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BRITONS AND MASKED STRANGERS IN JAMES I'S EMPIRE: A HISTORICIST STUDY OF OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE

Literature

Keywords: Shakespeare, Othello, British Empire, the Mediterranean, the Other, the Same.

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Abstract

This research seeks to explore Shakespeare's representation of Britons and strangers in Shakespeare's Othello, the Moor of Venice (1604) in the context of the accession of James I to the throne of England, and the resulting dramatic shift in geopolitical strategy as well in the conception of the British Empire. This historical reading of the play will be supplemented by an appeal to literary theories about archetypes, the Other, and the notions of play and masks. One of the major arguments of the research is that the idea of empire in Shakespeare's drama finds one of its best expressions not solely in The Tempest as most postcolonial critics often prone to claim, but also in Othello, a play written and performed at a transitional period in British history marked by a significant change of dynasty and a concomitant shift in the notion of empire, from that of a defensiveimperium as a mark of English national sovereignty to that of British Empire in the modern sense of the word. This redefinition of empire in the early Jacobean period, we would also contend, was sustained by a drastic re-deployment in geopolitical strategy that made of the stranger or the Other and the Same vital issue in the process of the definition of self-hood and nationhood.

Introduction: Literature Review, Issue, Method and Material

"A great deal of the world's history is the history of empire. Indeed, it could be said that all history is imperial – or colonial – history, if one takes a broad enough definition and goes far enough back," wrote Stephen Howe (2002). Howe's citation is illustrated superbly by the interest that Shakespeare accords to empire in nearly all his drama, i.e., in his comedies and tragedies as well as in his historical and Roman plays. However, this interest in the British Empire shows particularly strongly in the plays written and performed after the enthronement of James VI of Scotland as King James I of England. And surprisingly enough, Shakespeare's attraction to the idea of empire finds one of its best expressions not solely in *The Tempest* as some post-colonial critics (Barker & Hulme, 1985; Brown, 1985; Greenblatt (1988); Willis, 1989; Skura, 1989; Knapp, 1992; Gillies, 1994, etc.) are prone to claim, but in less cited plays like *Othello, The Moor of Venice* (1604). Such a transatlantic-centred reading of Shakespeare in empire and pre-modern studies glosses over the much more important place that the Mediterranean holds in the debate over the imperial idea due to the shift from the Tudor to the Stuart dynasty. If follows that Shakespeare's overall interest in the Mediterranean cultural area cannot be totally justified on the grounds that if Shakespeare set some of his plays in that area, it is in order to escape censorship when dealing with controversial issues or handing advice to the monarch. Nor is the interest of Shakespeare in the Mediterranean basin due completely to the supposed mythical origins of the Britons, origins traced to the Roman Empire through the mythical founder Brutus or Brute. Finally, we would argue that if Shakespeare's attention is drawn by the Mediterranean, it was not just an issue of the travel of Renaissance ideas marked by a rebirth of interest in classical Greek and Roman writings, such as those of Plato, Virgil, Plautus, Cicero, Seneca, and so on and so

forth. These authors certainly provided Shakespeare with food for thought about virtue, the right governance, love, gender relationships and other issues pertaining to his age, but their influence cannot be held as the one ultimate answer to his setting of his plays in the Mediterranean.

Hence, we would contend that whilst the above reading perspectives offer insights into Shakespeare's Mediterranean plays such as *Othello*, they need to be completed by ahistorical contextual reading centered on the drastic re-deployment of the geopolitical strategy followed during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, after the peaceful accession of James VI of Scotland to the throne of England as James I, a Protestant King married to a Danish Princess. At the crux of this re-deployment is the major issue of re-definition of self-hood and nationhood in relation to the Other and the Same. It is hardly surprising that Shakespeare saw in the Mediterranean the ideal space to raise thorny issues like the re-definition of the Britons' identity and the place that strangers would hold within a restored empire of Great Britain so much prophesied about and wished for by James I within the boundaries of a play, that is within a politically accepted poetics of space. Admittedly, the case can be made for the universality of Shakespeare's drama, which has made some critics affirm the playwright's status as "our contemporary." However, we would contend that if Shakespeare had received the attention of the public during his time, it is primarily because he dealt very subtly with the major domestic and foreign issues of his period, as well as the anxiety that England was swamped by strangers of all shades, including the Scots. Indeed, as soon as he was crowned James I of England, James VI of Scotland sought desperately the inclusion of his Scottish subjects in the empire of Great Britain that he would like to see expanded overseas beyond the recovered antique geographical territory of Britain. His idea of empire was not limited to breaking the encirclement of this "sceptered isle," "this realm," or "this England" (the words are Shakespeare's) by formidable enemies as was most often the case in the Elizabethan period.

