The (De-)Construction of Racial Stereotypes in Shakespeare’s Plays

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1. Introduction

Racism and malignant stereotypes have been discussed lately in more depth than maybe ever before due to a volatile political climate against people of colour and non-Christian people all over the world. Brave activists have risen up against mistreatment and racial stereotypes, marking them as practices that should have no place in society nowadays. Many forms of these injustices and stereotypes have developed over centuries and often find their roots in the Middle Ages or even before. While some stereotypes seem inherent in characters today, Otherness always has to be constructed and Otherness as well as racial stereotypes have been a theme in many literary works. As Loomba (2002, 167f.) points out, it has been proposed lately that literature and theatre had played a crucial role in creating and disseminating stereotypes about the racial Other. Therefore, drama did not only reflect societal attitudes towards different races but also helped create and perpetuate negative stereotypes (ibid.). Shakespeare represents a writer who often incorporated seminal characters in his works, who belong to racial and religious minorities. He was not only an author who liked to challenge norms and conventions when it came to style and treatment of genre, but he also confronted narrow stereotypical and racist views in his plays. Shakespeare incorporated the racial Other in his drama in a way that still make them important and interesting for interpretation today.

The objective of this thesis is to find out what strategies were employed to (de)construct racial stereotypes in three plays by William Shakespeare – The Merchant of Venice, Othello and The Tempest. This will be achieved by employing two different methods in the analysis. The representation of racial stereotypes will be explored by the method of close reading. Furthermore, in Chapter 2.3. I will introduce different strategies and terms which will help in evaluating the (de-)construction of the racial stereotypes. The approach will be chronological and the scenes considered for the analysis were chosen to best reflect the characters (un)stereotypical portrayal. My assumption is that all of the characters will deconstruct their racial stereotypes in the course of their dramas to a certain extent and remain ambiguous.

The Merchant of Venice, Othello and The Tempest have been chosen to analyse the (de)construction of racial stereotypes because they all incorporate the racial Other in their dramatis personae. The Merchant of Venice deals with a bloody bond between the titular merchant of Venice, Antonio, and his enemy Shylock, the Jew. Shylock is one of the most famous Jewish characters in literature and has been cause for varying interpretations due to his portrayal in the play. He inhibits clear stereotypical traits but also challenges these traits. In Othello, Shakespeare depicts the life of Othello, the Moor, a highly respected Venetian general
who, in a fit of jealous rage, kills his wife Desdemona. In Othello, we will find two opposing stereotypes at war with themselves, complicating the portrayal of the Other. The Tempest examines the portrayal of the New World native Caliban after Europeans have invaded his island and have enslaved him for their services. Caliban is described like a deformed slave and subhuman thing, relegating him to the margins of society. Every one of the characters analysed in this thesis is portrayed in a stereotypical way because of their race. However, the characters also display non-stereotypical traits and challenge a stereotypical view of them. While stereotypes require a black-and-white view of the racial Other, these particular characters cannot be regarded thus because of various complications.

Drama in general and Shakespeare’s drama in particular lend themselves to the analysis of the (de-)construction of racial stereotypes because the theatre has always been a mirror for society (cf. Baumbach and Nünning 2009, 9) and society’s attitudes towards certain elements. Drama does not only reflect societal attitudes but also political, historical and psychological developments (cf. ibid., 10). Constructing a stereotype is a complex process, where not only societal but also political, psychological and religious beliefs among others play vital roles. While stereotypes are limiting and often wrong, they offer a way of looking at a new world and to categorise encounters with unknown people. During Shakespeare’s lifetime, colonial efforts were just taking off and encounters with the racial Other increased, while some Others had been living in England for many centuries. Therefore, Shakespeare lived and created his works at a time, when many changes came upon England and contact with the Other grew, bringing with it negative prejudices and stereotypes regarding the new people.

To achieve the objective of this thesis, the structure is as following. First, it is important to establish a contextual framework for Shakespeare’s plays, which includes not only historical and theatrical contexts but also society’s attitude towards strangers and the Other (cf. Baumbach and Nünning 2009, 14, 17). Second, the different strategies to construct and deconstruct stereotypes will be introduced and explained. In the main analytic chapters of this thesis (Chapters 3-5), the aim will be to fulfil the objective, which is to analyse the stereotypes of the characters with the method of close reading and the help of the strategies presented in Chapter 2.3. Third, a summarising chapter will examine the differences and similarities in the strategies employed by Shakespeare to (de-)construct racial stereotypes and the particular outcomes for each of the characters regarding their stereotypical portrayal. Fourth, a conclusion will summarise the results of the analysis and give a comprehensive overview. Lastly, I will suggest how Othello and the topic of racial stereotypes can be incorporated in the English classroom.
2. Historical and Methodological Framework

2.1. Theatre in the Early Modern Age and Shakespeare’s Treatment of Genre

William Shakespeare, born in 1564 in Stratford upon Avon, attended King’s Grammar School and contrary to popular belief, moved to London as an educated man. At school, Shakespeare became versed in Latin and classical Greek authors like Ovid, Plautus, Virgil, Cicero etc.; among his teachers were Oxford educated professors (Honigmann 2001, 2). By 1592 Shakespeare was a resident of London, where he had managed to make a name for himself (Honigmann 2001, 3). He mainly worked with one specific playing company – the Lord Chamberlain’s Men – as an actor as well as a dramatist; the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were the English court’s favoured company (Boltz 2009, 147). We can assume today that Queen Elizabeth I. as well as her successor James I. were enticed by his plays, since they were the ones most often performed at court (Boltz 2009, 148).

Shakespeare’s personality and character remain unknown much like most of the aspects of his life. Many researchers claim to have found autobiographical elements in Shakespeare’s sonnets, according to which he suffered from the unhappy marriage to Anne Hathaway, engaged in extramarital affairs (with women as well as men) and was a very emotional, impulsive and romantic individual (Honigmann 2001, 8). Other researchers dismiss these claims since writer, subject and narrator of a poem cannot always be equated with each other. Without doubt, Shakespeare was not an ordinary man. Ben Jonson, poet, dramatist and Shakespeare’s contemporary, voiced the following statement after Shakespeare’s death: “He was indeed honest and of open and free nature; had an excellent fancy, brave notions and gentle expressions.” (Honigmann 2001, 11)

Putting Shakespeare’s work into context is not as easy as it seems. Scholars have placed his dramas in categories such as Elizabethan drama, Renaissance drama or early modern drama (Ruge 2011, 31) and nowadays, the different terms for this particular era can be used synonymously (as will I do in this thesis). Ruge (2011, 31) asserts that literary works created in this period of time – including Shakespeare’s plays and poems – still maintain their popularity and influence today due to incorporating issues and insecurities arising from modernisation and drastic change in religion, society and politics.

During the Renaissance period, drama evolved and writers moved away from classical theories of drama and its classical composition of dramatic texts; so much so that essayist Sir Philip Sidney lamented the state of Renaissance dramas as “neither right tragedies, nor right comedies” and writers created a “mongrel tragi-comedy” (Ruge 2011, 32). Writers like Richard
Edwards and Thomas Preston paved the way for Shakespeare and his contemporaries in the middle of the 16th century by mixing classical elements of tragedy and comedy in one play (ibid., 32-33). Marlowe, Kyd, Shakespeare and their contemporaries picked up this practice and refined it (ibid., 34). In the 16th and 17th centuries, the theatre was incredibly popular and welcomed audiences from all classes. Loomba (2001, 160) states that by 1600 up to 18,000-24,000 Londoners were visiting the theatre every week. The theatre served as a hub for every Londoner and was more popular than any other medium (Habermann 2011, 59). Habermann (ibid.) believes that this allowed a “fusion of various classical and indigenous traditions which led to a drama never surpassed in richness and complexity.”

Naturally, comedies and tragedies were handled differently in the early modern period, thus, the most important aspects of both will be highlighted separately in the following. In the Renaissance period, comedy was quite an ambivalent genre, which grew and changed under many different influences and styles (Habermann 2011, 47). While classical Greek and Roman authors and their traditional rules about comedy still played a role in this period, the more recent Italian commedia erudite and commedia dell’arte created an impact on English writers (ibid.). Furthermore, prose romances, medieval traditions and English folk rituals (i.e. mummer’s plays) exerted further influence (ibid., 47-48). In this thesis, I will deal with two comedies of Shakespeare’s: The Merchant of Venice and The Tempest. The Merchant of Venice is usually categorized as a ‘festive’ or ‘happy’ comedy, while The Tempest is classified as a romantic comedy (ibid., 49). Even though these labels are criticised, they are still widely used. Particularly with Shakespeare’s plays, a label like ‘festive’ and ‘happy’ for The Merchant of Venice and Shylock’s tragic ending might seem like a simplification as is often unavoidable with labels and generalisations.

The plot of The Merchant of Venice, which ends with two happy marriages and the triumph over the villain, is typical for Shakespeare’s early comedies. Nonetheless, there are certain elements that transform The Merchant of Venice into a unique drama. By incorporating elements, which are atypical for comedies, Shakespeare successfully entranced audiences and especially Shylock’s ambivalent end created a less happy ending than one would assume. Ryan (2009, 105) puts it like this:

The nub of the trouble, needless to say, is Shakespeare’s characterization of Shylock, and how we are meant to respond to his merciless insistence on his bloodthirsty bond and his crushing defeat by the Christians in court. Our response to Shylock will determine in turn whether we regard the play as a comedy or as something else altogether.
Heinrich Heine, a German writer, also called the drama a hybrid, which combined tragic as well as comedic aspects (ibid., 105-106).

Categorising *The Merchant of Venice* as a comedy does not only hinge from primarily comedic elements but also from the placement of the drama in the category Comedies in the first folio\(^1\). The classification of Shakespeare’s dramas into these categories proves difficult under the general fluidity of genre at the time and in particular under Shakespeare’s penchant for mixing up genre conventions. As Mehl (1999, 8) points out, the terms ‘comedy’ and ‘tragedy’ were only starting to be used more widely in the 1530s but by 1600 the habit of categorising plays had become so fashionable that Shakespeare himself parodied it in *Hamlet*.

