero often calls him (e.g. tortoise, earth etc.). Once he is also called a moon-calf. This name is connected with an old superstition which says that the moon causes a deformation of fetuses so that monsters were born instead of human beings. (Coles 1983:11)

7.5 Caliban's Personality

An important question stands in front of us – is Caliban really a monster as he is described by characters in the play? Is not he in fact a regrettable character? His behaviour does not seem to be aggressive (except the situation mentioned at the beginning of the play when Caliban tried to rape Prospero's daughter Miranda). In some situations we can easily pity him because he is treated by Prospero in a rude way all the time although he fulfils all his wishes and commands.

In some cases Caliban shows his quite intelligent mind, especially with his knowledge that is closely connected with life on the island. We can realise that he loves his island and that he knows a lot about the life there as it will be discussed in detail later.

Caliban serves his master Prospero because he is afraid that Prospero will punish him if he does not obey (he knows about his great power) but he is not happy to serve him. He also often speaks about freedom – this is probably his big dream, just to be free. Prospero needs Caliban a lot because he does all the heavy work. At one point Prospero says: "We

cannot miss him, he does make our fire, fetch in our wood and serves in offices that profit us." (Act I, Scene 2, 314 – 315) This evokes the image of the enslaved black people (as well as Indians), who were treated similarly. European colonists who came to America needed Indians to help them to stay alive, because they came from a different world with different surroundings and it was difficult for them to adapt. They would not be able to survive in America without Indians, who taught them for example how to grow maize. Likewise, Prospero would not have been able to survive on the island without Caliban.

Caliban is also appreciative of kindness and this can be seen when Stefano gives him wine and he got drunk immediately. He is extraordinarily happy then. It is the only situation in the play in which Caliban feels happy and so Caliban wants Stefano to become his god. He suddenly forgot that his master is Prospero and wants Stefano to be his new master, just because of wine. Nevertheless he is accustomed to drink and he is better able to carry it than the civilized men like Trinculo or Stephano.

He is less of a brute after drinking than either Stefano or Trinculo. The only effect it shows on him is to make him stammer in his song. He grows merry instead of quarrelsome like Trinculo. He is the only one of the three sober enough to see through Ariel's trick of the line of fine garments and he wants to have nothing to do with it. He considers wine, which he calls 'water with berries in it', something divine, and when he encounters Stephano with a constant supply of it, he falls to the ground before him, calls him a god, kisses his foot, and becomes his follower. (Coles 1983:63)

7.6 Caliban's Language

Caliban speaks excellent English thanks to Prospero because it was Prospero (and Miranda too) who taught him how to speak. Prospero says Caliban learned his language poorly but when observing him we can see that his English is good. In fact he does not speak English, but Italian. Although the whole play was written in English, each character in this play should be imagined speaking Italian. This can be another parallel to the colonization – we know that Christopher Columbus who started the colonizing process of America in 1492 came from Italy (although it was Spain that hired him). Interestingly, Columbus first landed in the Caribbean (again a connection with the name Caliban).

Also Stephano is surprised when Caliban understands and speaks his language: “Where the devil should he learn our language?” (Act II, Scene 2, 68)

In contrast with Stefano or Trinculo, Caliban speaks a literary language. Sometimes his language is even poetic:

The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That, if I then had waked after long sleep
Will make me sleep again, and then, in dreamin,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked
I cried to dream again.
(Act III, Scene 2, 133 – 142)

According to this poetic language, Caliban is not represented as a brute or monster by Shakespeare. He quite romantically expresses his own feelings through beautiful speech, in which dreaming becomes a kind of solace. The magical occurrences on the island confirm that it is Caliban's prison.