Trevelyan is to the point when he named the Elizabethan and Jacobean England as Shakespeare's England, for his drama reflects, indeed, "the spirit of the age." However, a caveat has to be put to Trevelyan's appellation for it encourages the assumption that Shakespeare did not change his political perspective on self-hood, nationhood or empire to suit the respective ideology of the imperial monarchs who recruited him. What distinguishes the Elizabethan Shakespeare from the Jacobean Shakespeare mostly is his espousal of the dynastic differences in ideology as regards the notion of empire, that is to say the displacement of the Tudor concept of a postcolonial England as an exclusive *imperium* or nation jealous of its sovereignty by James I's Euro-centered conception of an inclusive empire wherein the Scots, the English, as well as the planters of the settler colony of Ireland not only assume their antique identity as Britons, but are duty-bound to expand overseas an empire thus divinely restored in its territorial integrity. So this research is concerned principally with Shakespeare's poetics of the Mediterranean space as an ideal space for the performance of a British identity in relation to the inner enemies and external foes that fits in well with the new ideology of empire propounded by the new imperial monarch James I at his accession to the English throne in 1603.

It is true that Shakespeare's espousal of empire in the sense of James I is most prominent in later plays such as *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, both of which can be regarded as supplements to Virgil's *The Aeneid* (1985). However, we would make the case thatunless we understand the supremely important place that *Othello* holds as a transitional play in Shakespeare's drama about empire, we would certainly overlook how he operated his shift in the conception of empire and the relation of the Other to the Same within a contact zone where the sovereigns of many countries (Spain, Turkey, France, etc) were competing to snatch the title of a Caesar or Roman Emperor. This research, therefore, falls in the category of pre-modern, imperial studies that focuses on the manner Shakespeare seeks to circumscribe the concepts of nationhood and nationhood in that turbulent zone of contact of cultures, *par excellence*, the Mediterranean, with a wink to James I and his new ideology of empire. To explore this issue, we shall deploy an eclectic approach combining the findings of historicist and archetypal literary theories as well as the findings of literary theories about the Other and the crucial importance of play and mask in cultures. This eclectic approach, as already suggested above, will be brought to bear on a transitional play in Shakespeare's drama, *Othello, the moor of Venice* (1994, All further references are to this edition.). This choice of material in the form of a tragedy is not fortuitous, for the poetics of space in *Othello* is doubly marked by the idea of empire in the sense that its action takes place in that contact zone of empires, *par excellence*, the Mediterranean, and was performed in a theater significantly named *The Globe*. These features certainly make it suitable for the type of research that we wish to conduct into the change in the conception or perception of empire in Shakespeare's drama and his concomitant re-definition of self-hood, nationhood, and the Other in the context of the shift from the Tudor to the Stuart Dynasty.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of Shakespeare's *Othello*, has led us to three major research findings. The first finding is that the play retraces the evolution in the meaning of empire from the Tudor or Elizabethan conception of *imperium* as sovereignty over a defensive, "postcolonial" society threatened by external and internal foes to a conception of a British Empire on the Roman model of the *Pax Romana* wished for by James I. This first research finding completes and consolidates the findings already made by Marshall in his *Theatre and empire: Great Britain on the London stages under James IV and I* (1988). The second finding pertains to a radical change in the relationships between the same with the ethnic Other (Othello) from the latter's initial acceptance as a "metic" in partnership or alliance against the Spanish/Turkish threat of invasion of the *imperium* of Venice/England to his later rejection as a "xenos" or Turk in James I's imaginatively restored empire of Great Britain. The re-writing of the recent past of England in the light of the change of dynasty is at once a ritual of expulsion of inner enemies or demons (Iago/English xenophobe against Scots) threatening domestic peace by his demonic activities; a sacrifice of the "metic" turned "Xenos" (stranger) on the altar of Desdemona/Elizabeth I, as well as a celebration of the re/birth or restoration of a newly imagined empire through the promotion of a Florentine/Roman as governor at the imperial outpost of Cyprus that could well stand for Ireland. All in all, we have found out that Shakespeare has made his own James I's idea of *Pax Britannica*

on the imagined antique model of a *Pax Romana* at whose head is placed not only an Augustus but also a Constantine figure. Shakespeare wrote and performed *Othello* against a complex historical background marked not only by continuity, as is often claimed by historians and literary critics, who took into consideration the peaceful transfer of power from one dynasty to another, but also by a fundamental discontinuity or disjuncture that shows itself mostly in the conception of empire and the relationship between the Other and the Same brought out by the very change in dynasty.

This historical complexity largely accounts for the complexity of the representation of the ethnic Other and the Same in *Othello*. Significantly, the playwas first performedat the court of King James I on November 1, 1604, the year when the reapprochement of Britain to Spain was operated through a political move by James I, who went so far as to cut off Raleigh's head to seal his entente with the Elizabethan foes. Though written during Shakespeare's great tragic period, which includes amongst other plays, *Hamlet* (1600), *King Lear* (1604–5), *Macbeth* (1606), and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606–7), *Othello* holds a central placein this large corpus of tragedies, for it was precisely performed at a threshold of a royal succession that witnessed a redefinition of British foreign and domestic policy. In this context, it has to be noted that in the same year (1603) when James I ascended the English throne, Shakespeare becamea member of the King's Men, an acting company, called the Lord Chamberlain's Men during the reign Elizabeth I.