Originally, *The Tempest* was considered a comedy for a long time due to the typical ending with the promise of a marriage and it was placed among the category Comedies in the First Folio of 1623. However, critics do not agree with this assessment anymore and have invented the genre of the Romance for *The Tempest* and a couple of Shakespeare’s other plays (Orgel 1987, 4). Orgel (2008, 5) suggests that the new genre was invented because some critics felt “certain kinds of seriousness are inappropriate to comedy” as well as the incorporation of fantastical elements. Orgel (ibid.) actually claims that the play has more tragic elements than comedic ones, i.e. the themes of power and authority, vengeance and forgiveness, etc.

With *Othello*, this thesis focuses also on a ‘great’ tragedy (Baumbach 2011, 79-80). Tragedies during Shakespeare’s time were still influenced by classical Roman plays and playwrights and especially Seneca created a basis for the tragedy by incorporating violent and sensational content as well as an elevated rhetoric (Mehl 1999, 9). The first English tragedies, originating in the middle of the 16th century, furthermore established the habit to portray events, which, even if set in earlier times or different countries, reflected a contemporary and political angle (ibid., 14). Yet, while Shakespeare’s tragedy does show signs of the classical tragedy, it also shows deviations from it, e.g. a move away from the classical unity.

Nevertheless, even though Shakespeare’s dramas did not always conform to genre conventions, he still designed his plays and incorporated classical elements of genre after Aristoteles. Snyder (2001, 95) sees opportunities rather than limitations in this: “In Shakespeare’s hands, genre conventions provided shape rather than limitation.”

\(^1\) The folio published in 1623 by John Heminges and Henry Condell under the title ‘Mr. William Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies’ was the first complete edition of Shakespeare’s dramatic works and comprised 36 dramas, which were categorised into Comedies, Tragedies and Histories.
2.2. Race in the 16th and 17th centuries

Nationality and race were still an emerging concept during the Renaissance period and might not have been as fixed as today (Sokol 2008, 57). Even today, researchers and scientists do not see eye to eye on a definition of race. The word race was first used in the beginning of the 16th century and could be used as a synonym to ‘group’ and was used synonymously with family relationships and lineage for a long time (Loomba 2002, 22-23). As Sokol (2008, 114) points out, the term race with the definition of ‘certain similar physical characteristics’ was never used by Shakespeare and contemporaries. The term used to describe something similar to our contemporary definition of race in Shakespeare’s time was foreigner, stranger or alien; foreigner was used for somebody from the countryside, while stranger or alien was indeed used for non-English Europeans and others (Loomba 2001, 154). Thence, Shakespeare might not have used the term race in relation to blackness and colour but this does not mean that he could not have used it thus or that colour did not play a vital role in the development of the term race (Loomba 2002, 35).

Concerning nationality, in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, many changes led to the construction of a sense of nationality due to the expansion of empires. According to Loomba (ibid., 24), a sense of nation was often assimilated with its borders and a common race, heritage and/or religion. In early modern times, nation was definitely more often used to describe ethnic, geographic and religious differences than race (ibid.). The term nation was even used in connection with Jews, who did not have one particular geographic homeland, but Loomba (ibid.) argues that their “lack of affiliation to any one place” was their marker as a nation.

At that time, maps resembling modern day maps were developed and new findings in physical geography gave a new dimension to the concept of nationality. Hunter (2000, 37-38) points out that medieval literature did not (and actually could not) adhere to geographical correctness and infused locations not only with physical meaning but also with spiritual meaning. Due to increased travels to unknown or barely explored places, the urge to define the English nation and its people became apparent. Insights into the English nation and its people were expressed in various media, e.g. literature, law, cartography and travel writing (Loomba 2001, 149). Loomba (ibid.) argues that Englishness was primarily defined by what was not English.

Through travelogues and other travel-literature, English citizens were invited to learn about other races. Travelogues such as Hakluyt’s stressed the “prospect for future global success” in the overseas business and the English nation as a nation of voyagers (Loomba 2001, 151). Moreover, Hakluyt perpetuated the commonly held stereotype that Africa’s and...
America’s indigenous people’s heads grew beneath their shoulders (ibid.). The self-image of colonisers was always fashioned after their difference and superiority over the colonised (ibid., 151-152). Wild tales about sexual abnormal practises (i.e. same-sex relationships, alternative family arrangements, polygamy) fed into the construction of *Otherness*. Furthermore, frequent surveys from that time tried to compile characteristics for different nationalities, which were no more than generalisations and stereotypes, e.g. the drunk Dutch (Hunter 2000, 45).

An interesting theory about the concept of race and nationality stems from Floyd-Wilson (2003), who has extensively written about geohumoral history during the Renaissance period and how perceptions of race and ethnicity developed in the past. In the mid 1600’s it was widely recognised that environmental factors influenced appearance, complexion, temperament and ability (ibid., 36). Geohumoral theory is deeply influenced by Hippocrates Aristotle (despite the fact that the two texts contradict each other in certain aspects), where they place the north and the south at opposite ends of the spectrum and fashion them as polar opposites (ibid., 24-29). On the one hand, Aristotle’s musings defined the Northerners by having an excess of blood or moisture, which, in combination with the cold environment, created courageous, tall, fair, sexual but sluggish men (ibid., 30). On the other hand, the dryness and heat of the south caused thin blood in Southerners, thereby forming men, who were dark in complexion, shy, chaste and wise (ibid.). For the ancient Greek philosophers, the middle zone – Greece and Italy – signified the ideal climate; it produced temperate, high-spirited and intelligent people (ibid.). Therefore, for a long time Greek and Italians were regarded as the ultimate peoples. Hunter (2000, 49) sees Italy as “the land of wit […], of pleasure and of refinement” and on stage, Italy could be the locale for romance as well as villainy and therefore used for both comedies and tragedies. As a natural result, Northerners – including the English – felt inferior and tried to reason their way into a superior position.

The French political theorist Jean Bodin combined classical Greek writings and created another environmental theory, which influenced many writers of the 16th century (ibid., 35-36). Bodin reassigned the factor of overt sexuality and promiscuity to the Southerners, where it had been associated with typical Northern characteristics beforehand (ibid., 36). Still today, blackness is equated with sexual prowess and Floyd-Wilson (ibid., 44) reasons that this is due to our intuitive belief in geohumoralism. By painting Africans as savages, the picture of the wild man in need of control was created (ibid., 45) and in these colonial times, such a picture might have been reason enough to establish European superiority and an excuse for colonialism.

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2 Geohumoralism deals with a racist theory, which suggests geography and climate are responsible for national characteristics.
As an illustration, a typical example of ethnography is the archaic (Bible-centred) assumption that the sons of Noah populated all continents, according to which Africans are descendants of Ham (or Cham). Ham was punished by God for filial disobedience and God turned Ham’s and his descendants’ skin black, which would forever show Ham’s disobedience and connection to the devil (as it was the devil, who tempted Ham) (Loomba 2002, 55). Sokol (2008, 118-119) challenges many scholars by claiming that this racialist view, while it gained popularity in the 17th century, was merely used as a justification for colour at that time and was not used to justify slavery – this practice apparently only started in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Floyd-Wilson (2003, 45) further proposes that “negative stereotypes were applied to a wide range of Others – from Africans to black magicians to sodomites to Jews” and even to close neighbours such as the Irish. The relationship between the Irish and English has always been complicated and Floyd-Wilson (ibid., 46) found that the same rhetoric which justified the subjugation of the Irish was later used to justify colonising Africa and the Americas. Loomba (2001, 153) also recognises a connection here: descriptions of Irish usually included adjectives like “wild, thieving, lawless, savage, naked […]” – terms later closely associated with indigenous peoples of America and Africa.

Thus, ideologies of difference were both geographically and temporally mobile – not only did notions of outsiders honed in one part of the world shape attitudes in another, but older habits of thought were reinforced and reshaped by newer developments. (Loomba 2001, 153)

Therefore, the development of an English nation was a complex development, which included colonisation, marginalisation and the dichotomy of geographic insiders and outsiders of England (ibid., 149). Prior to James I.’s ascension to the English throne, it was almost impossible for non-English citizens to own land in England, including James himself, who was born in Scotland (Sokol 2008, 58). After his ascension to the English throne, James I. introduced a law that allowed nobles to own land regardless of their place of birth on the condition that they pledged their allegiance to the English throne (ibid.). In Shakespeare’s England, there were three possible nationality statuses for non-native residents: religious refugee (Protestant only, due to the reformation in mainland Europe), denizen (permanent right of residence but could not inherit or bequeath English land) and naturalisation (very expensive, only achieved through Acts of Parliament) (ibid., 58-59).

However, law making and attitudes towards strangers in England was not always this inclusive and definitely not when it concerned non-British (or what would later become Britain) migrants. Foreigners and immigrants in the 16th and 17th centuries in England were as
ambivalent a topic as they are today. In the 16\(^{th}\) century, as trade established itself even more firmly through trade-contracts with Turkey and Russia, indigenous peoples were transported to and shown off in London (Hunter 2000, 37). Furthermore, as the English capital experienced an influx of migration from Europe and the colonies (ibid.), the English came into increasing contact with foreigners, different cultures and languages. Queen Elizabeth I. was gifted exotic jewels, a bird of paradise and in London, an Eskimo couple was part of an exhibition (Loomba 2001, 154). In 1600, an embassy of the king of Morocco resided in London for a couple of months and was received with mixed attitudes – some commentators claim bad treatment of the visitors, while others claimed too good a treatment (ibid.). Loomba (ibid.) argues that outsiders were treated differently “depending on where they came from, the colour of their skins, or their economic status in their homelands.”

Interestingly, Queen Elizabeth had a Portuguese-Jewish physician in her household staff. Unfortunately, he was found guilty of high treason in 1594 and was executed because he allegedly attempted to poison the Queen (ibid. 156). Using foreigners as servants was not a new or emerging concept, though. For a long time, African servants had become a fashionable staple in noble families’ households and served as a status symbol (Sokol 2008, 142). These black servants were not mistreated, however, and most likely had the same status as white servants in the household (ibid.).