At the beginning of the play, Miranda says to Caliban: "Wouldst gabble like a thing most brutish. I endow'd thy purposes with words that made them known." (Act I, Scene 2, 360 – 361) She criticises his previous language. In fact she does not even call it a language. For Miranda it was only non-sense shrieks but for sure for Caliban it had a deeper meaning. Miranda thinks about her mother tongue as the cultivated (and probably the only) language in the world. Although Caliban speaks excellent English (Italian) he feels that he does not really need it "You taught me language and my profit on't is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language!" (Act I, Scene 2, 366 – 368) This again has some similar signs with colonization. European colonizers also tried to teach the blacks and Indians they had enslaved their language and they did not consider that they had their own language. White people were not interested in learning their language. For them it seemed better to force them to speak the language of the colonizers. According to one scholar "Perhaps it is no surprise that Caliban, the character in *The Tempest* who most often steals the show, has sometimes been taken as its tragic hero." (Dickson 2005:330)

However Caliban does not always speak in a polite way, he also knows a lot of bad and rude words. Where did he learn these words? He had probably learned them from Prospero because he speaks with Caliban in an impolite and rude way all the time, he does not even chat with him, he just gives him orders and commands. Caliban then just repeats what he often hears from Prospero, e.g. "What a pied ninny's this! Thou scurvy patch!" (Act III, Scene 2, 64)

7.7 Family and Relationships

Caliban's mother, Sycorax, was a witch who was born in Argier, North Africa. She was banished from Argier for her terrible mischief. Shakespeare does not say exactly what kind of mischief it was, but it could have been her association with the devil. Prospero also often calls Caliban the son of the devil. They originally wanted to kill her but at that time she was pregnant so they left her on an island far away from them. She and her son Caliban ruled the whole island because at that time they were the only people there. Another creature on the island was Ariel (an airy spirit) who was treated by her very cruelly. She imprisoned Ariel into a cloven pine but then Sycorax died. Ariel had been imprisoned there for twelve years and then Prospero came and saved him.

First we get to know about Sycorax from Prospero and not from Caliban but Caliban also speaks about his mother: "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, which thou takest from me." (Act 1, Scene 2, 335 – 336)

The character of Sycorax could be also connected with the African history – she was banished from Africa and the African black people were also forced to leave their country and go to America as slaves, and whites justified their enslavement by stating many reasons, most of which were unfounded myths and lies.

There is not any reference to Caliban's father or any other family-members in the play.

Caliban also does not have any friends. He is used to live without any friends from his early age. This seems at odds with European encounters with Africans and Indians who had large communities.

Prosper enslaved Caliban, and he even does not call him Caliban but he has for him names as e.g. tortoise, earth, slave etc. Caliban is afraid of him because if he does not obey without any protest Prospero punishes him. "I must obey: his art is of such power, it would control my dam's god, Setebos, and make a vassal of him." (Act I, Scene 2, 375 – 377) Yet Caliban interestingly recognises in *The Tempest* the source of Prospero's power, namely the role of education in one's life. Caliban knows that Prospero is such a powerful man only thanks to his books "First to possess his books, for without them he's but a sot, as I am." (Act III, Scene 2, 91 – 92) European colonizers also had higher education than black people (most of the black people were not even able to read and write).

Caliban's relationship with Prospero is like a master and slave, not nice for sure. Prospero calls him a slave (and other "names") and he gives him

only orders all the time. Prospero does not tell him a single nice word. However the relationship was not bad at first. When Prospero came to the island, Caliban liked and helped him: "I loved thee and show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle." (Act I, Scene 2, 340 – 341) Then Caliban tried to rape his daughter and the relationship completely changed. In fact Caliban does not seem to be aware of doing something bad, it is Prospero who tells us about this act. In this case Caliban is presented by Prospero as an amoral creature without moral sense. However, the development of their relationship, positive while Prospero learns basic information about the island, and negative once he enslaves Caliban, replicates the colonists' treatment of natives during the initial contact and colonization of the New World.

7.8 Religion

Caliban knows that there is a power above him, taught to him by his mother and Prospero. He fears and grows angry with the spirits which inflict pains on him and he considers wine as something divine.