Naturally, a change of patron implies an accommodation with the imperial vision that the new patron projected in relation to what Marienstras (1981) calls the Near or Close-at-Home and the Far or Distant not only in the geographical sense of the two words, but also in terms of politics of culture, religion, andethnicity. As is often the case in politically sensitive plays, Shakespeare the King's Man has set *Othello* in Venice, to which Britain as an imagined sea Empire was often compared at the time, principally because the prestige that the former enjoyed as a hub of commercial activity and the crucial role it played in the defeat of the Ottoman fleet in Lepanto in 1571. James I is known to have written a poem to celebrate the victory of the Holy League of which Venice was an important member over the Ottomans. So, the analogy of sea trade empires to which the Bard of Avon has resorted to in *Othello* betrays, all at the same time, the imperial pretensions ofan imaginatively restored Great Britain, particularly those of James I; his intention to please his new patron by that comparison; as well as a strategy of avoiding to outrage in any way his patron if ever his performance of empire and the identity of the Britons that he proposes does not completely toe James I' ideological line.

Historically speaking, *Othello*, is meant to portray one of the wars between Venice and the Ottomans over the Venetian outpost, Cyprus, that took place in 1570. This war is a small-scale war, but it prodded Venice into an active participation in that large-scale war waged by the Holy League against the Ottomans in 1571. The latter ended with the resounding victory of the former over the latter in Lepanto, a victory that would not have been possible if Venetian formidable flagship. So, the analogy between Venice and Britain that Shakespeare uses to prop up the plot of Othello is an apt one in its evocation of geographical smallness and pretension to a first role amongst the sea empires of the time. The analogy cannot fail to please his patron James I, who

harbors the same imperial pretentions as Venice. Likewise Shakespeare's audience of the time could not fail to grasp the parallels between British and Venetian histories as far as the threat posed to territorial integrity of Venice by the Turks, or to use the terminology of the time, the Grand Signor or the Porte. Unlike the modern readership or audience, the analogy is indeed quite easy for Shakespeare's contemporaries to establish, for the umbrella word "Turk" has a large scope of meaning. This umbrella word is employed not only as a referential word for"Turks"as nationals of a geographical area, but also as a derogatory term for all Christians, whose habitus does not fully comply with the Christian way of life, or the Protestant way of life in the case of Shakespeare's Britain. Clearly, Othello's dismissal of his drunken night watchmen as "Turks" for their disturbance of civil peace in Cyprus has one of its sources in this derogatory usage of the term, "Turk."

Outraged by the brawl purposefully provoked to discredit Cassio as Lieutent and make him fall into disgrace, Othello exclaims as follows to shame the guard for behaving in the same uncivil manner as the very Turks that they have come to combat: "Are we turn'dTurks? And to ourselves do that/ Which Heavens hath forbid the Ottomites./ For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl:/ He that stirs next, to carve for his own rage,/ Holds his soul light. (p.63). Shakespeare was the contemporary of Knolles, who wrote *The General historie of the Turkes in 1603*, the same year when King James IV of Scotland ascended the throne of England as King James I, and just one year went Shakespeare put his play *Othello* on stage. So, it is hardly surprising if the prejudices about Turks and Moors reported by Knolleshad found their way to Shakespeare's drama. Shakespeare's shame and name technique put into the mouth of a Muslim convert into the Christian faith turns, as we shall see in the course of this discussion, into a tragic irony by the end of the play. At this stage, it is worth reminding the reader that the usage of the umbrella word "Turk" also covers all the Muslims, including Moors, because of the prominent place or prestige that the Ottoman Empire enjoyed in the Muslim world. The second remark that needs to be made here is that the janissaries to whom the night watchmen are shamefully compared by Othello were often Christian youth, sometimes kidnapped, and at other times willfully trusted by poor Christian families to Turks to ensure their prosperity, or employed as counterparts for the payment of taxes imposed on the Christian population under Turkish domination. It is these youths who constituted the spearhead of that formidable Ottoman army after an ideological brainwashing, and which in the eyes of Christendom of the pre-modern times constituted both a scandal and a shame. It is this scandalous recruitment of Christian born youths turned into fanatic, turbulent janissaries that constitutes the other source of Othello's above-cited exclamation.

Shakespeare offers another key to the analogical discourse about sea empires in the Mediterranean (Venice and Britain) by resorting to the tempest as an essential element in the plot. Indeed, when the play was performed in 1604, the English had still a very fresh memory of that god-sent tempest that wrecked the Spanish Armada in the English Channel in 1588to be difficult for them to understand Shakespeare's wink at it, though invoked in another wartime context, the one opposing Venice and the Ottomans over the outpost of Cyprus in 1570-1573. In interweaving this element of the plot with the peculiar concept of "Turk" attached to European people who have

strayed out of their normative way of life, it becomes crystal clear that Shakespeare is replaying the conflict between the English and the Spaniards during nearly the whole reign of Elizabeth I.

In this regard, it has to be observed that the real Turks or Ottomans who assailed Cyprus in 1570 were not dispersed by a god-sent storm as was the case with the other Turks of the time, the Spaniards. On the contrary, they scored a decisive victory over Venice after a long siege of Famagusta, and they ultimately forced the Venetians to cede them the Island (Cyprus) and to pay them an annual tribute of 30,000 ducats. The final negotiations with the Ottomans paradoxically took place after the victory of the Holy League at Lepanto in 1571. Obviously, Shakespeare is subtly twisting historical facts to accommodate them with the English-Spanish war of 1588 without endangering the rapprochement that James I wanted with the Spanish. At the same time, Shakespeare is clearly involved in the construction of a usable past for a king concerned with the containment of the Islamic threat of the Ottomans and the pirates of the Barbary Shores by resorting to a wishful historical distortion.