As mentioned above, London experienced a drastic increase of migration in the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) centuries. From 1520 to 1600, London’s population tripled and in the early 17\(^{th}\) century, 10,000 migrants came to London from all over the country (Loomba 2001, 154). This rise in the population can be linked to increasing hostility towards outsiders and nationalist attitudes as poverty was linked to the immigration of strangers (ibid., 155). City officials were constantly arguing over the right of aliens to work and for a long time, aliens were not allowed to take up an apprenticeship with an English master without a special permit (Kermode 2009, 2). Dickson (2016) reports that inflation and high taxes were an increasing burden for Londoners and this combined with the rising cost of foodstuffs, led to a surge in homelessness.

This increasing anxiety about outsiders might have been the cause of the passing of several anti-immigrant proclamations and laws by Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth I. (Loomba 2001, 155). The devout Catholic Queen Mary exiled English Protestants and Elizabeth – a Protestant – allowed them back into the country during her reign (Sokol 2008, 61). Proclamations by Queen Elizabeth I. at the turn of the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) century indicate her attempt to expel 89 black people in exchange for 89 English prisoners in Spain and Portugal (ibid.). The English supported this exchange because strangers were supposedly responsible for starvation
and unemployment of English subjects (ibid.). However, Loomba (2001, 155) and others argue that the actual number of black people in England was relatively low. Expulsions were common at the time and in the time before, e.g. Jews had been officially expelled from England in 1290 (Loomba 2001, 156).

Sokol (2008, 117) argues, though, that despite the negative perception of aliens in London not all English natives were racists and participated in racialist thinking. He even goes so far as to claim that there was no racialist thinking in England at that time, whereby his arguments rely more heavily on terminology problems rather than non-racialist examples (ibid.). Nevertheless, he does indicate some examples, e.g. Ham’s punishment from God and the explanation of colour gained momentum in racialist theory only in the 19th and 20th century rather than in Shakespeare’s time (ibid., 118-119). In addition, Sokol (ibid., 117) asserts how Shakespeare – in his own dramas – gave indication that unquestioned racism was not the case by highlighting intolerance towards aliens, e.g. Shylock’s plea for equality. However, it is hard to tell how many of Shakespeare’s contemporaries shared his views. Rather than xenophobic beliefs, Sokol considers the term deep antipathy as more suitable (ibid. 61). Loomba (2001, 160) also poses the question whether early modern beliefs about racial difference can be called racism and comes to the conclusion that the beliefs already started to become racist even at that time:

[...] during the modern period, the growth of European nationalisms and colonialisms generated crucial new ways of seeing racial and cultural others, and these ways establish intellectual, literary, and political genealogies for colonial views of race and nation. Of course, racism is more than simply colour prejudice; some critics define it as the translation of prejudice into unfair social advantage. Early modern England [...] had already begun to invoke difference to justify its brutal practises in Ireland and the Americas, to outlaw Jews, expel Moors and create internal hierarchies within its own population.

When it comes to the representation of race in literature during the early modern period, Shakespeare is not the only one who broached this topic. In general, the portrayal of foreign characters changed during the Elizabethan period. In the early years of this period, aliens were portrayed as the villains – evil, vicious, and strange; later on, the stereotypical portrayal of foreigners gained popularity – often to distinguish them from the English (Hoenselaars, cited in Sokol 2008, 76). Interestingly, Hoenselaars (ibid.) sees a more sympathetic treatment of foreigners from the 1590s to the early 1600s, especially in comedies. The Merchant of Venice is believed to have been written in this period and also demonstrates a kinder approach to the resident foreigner Shylock. Afterwards, plays often exhibited reverse stereotyping or the highlighting of the foreigner’s virtues (ibid.).
Travels and voyages to unknown or barely discovered lands contributed to authors’ works. Having access to more accurate geographical maps than ever before, some authors like Marlowe, who reportedly owned a map, used them as inspiration for place names and settings of their plays, despite there being little to no sense of reality (Hunter 2000, 43). Furthermore, travel literature provided authors with accounts of how uncivilised life in undiscovered places could look like. Not only Shakespeare’s Caliban is a representative of the native ‘savage’ represented in literature, Thomas Moore’s *Utopia* and Montaigne’s *Essays* contain descriptions of the savage (ibid.). Hunter (ibid., 45) sees a connection between the representation of the alien as a savage and the insecurities that come with new discoveries of other civilisations – fear and contempt for the unknown created the urge to differentiate the foreigner from the English.

Thomas Moore and others instilled their xenophobic attitudes in their works of literature to an extent that, in the course of time, the role of an alien could only be the villain or the clown (ibid. 46). One of Robert Wilson’s plays engages a character, who is “not wicked because he is foreign but foreign because he is wicked” (ibid., 46f.). Contrastingly, interest in foreign cultures also grew at the same time, presumably spurred by national divisions. Nevertheless, Hunter (ibid., 47) posited that vulgarisation of the foreigner was an obvious process in the early modern period. Foreigners were instilled with vernacular and widespread prejudices, which contributed to their perception as mundane and despicable (ibid.). However, foreign settings were also employed in literature to discuss certain topics, which could not be discussed on English land, e.g. Marlowe’s *The Massacre in Paris* (ibid., 48).

Many views of foreigners were religiously motivated. Therefore, despite the foreign setting of *The Merchant of Venice* in Italy, the titular protagonist and his friends are Christian – therefore, the good people – whereas the antagonist – Shylock – is a Jew, therefore, evil. Likewise, *Othello*, also set in Italy, paints its titular character as a Moor, a characterisation that indicates not only blackness but also the Muslim faith. In many ways, Jews and Moors were on the same level; the title of a pamphlet, originating in the 17th century, stresses this: *The blessed Jew of Marocco, or a blackamoor turned white* (Hunter 2000, 55). Interestingly, before Othello, literature never included a Moorish character that was neither wicked or dumb (ibid.). Here, religious motivation can be found in equating Moors with the devil and the corruptness of the soul like Thomas Heywood or Reginald Scott (ibid.).

Shakespeare, technically being a foreigner himself (Sokol 2008, 64), lived and (presumably) created most of his works in London. It might have been the case that Shakespeare – as a new arrival in the city – personally experienced mistreatment due to his place of birth and therefore showed empathy towards the ill-treated aliens in his plays (ibid.). It is safe to
assume that Shakespeare encountered aliens from all over the world in the expanding English city. A court document from 1612 indicates that Shakespeare had lived with a Huguenot family in the early 1600s and Shakespeare testified on behalf of the family in a civil dispute (Sokol 2008, 59). Moreover, apparently Shakespeare had acted as a matchmaker for the family’s daughter (ibid.). As there is so little known about Shakespeare’s private life, it is hard to gain any further information about his life in London and his attitude towards strangers outside of his literary works.

Over the years, researchers have taken different viewpoints and angles when interpreting Shakespeare’s works, also regarding his representation of race. The first most noteworthy and worthwhile discussions about race in Shakespeare and Shakespeare’s time originate in the 1960s. Eldred Jones published critical studies in 1965 and 1971, which illustrated the Elizabethan’s familiarity and knowledge about the African continent and its peoples; something that had been underestimated beforehand (Bartels 2008, 1115). Furthermore, Jones first introduced the notion that literature was not merely a reflection of English culture but also had the power to shape it and that Shakespeare’s Othello played a vital role in portraying the Other as not merely evil (ibid., 1115f.).

G.K. Hunter (2000) was the first to survey a number of genres and authors during the early modern period and drew attention to patterns of beliefs about foreigners from all over the world. The study of international (albeit Western) representations and performances of Shakespeare became en vogue in the 1970s with annual reports about them in the Shakespeare Quarterly (Semple/Vyroubalovà 2018, 84).

In the late 1970s, Edward Said’s monumental book Orientalism introduced a new outlook on colonialism and the (re-)presentation of the Eastern Other in contrast to the superior West (Bartels 2008, 1117). Said’s theory also offered new interpretative value for the study of Shakespeare, especially Othello, namely in drawing the attention to the fashioning of the early modern England against the Other and the Orient (ibid.). Feminist studies also found a foothold in exploring race in connection with gender. Karen Newman’s essay ‘Femininity and the monstrous in Othello’ finds the monstrous in the female rather than in the Moor (ibid., 1122).

Concerning the representation of the New World, and in Shakespeare’s context therefore Caliban (and Ariel), the 1980s brought Paul Brown’s essay ‘This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine’ and with it an outlook on British colonialism (Brown 1985). Furthermore, Peter Hulme’s Colonial Encounters is the most noteworthy model for identifying the

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1 Naturally, race was discussed prior to the 1960s, i.e. during Hitler’s rule, dramatists twisted Shakespeare’s racial characters into monsters, to fit the Nazi regime and agenda. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the most important research in terms of racism, stereotyping and colonialism started in the 1960s.
representation of the non-European, especially New World, man of the time (Bartels 2008, 1119). Hulme stresses the “ideology of savagery” that helped colonists create the need to oppress and colonise the New World subjects (ibid, 1120).

Postcolonialism set the tone for the 1990s and marks the effort to expose and oppose “the practises of oppression that had silenced underrepresented peoples” (ibid. 1123f.). Here, the underlying theory was provided by Homi Bhabha’s The Location of Culture (1994) and through feminist support, it became important to study Shakespeare from the perspective of the subaltern (ibid., 1124). At the same time, the postcolonial focus was either on how early modern England might have shaped Shakespeare’s portrayal of characters (which this thesis does to some extent) or on how Shakespeare’s work could become such a rich field of study for colonialism (ibid.). Ania Loomba (2002, 7) illustrates the “range of ideas about skin colour, location, religion, rank and gender.” A.J. Hoenselaars’ Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries placed emphasis on the historical context and how the portrayal of foreigners changed over time (Semple and Vyroubalovà 2018, 85).

The 1990s also saw a turn towards specific geographic studies. David Armitage marks a turning point, wherein studies moved from national towards transnational and transoceanic constructions of blackness and worlds (Bartels 2008, 1126). With this tendency also came an interest in Islamic identity and Mediterranean worldviews (ibid., 1127). The multiple meanings of Moore, and therefore Othello’s role as such, was explored – a term, which includes several ethnicities, religions and skin colours (ibid.). As Shakespeare set many of his plays in Italy, scholars have studied Shakespeare’s use of the Italian culture and setting, including his appropriation of Italian sources (Semple and Vyroubalovà 2018, 84).