In Act I, Sc. 2, 165 he tells us he must obey his mother's god, Setebos, which, strangely enough, is the name of the god of the Patagonian Indians in South America. Shakespeare introduced it here merely as one of the strange creatures, customs, and men brought to England by returning travellers, and surrounded by the same mystery that envelops Caliban and Sycorax. The nature of Caliban's religion has aroused Browning to describe in one of his famous poems, Caliban on Setebos. (Coles 1983:63)

This means that Shakespeare did not think up Setebos by his own but he used the god of the Patagonian Indians in South America. The Patagonian Indians believed in Setebos, which is another feature representing the connection between Indians and Caliban.

7.9 Caliban's Attitude to the Island and to the Nature

As mentioned above Caliban loves the island on which he lives. It was originally his island but taken away by Prospero. His companions on the island were only the lowly animal life, the beetles, snakes, birds and shellfish. His thoughts cling to the rocks, shores, trees and sunshine on the island. He constantly talks of clouds and island noises, apes, hedgehogs and snakes. Caliban's appreciation of the sun, moon, earth and wild creatures of the island is expressed in fine poetic language. As one scholar comments on Caliban's relationship to the nature:

We find it in 'As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd with raven's feather from unwholesome fen,' and in 'hedgehogs which lie tumbling in my barefoot way' and in 'adders with cloven tongues hiss me in my barefoot way.' He delights in the beautiful music with which the island is filled, and he urges Stephano to teach him to sing. (Coles 1983:63)

Caliban shows deep emotion when talking about the island. He loves the nature and considers the island to be his home. He perfectly knows how to survive on the island and this is why Prospero needs him.

8 Conclusion

William Shakespeare introduced three Moors and an interesting enslaved character Caliban. Shakespeare's black characters can be smart (Aaron, Othello) as well as rather simple (e.g. Caliban). They can be treated good as well as badly. They can be enslaved and at the bottom of the society like Caliban, but they can also be at the top of the society like the Prince of Morocco or Othello.

Othello represents a reputable soldier who has everything at the beginning of the play – a beautiful loving wife and a good position in the society. In Act III his character changes under the influence of cunning Iago, who misuses Othello's trust and open heart. Othello turns from a good and rational man into a jealous violent beast who strangles his wife Desdemona to save his honour. At the end of the play he loses everything – his good reputation, his loving wife and finally his life. However he is just a victim of Iago's cunning plans and gossips.

In *The Tempest* we can not say that Caliban is a real monster but the European "colonists" do so. In many cases he shows quite an intelligent mind, knowledge of nature and he speaks excellent, even poetic, language. In his personality and behaviour there can be seen a similarity to the colonization of Africa and also in some situations which occur in the play we can see a remarkable similarity to the history of the colonization as for example in the following Caliban's sentence: "For I am all the

subjects that you have, which first was mine own king, and here you sty me in this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me the rest o' the island."
(Act I, Scene 2, 345 – 348)

The character of the Prince of Morocco energizes the play *The Merchant of Venice*, for he is completely different from the other characters including the Jew Shylock. Thanks to the colour of his skin he gains the attention of the audience. It can be seen that he has good heart but his complexion predestinates him to a failure, which was probably very appreciated by the British audience, who was predominantly racist in Shakespeare's time.

Titus Andronicus is a revenge tragedy full of cruelty, suffering and self-destruction. As one of the main causes of all the misery appears Aaron, the Moor, whose cruel deeds are highlighted by the colour of his skin as the black colour was considered to be the colour of evil. However Shakespeare did not want to create Aaron for the audience to hate him – he gave him a Biblical name, which evokes in the audience rather positive feelings. He represents also a clever warrior and in comparison with Titus he appears as a loving father. *Titus Andronicus* became one of the most frequently played drama during Shakespeare time and he made a lot of money thanks to this play. The audience were hungry for sensation, blood, great effects on the stage and this is what Shakespeare gave them by creating *Titus Andronicus*.