Moreover, the parallel between Venice and Elizabethan England that Shakespeare makes in *Othello* is a wink at James I whose ears and eyes he wants to please through political allegory. To catch this wink, we need to remember that there is an obverse side to the picture that Europeans, including the British had about Venice, notwithstanding its overall positive image best expressed in its nickname, *Serenissima* (peaceful or harmonious city). Indeed, because of its pragmatic policy as far as the "infidel" is concerned, it came to earn the bad reputation as the "Turk's Courtesan. (Valensi, 2009)" This reputation, we would contend, informs the characterization of both Desdesmona and Othello, both patterned on the ethnic groupings to which they belong. The analogical discourse that Shakespeare deploys in *Othello* makes of Desdemona a mirror image of Elizabeth I through whom England has become the Turk's or the Moor's Courtesan by her consent to an English-Ottoman entente. We shall see that this scandalous by Desdemona/Elizabeth I is ritually exonerated from all charges of infidelity toward the end of the play. So, the play as a whole is a story of love and political relationship gone wrong. It sets off with Desdemona's enchantment by the marvelous tales of conquest recounted by Othello during his visits to her father's home. As a consequence of this enchantment she elopes with this convert stranger from Islamic eyes to become his wife. A xenophobic charivari or mock serenade is organized by one of her petty suitors, Roderigo, under the urging of Iago. In this mock serenade for the newlyweds, Othello is called by all sorts of racial names: "thick lips," "old black ram", "luscious Moor," "Barbary horse," etc. This bawdy language is perfectly in tune with the superstitious belief that such love match across ethnic lines is "bestial" in nature, and thus is bound to engender monstrosities. Iago's alarmist cry perfectly illustrates this superstitious belief about the polluting consequences of the marriage of Desdemona with a Moor: "you'll have your daughter [Branbantio's] cover'd with a Barbary horse, you'll have nephews neigh to you, you'll have courses for cousins: and gennets for germans. (p.27)"

Othello is found out by two search patrols, one organized by Branbantio to get him arrested and judged for abduction, and the other urgently summoning him to appear before the

Duke and the Venetian Senate, which is facing an imminent war with the Turks. It is in this double capacity as suspect of an abduction and captain of the Venetian army that Othello shows himself to the Senate. The state of emergency does not block the passing of judgment on an alleged domestic case of abduction and bewitchment judged to all evidence according to an act of 1604 making love matches obtained by magic spells as criminal offenses. To Brabantio's accusation that Desdemona "is abus'd, stol'n from me and corrupted/ By spells, and medicines, bought of mountebanks," the daughter on being called to the bar declares the innocence of Othello in this regard. She closes the case with the following words about filial and marital duties:

> *My noble father,/ I do perceive here a divided duty./ To you I am bound for life, and education: My life and education both do learn me,/How to respect you. You are the Lord of duty,/I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband; And so much duty, as my mother show'd/ To you, preferring you before her father: So much I challenge, that I may profess/Due to the Moor my Lord. (p.39)*

In front of such a testimony, the Senate presided by the Duke, as per law regulating love and marriage, Othello is declared innocent obliging the father to drop the case. For all his pains to get the Moor convicted for the practice of magic and witchcraft on his daughter, Branbantio receives the Duke's consolation. It is worth observing that this scene about the use of magic and witchcraft as crimes takes its cue from writings, such as James I *Daemonology* (1597), Henry Holland's *A treatise against witchcraft* (1590), and George Clifford's *Discourse of the subtill practices of deuilles* (1987).

However, the Duke's consolations to Branbantio that make him sound as he breathing a sigh of relief that Othello is not proved guilty: "When remedies are past, the griefs are ended…/To mourn a mischief that is past and gone,/ Is the next way to draw new mischief on…/ What cannot be preserv'd, when Fortune takes: /Patience, her injury a mock'ry, (p.40)"the Duke says. Given the urgent need that Venice has for the military services of Othello, the Duke has not the luxury of sacrificing one of his best captains, Othello, the "valiant Moor" at the approach of a terrible foe. So, the morality of marriage of Desdemona with a dark-complexioned stranger without even the consent of the fatheris swiftly swept under the carpet. It is at this precise moment of the expedited trial that the exoneration of Desdemona, a mirror image of Elizabeth begins in the play. As many historians have pointed out the same expediency had presided over the alliance that Elizabeth I had secretly sealed with the Grand Signor to counter the Spanish assailment of Britain during nearly her whole reign (Matar, 1999; Matar, 2008; Ronald, 2008), etc.). Yet, to say this does not mean that Elizabeth I was as fond of Moors and Turks as her fictional surrogate Desdemona makes it sound, for as a royal edict dated 1601 shows clearly, ElizabethI had ordered the expulsion from Britain of all the "Negroes and Blackamoors," under the pretext that the latter abused the Poor Laws by receiving "relief" primarily destined to the English poor.