As briefly illustrated above, Shakespeare cannot be just one thing and does not only offer one particular interpretative approach. As Bartels (2008, 1129) determines it is not the point to “finally find the meaning of Shakespeare’s plays but rather to make meaning through them.”
2.3. Construction and Deconstruction of Stereotypes

Stereotypes and stereotyping is a common practice in society and does not necessarily have to be negative. In general, stereotypes arise when people are categorised as members of a particular group rather than as individuals. In everyday situations, markers like skin colour, clothes or language help us categorise the people around us and deal with information better (Hinton 2000, 5). This kind of categorisation and simplification in itself is not negative, it is essential to life in order to understand and communicate in society because it prevents cognitive overload (ibid., 21). However, issues arise because we associate certain characteristics and categories with negative things, e.g. blond women are unintelligent. In psychology, scholars have agreed on three components of a stereotype (ibid. 7). First, a group of people are identified by a certain characteristic: gender, nationality, ethnicity, age, occupation, etc. (ibid.). In the next step, this group of people is connected with a specific set of stereotypical characteristics (ibid.), i.e. men are unemotional and women cry a lot. Most importantly, these additional characteristics are attributed to all members of the particular group (ibid.), i.e. all men are unemotional and all women cry a lot. Finally, upon encountering a member of said specific group, the stereotypical characteristic is attributed to this person (ibid.).

While stereotypes might hold some truth (cf. Stangor 2009, 2), it is important to acknowledge that an entire group of people cannot be categorised by a simplified, generalised set of characteristics, which limit individuals, and such overgeneralisations are by nature false (cf. Hinton 2000, 18). Hinton (ibid., 14f.) states that stereotypes are a feature of prejudice and often people do not want to abandon a stereotype because it confirms a prejudice held against a certain group of people. Primarily, stereotypes are negative, inaccurate and unfair and are often the result of purely random facts (Stangor 2009, 9). Stangor (2009, 2) observes that the problematic part about stereotypes is using and acting on them rather than just holding them, i.e. judging individuals based on stereotypes. Another reason for the emergence of stereotyping might be intergroup dynamics and competition with other groups, e.g. nation rivalry for land, water or other natural resources (Hinton 2000, 17). Stangor (2009, 4) sees stereotypes rather as a social than an individual construction because they reflect our relationship with other groups and cultures.

In literature and also drama in particular, ethnic and racial stereotypes have been employed often and have also contributed to the establishment and spread of certain stereotypes. Baumbach and Nünning (2009, 8) name the Moor and the Jew as two of the most controversial characters on stage and the integration of Moorish or Jewish characters had a certain effect on
the audience as those characters were usually up to no good. Nevertheless, the stage provides an excellent space to reflect on stereotypes, may they concern race, ethnicity, or gender (ibid.).

At this point, the strategies will be introduced, with will be used to analyse the construction and deconstruction of racial stereotypes in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello* and *The Tempest*. The model was compiled using different sources from different fields of studies, including literature (post-colonialism), and social psychology, but I have also added markers developed from my own ideas and thoughts. An existing model for the analysis of stereotypes has not been used because no such model exists and information on constructing and deconstructing stereotypes in literature is quite rare. I chose to analyse the dramas chronologically with the help of this model (and the method of close reading) because it provides clear structure and terminology for the analysis. I do not claim universality to this model and using it for the analysis of racial stereotypes in other dramas might not work because I have specifically compiled the strategies in connection with the three dramas analysed and the specific requirements for their analysis.

The strategies are divided into two main categories – constructing the racial stereotype and deconstructing the racial stereotype. As mentioned above, the strategies were created with the help of different sources. Mainly, the focus thereby was on postcolonial theory and literature of and by Edward Said. While Said’s main theory *Orientalism* mainly focuses on a different culture and time than I do with my analysis, Said himself saw a connection between colonialism and Shakespeare in *The Tempest* (Said 1994, 212f.), which inspired me to apply his theories and terminology to Shylock and Othello as well. The same principle was applied to postcolonial theories and especially its terms, which were borrowed as the title for many strategies and which contain many aspects inherent in creating a racial stereotype.

One strategy which fits in with both constructing and deconstructing strategies is language. Generally, language has different communicative functions in a drama. The emotive function assists in the characterisation of the characters and to identify the current mood or frame of mind of the addressee (Baumbach & Nünning 2009, 79). This emotive function particularly relevant in soliloquies or monologues to convey the speaker’s feelings and attitudes (ibid.). The conative (or appellative) function refers to the addresser’s wish to get the addressee to do something or react in a certain way (ibid., 80). The referential function in dramatic speech provides the audience with information about actions, events, or objects, which are located in the fictional world of the play (ibid.). This information might be about previous events, about other characters, etc. (ibid.). The poetic function indicates the aesthetic elements of language (ibid., 81) and the phatic function concerns the communicative channel and relationship.
between the speaker and hearer (ibid.). These functions of language can be applied to constructing and deconstructing stereotypes insofar that the author might have used language to appeal to the audience’s feelings (conative function), to hint at the speaker’s feelings about certain treatment (e.g. Shylock’s soliloquy), etc. and these strategies can be employed to both construct and deconstruct a stereotype.

In addition, there is a specific connection between language, culture and oppression. Researchers in the field of postcolonial theory have found that the language of the coloniser was seen as the dominant language, which was imposed on the colonised (Burney 2012, 51). At the same time, the coloniser’s language was afforded a higher value, while the native languages were devalued – thereby subconsciously forcing the colonised to reject their own language and culture due to their inferiority to the coloniser’s language (ibid.). The term abrogation was introduced in postcolonial theory to show a rejection of the notion that one language, dialect or accent is superior to others and the only correct form of language (ibid., 176). As Burney (2012, 176) points out, the accent of a language can indicate class, position and geographic location of a speaker and thus can create a hierarchy of class. Therefore, postcolonial writers often employ dialects and accents (Irish, Scottish, Creole, etc.) of non-standard English to create an authentic cultural image and undermine this notion of superiority of the standard language (ibid.). Burney (ibid., 177) states that “[t]he concept of abrogation can serve as a tool for investigating language and cultural identity, cultural difference, class, social status, […] representation and other areas.”

2.3.1. Constructing Racial Stereotypes in Literature

This part focuses on how Shakespeare created his stereotypical characters and how he conveyed to the readers that they are the stereotypical Jew, Moore or Savage. Constructing racial stereotypes encompasses several strategies. Sometimes it will be hard to strictly distinguish between each strategy when analysing certain scenes because stereotypes and character formation are complicated and often not straightforward. Hence, two or more strategies can naturally occur in one particular instance.

The first strategy, generalisations, is the most obvious strategy in creating a stereotype. Generalisations are included in the dramas to familiarise the reader with the character and offer them a set of characteristics, attitudes and prejudices the audience is familiar with. The audience is confronted with a set of simplified prototypes and fixed structures, which “make” The Jew, The Moor or The Native. The author imbibes their character with the stereotype already held against a certain group. For example, it is made clear that the Asian character is intelligent,
studies hard and is shortsighted. Edward Said (1979, 155) used the term *collective abstractions*, whereby he defines them thus:

 [...] [T]he age-old distinction between “Europe” and “Asia” or “Occident” and “Orient” herds beneath very wide labels every possible variety of human plurality, reducing it in the process to one or two terminal, collective abstractions [...] as if in a self-fulfilling proclamation, only the vast anonymous collectivity mattered, or existed.

Therefore, with this strategy, the individual character is reduced to his stereotypical group’s characteristics. Related to this notion of generalisations and collective abstractions is the disputed idea in postcolonial theory about *essentialism* (Burney 2012, 186). Essentialism means that every culture has “a certain typical quality that is shared by all within that culture” (ibid.). As Burney (ibid.) points out essentialism was and is still used to stereotype certain cultures in the media. Naturally, postcolonial scholars have disputed this view as the individual aspect of all humans is completely ignored by this essentialist theory. Thus, this term and the notion behind it serves the purposes of constructing stereotypes very well.

What comes into play as well in regards to generalisations is *chromatism*. This term refers to the unfair treatment of people of colour and deals with the belief that there are essential differences between people with different skin colours, i.e. the lighter the colour of skin, the better the person (Burney 2012, 180). In postcolonial theory, this concept was and still is an issue; for example, in India whiteness is still seen as a sign for class, status and opportunity – thus, power. This is still a very sensitive topic today and Burney (ibid., 181) sees chromatism as a strategy to confront race and colour bias.

The next strategy is called *centre/margin* and refers to constructing an opposition between the minority, stereotypically portrayed character and the other white, Western characters (as well as Shakespeare’s primarily white, Western readers and viewers of the time). Centre/margin is a term coined in postcolonial theory and introduces the notion of imperial Europe being in the centre and everything else being in the margins of knowledge, power and culture (ibid., 180). Burney (2012, 180) explains that the creation of empires, including the oppression of native citizens, relied on creating a binary opposition between the West and the Other, “[...] [W]ithout the concept of the ‘civilized,’ the notion of ‘savage’ could not occur; without the notion of ‘us,’ the concept of ‘them’ has no meaning.” This creates an opposition that aided the colonisers in oppressing the colonised and allowed them to bring culture and civilisation to the Other in the margins (ibid.). Despite (or maybe because) many scholars, Edward Said included (cf. 1994, 324), criticise the term centre/margin since it might perpetuate the marginalisation of the Other, it does fit in very well in constructing a stereotype and therefore, I included it in the analysis.
Connected to the concept of centre/margin, is the ‘us/them dichotomy’. This dichotomy is a recurrent theme in postcolonial discourse and literature, but Burney (2012, 180) also finds examples in the present with George W. Bush’s use of the concept after 9/11. This dichotomy also deals with opposition between the Western dominant group – us – and the Eastern, marginalised, dominated group – them (Staszak 2009, 43). This creation of an ‘us/them’ dichotomy stigmatizes a difference, which might be real or imagined; therefore, Staznak (ibid.) differentiates between difference (e.g. biological sex) and otherness (e.g. gender). The theory here is that difference is used to create meaning (Burney 2012, 173) and language is used to create otherness. Othering is a practice that allows the ‘us/them’ dichotomy to take hold as well as asymmetry in power, “Only the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of others (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures.” (ibid.). Staznak (ibid., 43-44) remarks that othering does not follow logical thinking but political, social and economic power are main factors in the success of stigmatising the Other.