Today blackness is not considered ugly, people tan to get darker skin, it is fashionable. In Shakespeare's time the most beautiful was lily white skin

so no wonder that his characters are often targets of racial remarks. It must be said that none of the characters is ashamed of the colour of his skin but still they are aware of the fact that they are different – the Prince of Morocco says it right at his first appearance. Although he is proud to be black, he mentions that he would like to be white only if this would get him the love of Portia. Othello does not confront the racial remarks face to face that often as for example Aaron. Yet starts to think about the colour of his skin thanks to Iago's idea that one day Desdemona will leave him because he is black and old. Aaron represents a target for racial remarks of white characters in the play, and he meets them daily, face to face, but still he is defending the colour of his skin and thinks that having black skin is much better. Each of them is proud of being black and this is how it should be also nowadays.

Another important feeling which unites all the characters including Caliban is love. All of them are in love with white women – some with deep and passionate love, for example Othello and Aaron. Their feelings are real and they both are lucky in this matter because both Desdemona and Tamora return the love. The Prince of Morocco and Caliban were not successful – Caliban showed some feelings to Miranda, the daughter of Prospero. He behaved to her in a barbaric way when trying to rape her. The Prince of Morocco had a great personality but he did not win Portia's hand in marriage.

We can see that all Shakespeare's black characters have different roles in the play and in the society of white people as well. Some of them are successful, some of them not. It can be compared with the situation today – the colour of the skin does not matter, one can be successful with black skin as well. We learned from our history that black people had difficult times only because the colour of their skin, but nowadays it is less of an obstacle. Let us take an example from the United States and President Barack Obama, the man who made a dream come true to be the first African American to hold the office.

William Shakespeare did not create the black characters in order to concentrate on the racial question. He created outstanding characters who are unique in many ways. He gave them the black colour because this makes them even more outstanding and it emphasises their special characteristics, which were examined in this work.

9 Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá zkoumáním čtyř postav tmavé pleti, které se objevují ve čtyřech hrách alžbětinského dramatika Williama Shakespeara. Jedná se o tituly *Titus Andronicus*, kde se objevuje krutý Aaron, *Kupec benátský*, kde se byť jen na malou chvíli setkáváme s výjimečným princem marockým, *Othello, benátský mouřenín*, kde je jednou z klíčových postav žárlivý generál Othello, a *Bouře*, v níž nalézáme velice zajímavou postavu Canibala. Při analýze těchto divadelních her je nutné brát v potaz, že William Shakespeare nikdy nepsal své hry s tím záměrem, aby je někdo četl, ale psal své hry proto, aby byly hrány. Měli bychom si tedy zkusit představit, jak na výše uvedené postavy tmavé pleti a na jejich chování reagovalo alžbětinské publikum. Požitek z návštěvy divadelního představení byl totiž v této době jiný, než je tomu dnes. V alžbětinské Anglii bylo publikum při představení velice živé, předpokládalo se, že lidé budou reagovat na dění na scéně a budou tak součástí představení. Lidé se při představení běžně občerstvovali, pili a diskutovali o hře.

Při analýze Shakespearových postav tmavé pleti je pozornost soustředěna především na to, jak jsou tyto postavy integrovány do „světa bílých“, zda se jim podařilo v tomto světě uspět a jaká je jejich interakce s ostatními postavami. Dále jsou v práci analyzovány jednotlivé charakteristiky daných postav.

William Shakespeare nám představuje tři postavy tmavé pleti, které často nazývá mouřeníny, a jednu velice zajímavou postavu zotročeného Calibana. Všechny tyto postavy vykazují velkou míru odlišnosti – některé jsou chytré (Othello, Aaron), některé jsou jednodušší (Caliban), některým se podařilo uspět a dostat se na vrchol společnosti (Othello, princ marocký), někteří žijí zotročení (Caliban).