Paradoxically, the presence in the "Negroes and Blackamoors," as they were then called, was in part due to Queen Elizabeth I's decision to participate in the Triangular Trade through her pirate adventurers, such as Sir John Hawkins as early as 1564. The consequence of this royal

decision is the auction sale of some black slaves in Britain as domestic servants in English households. The Royal Edict of 1601 builds the case of expulsion of "Negroes and Blackamoors" on economic grounds or national preference in according poor relief. Another source in Richard Haklyut (1907) sets off the same alarm bells about the residence of "Negroes" in England, but this alarmis formulated in terms of racial pollution of the country. It is the latter alert that Shakespeare's play clearly reflects in *Othello*. Indeed, one George Best, who is apparently a companion to Martin Frobisher spoke about the erotic menace that the presence of these "Negroes and Blackamoors" posed at the time. In his report, he stated that he saw by his very eyes, an Ethiopian brought to England only to take an English woman as wife. His surprise is that they gave birth to a son whose complexion is as black as that of his father. For this Best, the dark complexion of the Ethiopian's progeny demonstrated, if need be, that "Blackness" in all senses of the word is so inherent to "Negroes and Blackmoors" that neither the fair complexion of the English mother nor the change of climate can redeem, what he regarded as a physical and moral flaw. (As cited in Frobisher, 1972, p.180)

Other historical elements can account for the xenophobia permeating *Othello* from beginning to end. The first element pertains to the enthronement of James IV of Scotland as King of England under the title of James I. Naturally, James I in his wish to build an build organic union that would reconstitute the antique empire of Britain made many attempts to put the Scots subjects on the same par or footing as the English, ignoring the striking differences in laws and customs separating the two nations, and the centuries-old animosities between the Scots and English. For example, Trevelyan noted how far James I's ignorance of English law went when he ordered a petty English pickpocket to be hanged on his first voyage to London for coronation as King of England. So, it is scarcely surprising that a section of the English population thought both the Scots and the English thought of one another as foreigners to be kept out of their respective kingdom. The *imperium* as conceived by Elizabeth I and her father Henry VIII looked at Scotland in terms of domination rather than equality. The Scots' status as foreigners did not allow them to enjoy full rights as the English nationals, rights such as the possession of estates. The writings of Thomas Moore, Francis Bacon, and Richard Cooke fully document this episode of English-Scottish history that climaxed with the political union of the two nations more than a century later, in 1707, when Scotland was formally joined in an organic union with England.

Hence, Iago's outrage at the privilege accorded to a foreigner such as the Florentine Cassio by another foreigner Othello the Moor has a political overtone. It owes a lot to the anxiety of the Englishmen that a huge number of strangers (Scots) would be admitted to Venice/ England as a result of the political project of James I to unite the two Kingdoms under one crown and system of law regardless of their turbulent pasts such as the Border Wars. To convince Roderigo a gulled gentlemen that his hate for Iago has some ground beyond the fact that the former pays him to win Desdemona for him, Iago reports what Othello has told him when he has asked him for a preferment: "For certes, says he [Othello] I have already chose my officer. And what is he? Forsooth, a great arithmetician/ One Micheal Cassio, a Florentine, / (A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife)/ That never set a squadran in the field, Nor the division of a battle knows./ Mere prattle

is all his soldiership. (p.23)" Iago represents a current of political thought about the admittance of foreigners from the North (the Scots) on a preferential basis rather than merit. Iago's outrage might be an ironical thrust at the exorbitant bestowal of knighthoods on his first voyage to London in 1603. As we shall see in the course of this discussion, the figure of Cassio undergoes a displacement that makes him a surrogate for both Brute, the mythological Roman figure of ancient Britannia, and his later embodiment as James I, who just like Cassio, is also an arithmetician of sorts.

The deployment of xenophobia as the one of the main motivations of characterization in the very first verses of his play shows to what extent Shakespeare's English were seized by the anxiety that their country was swamped by strangers of all sorts of complexion. The latter not only took the most beautiful women as wives, women liable to give birth to a monstrous breed, but were accorded preference over the English natives in terms of preferment. Two points need to be underlined at this stage to understand xenophobia in Shakespeare's Britain. The first point relates to the English people's belief that marriage with such foreigners as Jews, Turks, "Negroes and Blackamoors," is bestial in nature. This popular belief is reflected in the discourse of bestiality deployed by Iago in *Othello* to alarm Branbanbio about the consequences of his daughter's marriage with a Moor. The second point pertains to the suspicion that women the "weaker vessels" as they were then called were the ones who could facilitate the entry of these strangers to the kingdom. As early as 1558 when Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne of England, John Fox wrote his *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women* to warn about the danger of pollution that women could constitute for England if masculine domination was loosened in whatever means. The Biblical reference in Fox's title is very apocalyptic, for it announces clearly that unless control over the affairs of the country by males was made, the next two blasts of the apocalypse that would be eventually sounded would certainly wipe out the rest of the male Englishmen with the complicity of the fifth column or the monstrous regiments with women. As a landmark in English history, Fox's pamphlet of the polluting danger of female government threatening at all times the very existence of kingdoms and nations finds an echo in James I's reign when women went so far as to wear men's clothes. Desdemona's betrayal of the patriarchal authority is held as a typical case in Shakespeare's *Othello,* and assumes a wider scope in a political allegory speaking of Elizabeth I's doubtful alliance with the Grand Signor, the perpetual enemy of Christendom.