Connected to this is also the ingroup vs. outgroup conflict. It is very similar to the ‘us/them’ dichotomy, albeit the ingroup does not have to be the Western cultures and the outgroup does not necessarily have to be the Eastern cultures. Ingroup/outgroup is always defined from one particular point of view; ingroup describes the group of which the perceiver is a member and outgroup relates to the group to which the perceiver does not belong (Hinton 2000, 107). This ingroup/outgroup system can be applied to many aspects in life, including social status, age, profession but – most importantly here – also culture and nationality. If the ingroup is one particular nationality, e.g. British, the outgroup is another nationality, e.g. Indian (ibid.). Applying this to Shakespeare’s context, the analyser must choose a certain perspective, e.g. Shylock’s ingroup are the Jewish, while Antonio’s and his companions’ ingroup are the Christians. Accordingly, Shylock’s outgroup are the Christians and thus Antonio and his companions vice versa.

All of these strategies hinge on establishing a binary or extreme opposition (Burney 2012, 178). This system has been used to create a hierarchy and ideology not only in the colonial context but also in other contexts like feminism (ibid.). A binary point of view is very black and white and does not acknowledge ambiguous grey areas (ibid.). Burney (2012, 179) emphasised that “the binary concept of Orient/Occident can yield tremendous insights into representation, cultural discourse, sociology, psychology, politics and geography, education, the social construction of the Other, and ‘othering’.” Extreme opposition of two sides fits wonderfully in the often simplified stereotypical representation of the Other in *The Merchant*
of Venice, Othello and The Tempest. It also helps establish a certain attitude towards the Other, as in this model extreme opposition is always negative for the Other because they are represented as uncivilised (vs. the civilised Venetians, conquerors), black (vs. white), etc. For the purposes of this thesis, I have used this concept of a binary opposition not only on a group level, e.g. Africans vs. Europeans or Jews vs. Christians, but also on an individual level, e.g. Othello vs. Iago or Shylock vs. Antonio.

The next strategy concerns metonymy and catachresis. Metonymy is a figure of speech, where something is referred to by using a word that describes one of its qualities or features ("Metonymy"). In the context of my model, metonymy will be used to point out when certain words, features or qualities are used to refer to a stereotypical characteristic. This includes different aspects. One of those aspects is dress and appearance. In literature and also more general, in media, minorities are often represented in a certain way. For example, on stage Jews were often seen wearing a hat and they usually had a large, hooked nose. While dress is hard to gage when analysing a play and not explicitly connecting it to a particular staging of the play, appearance does not only have to do with outward appearance. In this model, appearance also includes equating the stereotypical character with a stereotypical characteristic, e.g. Shylock is a moneylender, which is not only stereotypically Jewish but it is also what situates Shylock in the play and determines his actions. In the connection with metonymy, Shylock becomes the moneylender. While this strategy of metonymy might also be connected to the strategy of generalisations because metonymy relies heavily on stereotypes and generalisations, this kind of metonymy goes a step further and becomes the focal point of the character, i.e. Shylock, the moneylender, is the villain, since moneylending with interest is an Unchristian and despicable thing to do. Through metonymy, the stereotype is integrated into the plot.

However, is moneylending an inherently villainous thing to do? No. This is why metonymy and catachresis can be combined. Catachresis is a figure of speech and is “the incorrect use of words or the application of something to an entity it does not represent” (Burney 2012, 179). I will use this term in this thesis in connection with postcolonial theory to mean that a certain feature, characteristic or word is connected to the stereotypical character, which does not actually represent the character. Subsequently, metonymy and catachresis are more or less the opposite and therefore complement each other because, as I have mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, stereotypes are most often created with a grain of truth (i.e. Jews are often moneylenders) but are also often falsely connected to negative things due to generalisations and othering (i.e. Jews are moneylenders and moneylenders are villainous, thus Jews are villainous). Another good example for catachresis is name-calling. Using derogatory
terms for stereotypical characters makes it easier to alienate them from the audience and helps create an ‘us/them’ dichotomy.

### 2.3.2. Deconstructing Racial Stereotypes in Literature

The following strategies focus on ways to deconstruct the stereotypes created beforehand. This chapter incorporates several strategies, which represent different approaches to dispel stereotypes and will be discussed in detail in the following.

The first strategy is called counter-discourse. It includes all instances, where counter-discourse about the racial stereotypes can be encountered. In postcolonial theory, counter-discourse indicates instances, where the Other resists the white man, which, according to Burney (2012, 182), can take different forms. The most prominent example here would be letting the Other speak for themselves. In all three plays, Shakespeare incorporated a monologue or a soliloquy for his minority characters and each speech serves the purpose of educating the audience about their situation, shedding light on their hardships and motives behind their cruel actions. Monologues and soliloquies are an integral technique of characterisation because here the character does not rely on authorial or figural implicit characterisation but has the opportunity to tell their side of the story (cf. Pfister 1993 as cited in Baumbach & Nünning 2009, 109/111). Baumbach and Nünning (2009, 111) noted that the most reliable information is offered when a character is by themselves on stage. How information about the stereotypical characters is provided is always vital in deconstructing (and also constructing!) a stereotype and I will refer to the technique of characterisation according to Pfister (ibid.) throughout my analysis. Furthermore, monologues and soliloquies offer a glimpse into the character’s inner worlds, tell us about previous events, etc. (Baumbach & Nünning 2009, 87f.). Naturally, other characters, who are close to the stereotypical figure, can also offer counter-discourse.

The second strategy can be defined by exposure to positive examples and unfair treatment. The title gives away what features and strategies this category contains and is found in action rather than devices or characterisation. Positive examples might be the character’s morale, their successful career or relationships. Positive exposure might also be achieved through finding common ground between the stereotypical minority character and a white, Western character. Hinton (2000, 123) mentioned how cooperation between members of groups can lead to understanding and re-categorisation by viewing them “as members of a different ingroup as a way of reducing bias.” For example, from the perspective of a white audience
member, they might consider the black outgroup character as a husband rather than just a black man and find common ground like this.

Unfair treatment of a racially different character can be a strategy to construct a stereotype and can be linked to catachresis (for example, name-calling) but exposure to cruel behaviour towards a defenceless or maybe even innocent character might have just the opposite effect. In all of Shakespeare’s plays analysed in this thesis, the racially stereotypical characters will be verbally and physically mistreated and these instances serve to humanise the characters to the audience. There is, however, a certain grey area and mistreatment of the stereotypical character will have to be analysed according to the construction and circumstances of each scene.

Hybridity is another strategy vital in deconstructing racial stereotypes. Most of the time, as seen with strategies to construct stereotypes, the Other is represented in a simplified, generalised way, accumulating all stereotypical and negative characteristics of their race or religion. Sometimes, racially diverse characters served as stock characters, who were present for one purpose only. In postcolonial theory, hybridity is a term which denotes the complicatedness of the postcolonial individual and stresses that identities are dynamic not only on a cultural but also on an individual level (Burney 2012, 189-190). In literature, the Other was often demoted to a simplistic member of a group, who represented the whole group. Said (1979, 150) critiqued the “kind of human flatness, which exposed its characteristics easily to scrutiny and removed from it its complicating humanity.” Said describes this practise of simplifying the Other very poignantly with the terms human flatness and complicating humanity. Therefore, this part of the model focuses on the complicated, human decisions the analysed characters make and while their choices might be mistakes sometimes, they highlight their humanity and individuality in contrast to their race’s collectivity. Showing individual hardships of the Other can help the audience identify with them and focus more on their individuality rather than their race or religion.
3. “If you prick us, do we not bleed?”

The Jewish Stereotypes in *The Merchant of Venice*

3.1. Historical and literary context

During Shakespeare’s time, Jews were a marginal group and Shakespeare’s contemporaries were used to depictions of Jews as villains. Furthermore, Jews also attracted derision and contempt in real life outside of the theatre. Marlowe’s Barabas, the titular protagonist of *The Jew of Malta*, was a common stereotype for the Jew and Shakespeare himself employed some of the most popular Jewish stereotypes for Shylock for several reasons. Before diving into the construction and deconstruction of stereotypes with the example of Shylock, this chapter will illuminate a Jew’s life at the end of the 16th century.

Up until the 12th century, Jews and Christians lived together more or less peacefully in England. Due to superstitions like the blood libel, the predominantly Christian population turned violently against Jews. This violence had different causes: some were blinded by newly emerging prejudices, while others tried to discredit Jews to escape their debts with Jewish moneylenders (Gruber 2003, 16). Henry III. (1207-1272) passed several laws limiting Jewish rights and after the crusades, lending money with interest was prohibited (ibid. 19). Jews were accused of usury, thus, actively stripping many Jews of their livelihood (ibid.). Jews were obligated to wear a stigma and taxes for Jews were increased, causing many Jews to descend into a criminal life, which only served to enforce the prosecution of and prejudices against Jews even more (ibid., 20). In 1290, Edward I. banned all Jews from England. Only 400 years later, Jewish communities officially resettled in England again.

At the end of the 16th century with the rise of mercantilism, Jews became valuable assets due to their economic knowhow and international connections. A sort of renaissance of Jewish communities could be witnessed in Germany and Italy and while Jews were still officially banned from England, a comparatively large number of Jews resided in England during the reign of Elizabeth I. These Jews played a significant role in international trade. Probably the most famous Jew of the time was the Portuguese Roderigo Lopez, who was the personal physician of the Queen. 1594 he was accused of attempting to murder the Queen and was consequently executed. Sources claim that Elizabeth herself was not entirely convinced of his guilt but due to Lopez’s heritage, he had made powerful enemies in England. Lopez’s conviction and execution was a sensation in London and Shakespeare must have undoubtedly heard about this event. (Gross 1994, 20-21)

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4 MV, 3.1. 60-61.
In 16th century Venice, Jews were oftentimes treated better than in England, although their lives were still affected by injustice and racism. Today, it cannot be determined whether Shakespeare had ever visited Venice in his lifetime but scholars strongly assume so. Despite alleged first-hand accounts, Shakespeare did not always faithfully follow historical facts and geography and used embellishments (cf. Hunter 2000, 37-38). Jews were more or less welcome in Venice, an international trade city, which relied on successful moneylenders (Gruber 2003, 69). Jews of that region were actually well known and mostly well respected due to their good reputation as merchants and usurers (Loomba 2002, 144). The Jewish success was credited only to their religious beliefs and not their economic talent, which led to English tradesmen desiring Jews to convert to Christianity to allow English Christians a foothold in the lucrative Mediterranean market (ibid.).