Existují ale i znaky, které mají všechny tyto postavy společné. Všechny postavy pociťují lásku k ženě bílé pleti. U Othella a Aarona se jedná o opravdovou vášnivou lásku k Desdemoně a Tamoře, která je opětována a naplněna, zatímco Caliban i princ marocký se setkávají s nepochopením a jejich láska zůstane ze strany Mirandy i Porcie nenaplněna. Každý však dává svou náklonnost najevo různým způsobem. Othello se zamiluje a následně se s krásnou Desdemonou ožení, ale jejich svazek zničí žárlivost. Aaron je předurčen k tomu, aby se s královnou Tamorou stýkal potají, jelikož jejich vztah je vzhledem k okolnostem a k jejich postavení nepřipustný. Princ marocký chce získat ruku Porcie a vyjádří se ve smyslu, že by se zřekl barvy své pleti pouze v případě, že by mu to přineslo její lásku. Nicméně k Porciině velké úlevě si princ zvolí špatnou skříňku a musí odjet zpět do svého království bez nevěsty. Caliban dává svou náklonnost najevo poněkud neobvyklým způsobem – pokusí se Mirandu znásilnit, za což samozřejmě upadne v nemilost u Mirandina otce Prospera.

Společnou charakteristikou zkoumaných postav tmavé pleti je i to, že jsou na svou pleť pyšní – nejvíce si přednosti tmavé pleti uvědomuje Aaron, který kritizuje světlou pleť například proto, že člověka často zradí tím, že se v nevhodných chvílích červená. Také princ marocký upozorňuje na fakt, že není o nic horší než muž bílé pleti narozený na severu, jelikož mají stejnou barvu krve.

William Shakespeare nevytvořil tyto postavy tmavé pleti za účelem toho, aby hlouběji upozornil na problematiku rasové nesnášenlivosti. Vytvořil výjimečné postavy, kterým dal tmavou pleť proto, aby je ještě více odlišil od ostatních postav a dal jim tak ve svých hrách nadmíru vyniknout. Díky těmto postavám získaly jeho hry na atraktivitě a byly u alžbětinského publika velmi oblíbeny.