Marienstras argues that the representation of Othello in Shakespeare's play is informed by contemporary conceptions of the stranger or foreigner developed as a result of the accession of James I to the throne of England. As claimed above, James I's ambition to form a land or internal empire led him to envision an organic union between England and Scotland. Amongst the political counselors who were looked for to find a solution to the issue of insertion of the rather poor Scots in one peaceful kingdom or empire, Marienstras refers to Francis Bacon and Sir Edward Coke.

The latter, as Marienstras wrote, distinguishes between subjects and strangers in his classification of the population in the realm. As "subjects", this population falls into two

subcategories or subclasses, "native-born" and "created subjects." As far as strangers are concerned, they are divided between "friendly strangers" and "enemy strangers." The latter class is in its turn subdivided into "temporary," "expressly tolerated," and "perpetual strangers."It is Coke's classification supplemented by Bacon's conceptions of strangers that Marienstras uses to account for the place that Othello holds in Shakespeare's play with the assumption that the playwright was knowledgeable of the conceptions of strangers held by contemporary jurists.

Admittedly, Shakespeare could not have ignored the above notions about strangers, but there is also no doubt that our playwright had close at hand the conceptions of strangers that the Greeks and the Romans had developed in their times. Shakespeare's Roman and Grecian plays raises the same issue. These Roman and Greek conceptions of the Same and the Other are amply documented in Kristeva's *Strangers to ourselves* (1991) to speak about "outsiders" in contemporary France. However, Kristeva's notion of the stranger in the Greek cities can be used to shed new light into the status of strangers in *Othello*. Othello, as already stated is a friendly stranger in the sense that he is a convert to Christianity and lives in Venice and has achieved fame as a military leader during the Turkish-Venetian Wars (1570-1574). His presence and that of his Florentine lieutenant Cassio in Venice/England can be explained by the fact that both are needed to confront the military might of the Turks. It is in this sense that the Greek notion of stranger as "metic" applies to them both. In this regard, Kristeva wrote that the "metic" belongs to that category of strangers, who by choice or necessity, have decided to settle in the Greek cities wherein their skills are badly needed. She refers to Aeschylus to explain that the origin of the word "metic" is "métoikein," meaning a change of domicile. Such an origin makes of this type of stranger a domestic resident who owes local allegiance to his hosts to whom he is bound by an economic contract, though not fully enjoying all their political and civil rights. We would argue that Othello and Cassio stand in such a relationship with their hosts in Venice/England where their skills as warriors are needed to confront the eternal enemy or what the Greeks would call the "xenos," (hated strangers) from which the word "xenophobia" is derived. It is what Shakespeare's contemporaries called the "art of war" that Othello and Cassio have managed to sell in Venice/England. (Riche, 2011; Riche, 2012)

The relation of Branbantio to Othello can also be understood in terms of the related notions of "metic" and "prostate" or "proxenie." According to Kristeva, the "prostate" is the host who welcomes and accords protection to the "metic" to practice his commerce without fear of prejudice on the part of the Greek citizens. This notion of host largely accounts for the numerous invitations that Branbantio extends to Othello. Othello's testimony in his self-defence against the alleged crime of having bewitched Desdemona makes sense in this context. "Her father lov'd, often invited me; Still question'd me the story of my life,/ From year to year: the battles, sieges, fortune/ That I have (p.40), he says in his address to the Duke and the whole Senate of Venice during his interrogation. A huge number of critics have already tried to locate the flaw or *harmatia* at the basis of the tragic fall of Othello. We would claim that this flaw can be located in his making too much of his status as a "metic." To Iago's warning to beware of the vengeance that the "Magnifico" Branbantio can wreck on him for having made a small case of the sense of hospitality

by marrying his daughter in secret, Othello insolently challenges him to do his worst, forgetful that Branbantio was once his host: "Let him do his spite;/ My services, which I have done the Signiory/ Shall out-tongue his complaints. '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. (p. 30)" This arrogance or excess of self-confidence as a "metic" though of royal origins is tragically misplaced, for it shows to Iago the major flaw in Othello's character as a stranger, totally ignorant of the terms of contract binding him to Venice.