Nevertheless, the bloody deal Shylock and Antonio strike in The Merchant of Venice would not have been possible. According to Venetian laws, Jews were obligated to work within loan banks and these loan banks were supervised by the Venetian authorities (Gruber 2003, 69). Over the course of the centuries, Jews were continually banned from Venice, only to be asked back in times of financial crises (Schwanitz 1997, 70). At the beginning of the 16th century, Jews were resettled in the Venetian Ghetto Nuovo (ibid.), thus, also placing Shylock and his daughter in the ghetto, which is never mentioned in the play.

In the following paragraphs, the most common stereotypes about Jews, which already existed in Shakespeare’s time, will be illustrated. Many stereotypes originated in the belief that Jews are followers of the devil (Gruber 2003, 32) and Shylock is called a devil or assimilated with satanic characteristics several times in The Merchant of Venice (Schwanitz 1997, 29).

The stereotype of the stingy Jewish moneylender and usurer is still relatively well known today, despite finding its origins in Jesus’s times, when Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The reason why Jewish moneylenders garnered such a bad reputation was due to their custom to invoke interest when lending money and according to Christian beliefs, they therefore profited from the needy (Gruber 2003, 37). Moreover, Christians were not allowed to charge interest when lending money according to church rules because they were not allowed to profit while not actually working for it (ibid.). Therefore, money lending was one of the only jobs Jews were allowed to carry out and Christians were not. This issue about money lending with interest is also tackled by Shakespeare and is – among others – a reason for the rivalry between Shylock and Antonio. Gross (Gross 1994, 261) states that Shylock’s profession is a crucial point about him and according to him, some researches see Shylock as the “personification of capitalism”.

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Another malignant Jewish stereotype – well poisoning – emerged during the middle Ages in an attempt to find an explanation for the plague and, fuelled by superstition, Jews were accused of being the source of the disease (Gruber 2003, 45). Jews were blamed for the plague because less Jews died from it than Christians; today, it is known that Jews had better hygiene than the predominately Christian population due to the Mikveh, a regular bath to achieve ritual purity (ibid.).

The blood libel (also known as blood accusation) originates in 12th century England and accuses Jews of kidnapping, abusing and/or torturing an innocent child. The kidnapped child usually belonged to a different religion, usually Christianity. Furthermore, the victim’s blood was later used in religious rituals.

Moreover, there are several general stereotypes about Jews, which already circulated in England and Europe of Shakespeare’s time. According to ‘scholars’ of medieval times, Jews were supposed to smell badly, have large hooked noses and Jewish men were allegedly able to menstruate and breastfeed (Loomba 2002, 144). Additionally, Jews were supposedly circumcising Christians by force, participated in cannibalism and were exploiting Christians economically due to their usury (ibid.).

Interestingly, Jews were associated with black skin in theological writings and became so associated with Islam and blackness that the two even became interconnected (ibid., 148). Loomba (2002, 148) argues that

> [t]he idea of the moral and often literal blackness of Jews and of Judaism had as long a tradition as that of the blackness of Islam; it was reinforced as racism intensified, so that in the 19th century, the Jew could be labelled the ‘white Negro’.

Al-Joulan (2017, 66) also contends that the terms black and Moor could be used synonymously with Jewish figures and thus connect Jews with the same pejorative attributes as dark-skinned people. Harris (2010, 210f.) even speaks of a typical “cross-hatching of religious and racial otherness on the early modern English stage” and he also draws a comparison between Muslims, Moors and Jews insofar that the traditional circumcision in both religions is one of the only physical markers of otherness (next to other physical appearances like clothes, skin colour, facial features).

The Jewish stereotypes and prejudices are manifold and extensive. This was only a brief overview of the most prominent racially motivated beliefs about Judaism and the Jewish, but more might come up when we delve into the analysis of Shakespeare’s construction and deconstruction of the Jewish stereotypes in Shylock.
Like all literature, Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* lives in a network of plays – past and contemporary –, which influenced and inspired him. The story about the bond and the guarantee of a pound of flesh is a common motive. Gross (1994, 5) presumes that Shakespeare knew and modelled *The Merchant of Venice* after Giovanni Fiorentino’s novella *Il Pecorone* (written around 1378). *The Merchant of Venice* and Fiorentino’s novella are both set in Venice and Belmont and also share a very similar story arc, i.e. combining the bond motif with the courting of Portia (Pfister 2009, 406). The biggest difference, though, is that Shakespeare infused complicated racial issues into his comedy and thus sets itself apart from Fiorentino’s funny novella (ibid.). Moreover, Shakespeare gave Shylock a more prominent role in the character constellation and highlighted dramatic as well as poetic aspects (ibid.). Most notably, Shakespeare expanded and focused more on the storyline surrounding the bond and the pound of flesh (Gross 1994, 6).

Furthermore, researchers have found reason to believe Shakespeare was inspired by a translation of the medieval tales *Gesta Romanorum* (1595) because of the similar romantic storyline about the three caskets in Belmont (Pfister 2009, 406). Researchers also see a connection between Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and Thomas Dekker’s drama *The Jew of Venice* due to the similarity of Dekker’s titular Jew and Shakespeare’s Shylock (ibid.). Additionally, the courtroom scene in Alexandre Sylvain’s *The Orator* and *The Merchant of Venice* are alike (ibid.). Similarities can also be found between Antony Munday’s *Zelauto* and *The Merchant of Venice* concerning the pound of flesh motif and the storyline surrounding Lorenzo and Jessica (Gross 1994, 8-9).

The most controversial connection is between Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and Kit Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (ca. 1589). The titular Jews and villains Shylock and Barabas are both usurers, who have to survive in a Christian world, and whose only daughters convert to Christianity (Gross 1994, 8). Gross (1994, 10-11) believes that Marlowe’s Barabas, who almost manages to win the audience’s sympathy due to his wit and isolation from society (at least at the beginning of the play) influenced Shylock’s complexity in his villainous role. The most prominent difference between Shylock and Barabas, though, arise in how Barabas’ was stylised. T.S. Eliot (cited in Gross 1994, 13) describes Barabas in an essay about *The Jew of Malta* as a “prodigious caricature” and mentions the cruel sort of wit of the play. Nevertheless, according to T.S. Eliot Barabas thus represents “something which Shakespeare could not do, and which he did not want to do.” (ibid.)
Shapiro (2017, 6) points out that while Shakespeare was inspired by other writers and old tales when creating The Merchant of Venice, he did not simply copy and paste, “Deepening and enriching source material is a hallmark of Shakespeare’s genius as a writer.”

3.2. Shylock: (De-)Constructing the Stereotypes

In the following chapter, I will analyse the construction and deconstruction of the Jewish stereotypes in The Merchant of Venice by analysing Shylock, the Jew.

Even before we begin with the analysis of specific scenes, we will explore how Shylock is introduced to the audience. Shylock is introduced as “Shylock, a Jew” (MV, 101) in the dramatis personae and “Shylock the Jew” (ibid., 1.3.) in the stage directions of his first scene. We have to bear in mind that Jews had a bad reputation anyway and were infused with negative prejudices and stereotypes even before Shylock’s portrayal in Shakespeare’s play (see Chapter 3.1.). Therefore, as soon as the audience is informed of Shylock’s Jewish faith he is marked as an outsider (see Chapter 3.1.). His name alone – Shylock – marks him as an outsider among the other Venetian characters, even though the etymology of his name could not be uncovered as of yet (Gross 1994, 51). Shylock sounds like a mix between English (shy-lock) and Hebraic and stands in stark contrast to the classic Italian names of the other protagonists like Antonio, Bassanio or Lorenzo (Schwanitz 1997, 23). As we will see, in the course of the play, Shylock is often referred to as ‘the Jew’ behind his back, albeit called Shylock in face-to-face encounters (the court scene represents an exception, which I will come back to below). Referring to Shylock as ‘the Jew’ and not his name already signifies a strategy to stereotype him. Shylock as ‘the Jew’ or ‘a Jew’ successfully strips him of his individuality and places him squarely among his brethren, the stereotypical Jews with all the negative prejudices held against them. Calling him this can be identified as a generalisation in the strategies presented in Chapter 2.3. Said (1979, 155) illustrated how only the collective beliefs about the Jews play a role as long as the audience was not introduced to the individuality of the Other, i.e. Shylock. This points towards essentialism and the assumption that all members of a certain racial group share the same characteristics (cf. Burney 2012, 186). Thus, even before the audience is introduced to the character himself, they start to form an opinion of him as a stereotypical Jew.