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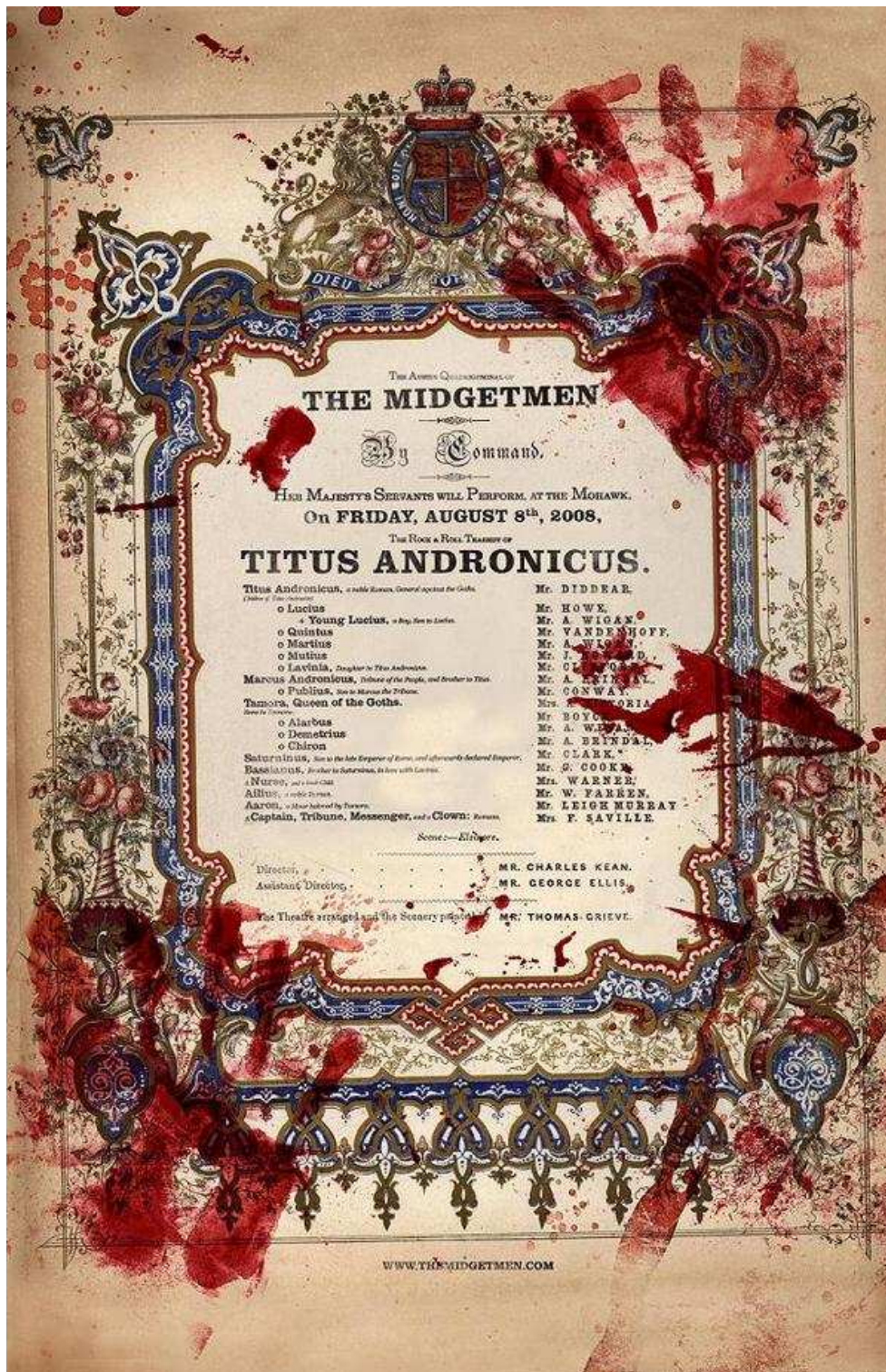
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11 Attachments

- 1 William Shakespeare
- 2 Modern poster advertising Titus Andronicus
- 3 Poster advertising Titus Andronicus in Shakespeare's time
- 4 Ira Aldridge as Aaron in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (between 1833 and 1855)
- 5 The Globe Theatre 1599
- 6 Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Caliban, postcard published by J. Miles and Company, London
- 7 C. W. Sharpe (England 1818 - 1899): *Caliban. Miranda. Prospero. The Tempest* (1875)
- 8 Ira Aldridge as Othello, illustration originally published in 1887



1 William Shakespeare



2 Modern poster advertising Titus Andronicus

BY PARTICULAR DESIRE.
For the BENEFIT of MR Beeton.

This prefent Wednesday, May 5, 1587

will be performed a terrible and bloody tragedgy of ancient ROME

TITUS ANDRONICUS

a play by

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

performed at

the **GLOBE THEATRE, London.**

Performed by

the **CHAMBERLAIN'S MEN**

with *Titus Adronicus* by,

CHRISTOPHER BEETON

Marcus Andronicus by **WILLIAM KEMPE,**

Bassianus by **AUGUSTINE PHILLIPS,**

and,

Lucius by **THOMAS POPE,**

with playerf,

JOHN LOWIN, AUGUSTINE PHILLIPS, William

OSTLER, Richard COWLEY, Alexander COOKE,

Robert ARMIN, Henry CONDELL.

3 Poster advertising Titus Andronicus in Shakespeare's time



4 Ira Aldridge as Aaron in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (between 1833 and 1855)



5 The Globe Theatre 1599



6 Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Caliban, postcard published by J. Miles and Company, London



6 C. W. Sharpe (England 1818 - 1899): *Caliban. Miranda. Prospero. The Tempest* (1875)



IRA ALDRIDGE AS "OTHELLO."

7 Ira Aldridge as Othello, illustration originally published in 1887