As we have previously sustained the tempest that dispersed the Turkish fleet at the approach of Cyprus finds an echo in the tempest that wrecked the Spanish Armada in the English Channel in 1588. At this stage, we would add that the tempest is also an element of the plot that gives a new turn to the story. Significantly, the tempest does not only scatter the Turkish fleet but also separates the major characters who take part in the military expedition from Venice to Cyprus. Life and marriage are often described as a voyage liable to wreckage at any time, but out of this wreckage we are bound at one moment to gather the pieces swept ashore by the turbulent sea of life somewhat in the manner of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe in order to start life anew. It is what happens in *Othello* wherein the major characters, for some time thought of as stranded in the oceans, are gathered at last together to start a new social life. One important element in this spatial and temporal displacement or shift of action from Venice to Cyprus is the characters' move from the state of war to an alleged state of civil peace. This displacement is operated in accordance with the policy of domestic civil peace that James I announced in his first speech to Parliament on March 19, 1604. James I looks at the age that he inaugurated as a blessing to an England, long torn out by wars and domestic conflict during Elizabeth I'sreign. As far as the characters are concerned, it is the title character Othello who is bound to suffer the most, for a state of peace makes him vulnerable to the assault of his xenophobic antagonist Iago. The services that he renders to his Signiory on which he has built his self-confidence or rather arrogance as a "metic" are no longer considered as essential to the survival of Venice/England now that its outpost is militarily secured. As "metic" not completely integrated into the social fabric of the empire, Othello is certainly good in the art of war but not in that of love. This claim is also valid for the Ottoman-English entente. Not fully integrated into the community that hosts him, Othello turns out not to be good at the game of appearances or seeming or the wearing of social masks to be able to cope with the diverse social situations during the short time of peace that he is given to enjoy at the outpost of Venice, Cyprus. On his arrival to Cyprus, Othello, after greeting his wife as "my fair warrior" expresses his joy at the fair weather that has followed the (social) tempest that nearly caused their separation in the turbulent sea of life. The credulity that he and his wife have won the war against social prejudice now that they have reached safely the periphery of the imperial republic of Venice is expressed in this highly metaphorical exclamation:

> *It gives me wonder, great as my content/To see you here before me./Oh my soul's joy:/ If after every tempest, come such calms,/ May the winds blow, till they waken'd death: And let the laboring bark climb hills of seas/ Olympus high: and duck again as low,/As hell's from Heaven. (p.53)*

It is thus that Othello tragically calls the woes of heaven on his head in his ignorance that though he has moved from the center of empire, he has close at his heels the hounds of hell bound to get their revenge for his moral and professional outrage. Paradoxically, it is at the periphery that the prejudices and beliefs, which Othello and Desdemona have more or less successfully confronted in the center, have regained a stronger hold on social life. The social calm after the social tempest that Othello has precipitously praised is soon disturbed by a provoked brawl during the first night watch. Being a sober man and having too much of gentleman in him to decline to drink to the health of his newly married general in the company of Cyprus gallants invited by Iago on purpose, Cassio ends drinking so much that he falls in the first trap that the well-traveled (Englishman) Iago has set for him. As a result of the disturbance of the civil peace that is supposed to advent in Cyprus after the social tempest in Venice caused by the urgency of war and the unconventional marriage of a Moor with a Venetian lady, Othello dismisses his lieutenant Cassio. It is at this stage when Iago scores his first point by separating old friends by a truncated testimony that the belief of discourse as poison starts to run through the whole social body. Iago's statement that "I am not what I am" made at the beginning of the play is given shape, with Iago's parading of dissembling "honesty" in words and acts just to make tragic fools of his opponents. The conception of words as poison is a current belief in Shakespeare's England and finds its full expression in Burton's *The anatomy ofmelancholy* (1638). Whether called calumny or slander, libel or backbiting, poisoned words constitutes in the eyes of law a crime, for as it is said in the play, they can irreparably steal someone's name.

In his use of cunning and deception, Iago thus emerges as a Mephistophelian figure distilling his poison in Othello's and Cassio's ears, and happily observing all the while the conflict that it induces in their souls. As surrogate Mephistopheles he is pleased to hear Othello's making his false words about Cassio's relationship with Desdemona his own. "I am bound to thee for ever, (p.80)" Othello tells Iago somewhat in the manner of Dr. Faustus to Mephistopheles. Following this Faustian declaration of faith, Iago exults that his poisoned words have brought the worst out of Othello's "perfect soul" showing in him the "green monster" of jealousy. The Moor already changes with my poison," he tells the audience in a soliloquy. He follows up this soliloquy with another soliloquy explaining to the audience that: "Dangerous conceits, are in their natures poisons,/ Which at the first are scare found to distate:/ But with a little act upon the blood,/ Burn like the mines of sulphur. I did say so. (p.84) Indeed, with his poisoned words, Iago ends possessing the soul of Othello, symbolically seized by an epilepsy and foaming at the mouth like a wolf. Shakespeare's emphasis on the danger of poisoned discourse has a political overtone. It reads as a political alert launched toward those want to disturb the civil peace that James I intended to bestow on England as a blessing. Political rumors about the new ruler and his Danish Queen were indeed rife at the time and could stand for an impediment to a peaceful rule. To convince further the audience that backbiting and slander are dangerous even to those who stand at the summit of power like Othello, Iago suggests to the audience to observe the gradual change in Othello's humor as a result of his poisoned words: "My medicine works. Thus credulous fools are caught,/And many worthy, and chaste dames even thus,/ (All guiltless) meet reproach, (p. 98) he exults." Shakespeare play on the nefarious effect of demonology on the social fabric finds

certainly an echo in James I's 1597 book entitled *Daemonology*. If follows that Shakespeare's play on how "inner demons" or we would say inner Turks like Iago can disturb the civil peace is primarily addressed to the king with his divine-inspired plan of restoring peace in the recovered empire of Great Britain.