The first scene analysed can be found in the third scene of the first act, which marks the first appearance of Shylock on stage. Here, Shylock is seen on stage for the first time and he negotiates a deal worth 3,000 ducats with Bassanio with Antonio as guarantor. At first, the
negotiation is civil as Shylock and Bassanio settle on the terms of the agreement; Shylock ponders his business opportunity and asks for a meeting between himself and Antonio. Bassanio extends a dinner invitation, which Shylock declines vehemently, “I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following; but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you.” (MV, 1.3. 33-35) With these words a rift begins to form between Shylock and the other characters. While it still might be too early to categorise Shylock’s utterance as the construction of a stereotype, the utterance definitely proposes a difference between the characters. According to the strategies introduced in Chapter 2.3., a binary opposition is forming. On the one hand, we have Shylock the Jew, who is infused already with all the negative attributes due to his religious beliefs and due to generalising strategies. On the other hand, we have Antonio and Bassanio, who are – as far as the audience knows – two upright Venetian citizens looking for a loan to woo a woman and win her heart. It can be argued that an ingroup and outgroup is establishing itself with Shylock as the outgroup character. The audience will automatically identify with ingroup members like Antonio and Bassanio, who have only shown good behaviour up until now and who are – like the majority of the audience – Christian. Interestingly, Shylock is the one, who creates this opposition by refusing to share a meal with his business partners, in particular Antonio. Shylock also immediately gives reasons for refusing the invitation:

I hate him for he is a Christian,
But more for that in low simplicity
He lends out money gratis and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
If I can catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.
He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,
[...] On me, my bargains, and my well-won thrift[.]
(MV, 1.3. 39-47)

This passage indicates Shylock’s reasons for his hatred towards Antonio and also furthers the difference between them. Shylock’s use of the word hate regarding his feeling about Antonio stands out at this part of the play. We have not yet seen any direct contact between the two antagonistic characters and already we feel a deep rift between them. The reason for Shylock’s hatred is partly Antonio’s religion, creating a binary opposition between the two characters. This opposition between them can even be likened to a general opposition between their faiths – Jews vs. Christians. But Shylock does not oppose Antonio just because he is a Christian but due to Christian customs. As mentioned in Chapter 3.1. on the historical context, it was illustrated how Christians frowned upon lending money with interest, a common practice
among Jews. This passage also indicates that Shylock does lend money with interest and this was how he was able to make his fortune and become a successful moneylender – much to Antonio’s chagrin.

The derogatory term ascribed to this practice is usury and Shylock is often referred to as a usurer (e.g. MV, 1.3. 105). His usury becomes one of the most prominent aspects of his character, not only because it makes the bond with a pound of flesh as guarantee possible. Some literary scholars believe Shylock is the personification of capitalism and have used this approach to turn a blind eye towards his religion and the discussion about anti-Judaism and antisemitism in The Merchant of Venice (cf. Gross 1994, 261ff.). However, Shylock’s religion and his choice of profession are closely connected. Jews were not afforded many opportunities in their choice of occupation, but the Venetian authorities actually encouraged moneylending as it brought money to the economy and was a job that Christians could not perform (Gruber 2003, 69). Enzensberger (1977 as cited in Schwanitz 1998, 177) offers a different approach to this situation as he argues that Shylock is not a usurer because he is a Jew but a Jew because as such he represents a usurer. Accordingly, Enzensberger (ibid.) suggests that Shakespeare included a Jewish antagonist on purpose to profit from the already established stereotypical characteristics associated with Judaism.

The mention of an “ancient grudge” (MV, 1.3. 44) between Shylock and Antonio might refer not only to the obvious dislike between the two protagonists but also the centuries long opposition between Christianity and Judaism. Antonio apparently “hates our nation” (ibid., 45), where ‘our nation’ signifies Judaism and Shylock’s people. This hints at a general dislike of Jews on Antonio’s part and his mistreatment of Shylock might take the same shape towards other Jews as well. Again, this opposition and the allusion to a grudge between Shylock and Antonio – as well as Judaism and Christianity – serves to establish an extreme opposition. Loomba (2002, 149) also observed how the play “vividly evokes the difference perceived by both Jews and Christians between their two communities.”

This scene does not end as civilly as it started, though. Soon Antonio and Shylock engage in a heated debate concerning the moral correctness of lending money with interest. After Shylock attempts to rationalise his practice of taking interest by sharing a story from the Bible, Antonio confronts Shylock with dreadful accusations. “The devil can cite scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness is like a villain with a smiling cheek, a goodly apple rotten at the heart.” (MV, 1.3. 94-97) As mentioned in Chapter 3.1., Jews were often associated with the devil, portrayed as his follower or even equated with the devil himself (Gruber 2003, 32). This practice of equating Jews with the devil would fall in the category of
catachresis in the strategies for constructing stereotypes presented previously. With the use of *devil*, a term is ascribed to Shylock, which does not represent him or his people. Moreover, “evil soul”, “villain” and “apple rotten at the heart” (MV, 1.3. 94-97) suggest further name-calling as Antonio seems to assign pejorative words to Shylock because the audience does not get a reason for the attack other than Shylock’s habit of lending money with interest. All the terms describing Shylock are derogative in their nature and therefore can be categorised as a strategy to construct the racial stereotype of the Jew.

At first, Shylock does not react to Antonio’s rant, he seems indifferent until Antonio suggests that there should be no interest. Thus, Shylock delivers one of the most important monologues, which serve to deconstruct the Jewish stereotype already established in the play.

In the Rialto you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances.
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
For suffrance is the badge of all our tribe.
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat, dog,
And spit upon my Jewish gabardine,
And all for use of that which is mine own.
Well then, it now appears you need my help.
Go to, then. You come to me and you say,
‘Shylock, we would have moneys’ : you say so–
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur[,] [...] Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last;
You spurned me such a day; another time
You called me dog; and for these courtesies
I’ll lend you thus much moneys’?
(MV, 1.3. 104-125)

In this passage, Shylock recounts several instances, where Antonio has mistreated him, which serves as a strategy to deconstruct the racial Jewish stereotype. The audience is confronted with the unfair treatment Shylock suffers by the hand of Antonio and while this instance might not deconstruct the stereotype per se, Shylock is seen as an individual, who has been badly mistreated. He was spat on, he was kicked, he was insulted. All this because of the supposed stereotypes and prejudices held against him and his people. Shylock even points out that his mistreatment is closely connected to his religion because Jews are used to endure suffering.

Furthermore, the monologue above marks a passage, where the stereotypical Other is allowed to speak for himself. Interestingly, this first instance of speaking for himself occurs relatively early in the play – the first scene, where Shylock actually appears himself. To some extent, Shylock portrays himself as the victim of Christian mistreatment and rightly so. O’Rourke (2003, 377) also suggests that “Shylock’s hatred for Antonio does not only originate
in his nature as a Jew but is the result of having been continually harassed by Antonio while conducting business that is legal by the laws of both Venice and London.” Shylock seems to argue on the basis of this mistreatment that he should not be lenient and indeed charge interest.

Shylock is able to start a counter-discourse to Antonio’s berating utterances, who – willingly and without hesitation – used slurs and curses when Shylock opposes him. The supposed gentleman Antonio is partly exposed as prejudiced and as a bully – something, which is also apparent in his answer to Shylock’s accusation, “I am as like to call thee so again, to spit on thee again, to spurn thee, too.” (MV, 1.3. 126-127) Antonio further suggests that all friendliness may be left aside and the money be “lend rather to thine enemy, who, if he break, thou mayst with better face exact the penalty.” (ibid., 131-133) This reinforces the ‘us/them’ dichotomy and the extreme opposition between the two protagonists. Usually, the audience would side with Antonio and the Christians in this dichotomy but the exposure to the unfair treatment cannot be forgotten.

Thus, the deal with the pound of flesh as collateral is struck, as suggested by Shylock. This instance definitely serves to further establish the Jewish stereotype as the devil and an evil person because who would demand a pound of flesh as collateral but an evil person? Indeed, Shylock’s lust for vengeance does not shine a favourable light on him. Both Shylock and Antonio agree on the deal in an atmosphere of hatred and viciousness, leaving the audience with a certain dread, even though Antonio seems satisfied with the bond, “The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind.” (ibid., 175) This sentence also suggests that Christians are inherently good and that a kind Hebrew/Jew is something to be marvelled at. Bassanio, on the other hand, also has a first inkling about what will later unfold in 4.1., “I like not fair terms and a villain’s mind.” (ibid., 176) This first scene then ends with Shylock the Jew connected with a negative stereotype again, i.e. the villain, and with an uneasy feeling about his motives regarding the pound of flesh. Hence, while his first monologue does serve as an instance which challenges the Jewish stereotype his bloodthirsty tendency in asking for a pound of flesh as collateral leaves the audience in two minds.

Before Shylock is able to speak for himself again, though, there are several shorter instances where other protagonists like his servant Lancelot Gobbo or his daughter Jessica characterise Shylock in a negative way.

In the second scene of the second act, Shylock is once again likened to the devil. In a soliloquy at the beginning of the scene, his servant Lancelot Gobbo describes his master as “a kind of devil” (MV 2.2, 23) and “the Jew is the very devil incarnation” (ibid. 25). This serves to further demonise and distance Shylock from other characters. Like in the scene above, when
Antonio dubs Shylock the devil, the strategy of catachresis comes into play here – associating Shylock with something he does not represent. It could also be argued that a binary opposition is being formed by establishing Shylock the Jew as the bad and evil character in contrast to the (seemingly) virtuous and gentlemanly Antonio. Breuer (2005, 7f.) also argues that the plot is constructed in a way typical for the genre of comedy: on the one hand, there are the ‘good’ ones like Antonio, the altruistic friend, Bassanio, the young aristocrat, who together with Portia portrays the romantic couple everybody champions, Jessica, the young woman in need of rescue and a husband; on the other hand, we have the antagonist Shylock, whose vengeful intentions are luckily thwarted by Portia’s wit in the end.

Lancelot continually refers to Shylock as ‘the Jew’ in his speech, never once by his name, successfully stripping Shylock of his individuality and hybridity. With Lancelot’s soliloquy, Shylock is explicitly characterised through the commentary from another (cf. Pfister 1993, as cited in Baumbach & Nünning 2009, 109). As Baumbach & Nünning (2009, 112) point out, characterisation by others must not always be reliable and depends on the relationship between the characterised and the speaker. Lancelot has presumably been in Shylock’s service for quite some time and by his soliloquy one can infer a certain dislike towards his master.