However, we would argue that this interest in the devil's play is also popular in character. As one commentator on Shakespeare's Britain rightly put it, when a dramatist wants to please his audience, he badly needs to put on stage a huge number of devils. The latter must be hideous, and must cry out, shout, and indulge in the use a bawdy language, and must end with dragging his vociferous victims to hell in a horribly noisy atmosphere. This isfinally what draws the audience to the theater. (As cited by Minois, 1998). We could only agree with this commentator in the light of the great number of classic plays such as Webster's *The white devil* (1608) and Marlow's *Dr. Faustus* (1592) that were performed in Shakespeare's Britain. This being said, Shakespeare's play about the nefarious effects of demonology has its uniqueness in the sense that the performance of the devil is primarily meant not only to create fear, but to send a political message to potential schemers and plotters in the form of a play. Caillos has classified play into four categories according to primary instincts or impulses that man shares with animals and insects. These plays are categorized as follows: the *agon* (plays involving combat), the *alea* (plays involving luck), *mimicry* (plays involving illusion), and the *ilinx* (plays causing vertigo). In this research, we would sustain that Shakespeare's play by virtue of being put on stage belongs to the category of *mimcry* where the actors embodying the characters as well as the audience are invited to enter a fictive world. Researchers on Shakespeare who have already put emphasis on the importance of the notion of mask in the Othello are to the point. However, we shall add that besides the wearing of masks to create illusion, the play also involves combat or defiance, and so can also put in the *agon* category of play. Caillos has underlined this possibility of the four categories of plays in his book. It is in this sense of play as *mimcry-agon* that one has to understand both Iago's declaration that "I am not what I am" that is playing the role of tempting devil and Othello's arrogance and defiance to "find him out."

What makes the play remarkable is that Iago does not abide by the rules of the game. Naturally, It is in his nature as devil to break the rules to such an extent that he practically turns into an alter-ego for the playwright himself. According to Caillos, treachery in games or plays does not annul or destroy the sense of play as long as the player who abuses of the loyalty of the other players simulates that he is playing by the rules. (Caillos, 1967: 38). In *Othello*, Iago plays by his own rules, and he makes these known to the audience up to the end of the play where he is finally found out by the other players, who tear out his mask. However, we would maintain that this does not disqualify him in his role as devil as he is not expected to be true to the beguiling mask of honesty that he wears. What disqualifies in his role as a character-devil is what Caillos called the "corruption of plays or games." In the case of the *mimcry* category of game or play, Caillos wrote what follows: "It happens that the simulacrum is no longer taken as such, when the person who is disguised believes in the reality of his role, the travesty, and the mask." Caillos went on to say that in this confusion of role playing and reality, the player "no longer *plays* the

Other that he represents. Persuaded that he is indeed the *Other*, he behaves as such and forgets who he really is. (p. 111)" We find an echo of Caillos' words in Iago's claim "I am not what I am." Interestingly, what Caillos added to finish his argument about the corruption of the *mimicry* category of games supports this research on strangers in *Othello*. "The loss of his deep identity," Caillos wrote, "represents the punishment of the player who is not able to stop at the pleasure of borrowing a foreign personality. (p.110)" It is in this sense that Iago (the fanatic English/Venetian opponent to the Emperor who in imperial Rome was often a Victorious general) turns out as much a stranger as the other strangers coming from other lands.

Conclusion

To conclude, amongst all the strangers who wear the mask in Shakespeare's play, it is the Florentine, Cassio, whom Othello dismisses as a "Roman" who turns out to be the most patriotic character in the play when the masks are finally torn out. His sense of civility and gallantry that nearly caused his definite fall into disgrace, stand in striking contrast to the behavior of Turks such as Iago and Othello. Cassio affirms his patriotism as a Briton in the love that he shows to the iconic figure of Desdemona as well as to Bianca, the woman of ill-repute in the play. Bianca and Desdemona, who is falsely accusing of being "that cunning whore of Venice (p.110)" by the possessed convert-metic Othello constitute the double facet of Venice/Britain, which Cassio rehabilitates through his unconditional love. Though Cassio is treacherously injured at the end of the play by Iago, he is rewarded by the Venetian Senate with the title of governor and general. The fact that a Roman, as Othello calls him, is thus promoted is surely a wink at James I in his attempt to establish a kind of a *Pax Britannica* on the mode of *Pax Romana* of old. Such a political project requires, as it is suggested in the play, the exorcism of inner demons like the Venetian/English Iago; the sacrifice of the Turk in Othello on the altar of Desdemona/ Elizabeth I; a homage to both of them exonerated from all charges of infidelity; a transfer of blame on the Indians for not having appreciated Desdemona's/Elizabeth I's worth as a precious empress (a hint at the Lost Colony of Roanoke in the 1580s); and finally the containment of the Turks of all shades at the outpost of Cyprus/Ireland. So when all these aspects are considered, we could say that Shakespeare's *Othello* is a celebration of the triumph of James I (Cassio) over inner and outside strangers threatening the civil peace of a wished-for land empire of Great Britain, whose destiny, as it is also suggested, is to expand overseas beyond its recovered territories.

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