Debating whether to run away from his master, Lancelot uses the images of his good conscience, who entreats him to stay on at his master’s, and his fiend, who counsels him to run away. This fiend, though, is a sort of “devil himself” (MV, 2.2. 22) and can be seen as the devil on his shoulder, tempting him to do something evil, which suggests a roguish and unreliable influence in itself. Nevertheless, later in the scene during a conversation with Old Gobbo, his long lost father, Lancelot accuses Shylock of mistreating him and not giving him enough to eat, “I am famished in his service; you may tell every finger I have with my ribs.” (ibid., 101-102). This indeed casts a damning light on Shylock and his conduct as a master – truly like a Jewish devil. Yet, Lancelot also suggests that he would rather be in Bassanio’s service not because he gives more food but new uniforms (MV, 2.2. 104-105). And indeed, when Bassanio accepts Lancelot as his new servant, he orders a new livery for him, which leaves Lancelot in raptures (ibid., 150-161). Furthermore, it can be assumed that Bassanio and Lorenzo have bribed and treated the servant very well to further their own agendas, gain access to Jessica and outwit her father with Lancelot’s help. Thus, it can be claimed that Lancelot’s characterisation of Shylock is influenced by his desire to serve Bassanio.

Moreover, Shylock himself talks about his servant Lancelot in the fifth scene of the second act and characterises him as “kind enough, but a huge feeder, snail-slow in profit, and he sleeps by day” (MV, 2.5. 45-46). This utterance stands in stark contrast to Lancelot’s
description of Shylock, where he used curse words and degraded his master as the devil. Shylock, on the other hand, only laments his laziness and gluttony and expresses his gladness in seeing the servant pass to Bassanio (ibid., 48-50).

Shylock is briefly characterised by his daughter, Jessica, in the third scene of the second act. After she says goodbye to Lancelot, who told her he was leaving her father’s service, she contemplates her relationship with her father, “Alack, what heinous sin it is in me to be ashamed to be my father’s child! But though I am a daughter to his blood, I am not to his manners.” (MV, 2.3. 16-19) It is clear that Jessica is ashamed of her father and his customs. Other scenes suggest that Jessica is kept at home most of the time and lives a secluded life. She also describes life in his house “hell” (ibid., 2) and tedious (ibid., 3). It should be noted that she does not actually indicate any mistreatment at the hands of her father and the words hell and tedious seem to correlate insofar that life in his house is hell because it is tedious, as in boring. Gross (1994, 57) claims that all this combined with her infatuation with Lorenzo and her desire to be free of her father’s restrictions make it understandable why she wants to flee her father’s house. Jessica further determines, though, that she is very unlike her father but does not clarify. It can be assumed that she alludes to all the negative information the audience has received about her father and his stereotypical Jewishness. Salerio, a friend of Antonio, also portrays her as an entirely different sort of person than Shylock, “There is more difference between thy [Shylock’s, note from the author] flesh and hers than between jet and ivory” (MV, 3.1. 36-37). Shakespeare evokes the imagery of black and white here, with Shylock representing jet, blackness and evil, while Jessica is ivory, white and good. As mentioned in Chapter 3.1., Jews were often associated with black skin and all the negative attributes of Moors and Muslims.

Interestingly, Jessica is placed on the Christian side of the binary opposition, which has several implications. It reinforces the assumption that Shylock is indeed the evil, villainous Jew that everybody says he is because even his own daughter – also a Jew – distances herself from him. Furthermore, her connection with a Christian and desire to marry him – and thus convert to Christianity – enhances the impression that Christianity is good, something to be sought and attained. Simultaneously, Judaism is tainted, something to be rejected and a Jew indeed a person, who one does not want to be associated with. Therefore, Jessica’s willingness to convert to Christianity sheds a negative light on Judaism and makes it undesirable. Thus, Judaism is boring, life with a Jew hellish and the “sweet” (MV, 2.3. 11), “gentle Jessica” (ibid., 19) stands in stark contrast to her father. Loomba (2002, 157) agrees that “Jessica’s incorporation into Christian society is essential to defining her father’s alien status.”
Shylock’s connection to Jessica – his only daughter – is further explored after she has fled her father’s household to elope with Lorenzo. Salerio and Solanio recount Shylock’s reaction when he finds out about his daughter’s elopement and her theft of a large sum of money and valuable jewellery.

My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats! […] And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones, Stol’n by my daughter! Justice! – find the girl, She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats! (MV, 2.8. 15-22)

At first glance, Shylock does not seem to be too sure which loss pains him more – that of his daughter or of his money. Due to this indecision, the audience might start to doubt Shylock’s capability to love his daughter since the loss of his ducats seems equally as painful to him (cf. Hellinger 2011, 36). A fact that is easily overlooked but cannot be forgotten is that Shylock does not explicitly deliver these sentences and lamentations about his ducats. Solanio, who is a close associate of Antonio’s, only repeats shylock’s reaction and might thence be biased. How much truthfulness and how much exaggeration lie in Solanio’s recounting of the events can only be guessed. Nevertheless, the narrative goes that Shylock mourns the loss of his valuables as much as the loss of his daughter. Thus, once again, he is portrayed as the stereotypical Jew, a miser, who cares for objects more than his daughter.

Shylock’s first reaction directly from himself to these events, though, shows a different picture because his feelings convey both anger and sadness. In a conversation with Tubal, another Jew and close associate of Shylock, Shylock does mention his ducats and the jewellery several times after asking about his daughter’s whereabouts, “A diamond gone cost me two thousand ducats in Frankfurt […], and other precious, precious jewels ” (MV, 3.1. 79-83). He further asserts that he would rather “she were hearsed at my foot and the ducats in her coffin” (ibid., 84-85). The loss of a particular turquoise ring, which Jessica squandered away for a monkey, is especially distressing to him as it had been a present of his dead wife from when they were courting. So, while the loss of materials is serious and substantial to him, he does show a sentimental connection with this specific piece of jewellery. In addition, he objects to Jessica’s escape also on the grounds that she fled with a Christian and given his experience with Christians as well as the treatment he has endured by the hands of Christians, his despair at losing not only his daughter to one but also his hard earned money is reasonable. Every father would be furious at his daughter’s elopement and her theft of a considerable sum of money and rare pieces of jewellery. But Shylock does not live in this vacuum of individuality
and everything he does is connected to his religion – he is Shylock the Jew. Hence, as a stereotypical Jew, he is indifferent in facing the loss of his daughter and losing his money is more pronounced because he is a stingy Jewish moneylender. Shylock cannot be removed from his Jewishness; everything he does is informed by his religion and his religion informs everything he does.

Soon after Jessica’s disappearance, news reaches Venice that Antonio’s ships have sunk and that he does not have the means to repay Shylock in time. When Salerio entreats Shylock not to ask for the pound of flesh, which is how it was agreed upon in the bond, this is Shylock’s answer:

To bait fish withal – if it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge; he hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies – and what’s his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? (MV, 3.1. 50-62)

This is the most important speech in The Merchant of Venice and one of the most prominent speeches in Shakespeare’s drama in general. The speech stands out for its inclusion and argument for fundamental human equality (cf. Ryan 2009, 116). With this monologue, Shylock successfully manages to deconstruct the Jewish stereotype to a certain point. He argues based on equality that all men are alike and creates common ground with the Christian audience as he points out all their similarities. Ryan (ibid.) notes that Shylock “rebukes the Jew-baiting Christians on the ground that they share the same physiology, faculties, feelings and needs, which render them equally vulnerable [and] equally mortal.” Shylock’s eloquent argument on the basis of equality denounces all discrimination and racism against him on the basis of religion.

Once again, Shylock touches upon the mistreatment he has suffered by the hands of Christians. Moreover, it is revealed again that Antonio’s only reason for his dislike and mistreatment of Shylock is because of his religion and nothing else. Due to the fact that Shylock’s successful career is only possible for him (and his people) through usury, Shylock’s occupation and religion are closely connected and, as I have argued above, cannot be separated. Even if Antonio’s dislike of Shylock stems from his choice of occupation, it would not justify his uncivilised, degrading behaviour towards him in any form. Thus, Antonio’s hatred and mistreatment originate in racial prejudices and his inherent belief that all Jews are
evil, beneath him and need to be put in their place. Al-Joulan (2017, 69) explores the possibility that Shylock’s eloquence highlights his mistreatment at the hands of the Christians and underlines his role as the tragic hero.

This monologue does not only stand out because of its content but also due to its eloquence. It is noteworthy that Shakespeare endowed Shylock with such expressive and impassioned speech, considering he is supposed to be the villain (cf. Al-Joulan 2017, 69). Monologues can often be designed to convince the audience of something or manipulate them but this monologue stands out in Shakespeare’s plays insofar that it is delivered in prose. As Baumbach & Nünning (2009, 91) indicate, Shakespeare’s plays were written at a time, where prose language was introduced on stage and prose still had a quite specific function. While poetic language (verse) is used to convey deep and reflective thoughts, prose often indicates spontaneous feelings and sincere thoughts (ibid.). Moreover, Shylock’s monologue is an instance where the Other is allowed to speak for themselves, which serves to humanise Shylock. At the same time, Shylock manages to escape his religious confines, which place him in the outgroup of the Christian characters (and audience), and creates his own ingroup, where all men are equal and should therefore be treated equally.

However, even though Shylock’s impassioned plea for equality still strikes a chord with the audience today, he adds:

And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge! The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

(MV, 3.1. 62-69)

It seems as if Shylock justifies his lust for revenge by equating it with Christian behaviour and the Christians’ mistreatment of Jewish people. The end of Shylock’s monologue taints his noble aspirations from the earlier part of the monologue and we get the impression that his justification for revenge confirms his innermost wickedness and villainy, validating the belief that all Jews are evil and bad. As much as the first part of the monologue deconstructs the Jewish stereotype, the end does nothing to dispel the notion of the vengeful Jew.

Despite Shylock’s wrong justification, his desire for revenge highlights individual hardships and the complexity of humanity (see Said’s concept of complicating humanity in Chapter 2.3.2). Even though Shylock uses the third person singular or first person plural – “a

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5 It should be noted that Lancelot Gobbo’s monologue in 1.3. is also composed in prose. Nevertheless, Baumbach and Nünning (2009, 91) point out that prose was also often used for common people of low rank and indicated a “rambling and loose manner of speech”. Lancelot’s utterances are always in prose, while Shylock does speak in verse in the play and only reverts to prose when he is emotionally agitated. Furthermore, prose was often incorporated in a play to give the audience some relief (ibid.).
Jew”, “a Christian”, “we”, “you” – throughout most of this speech, the last sentence is voiced in the first person singular. This stresses his individual resentment towards Antonio and his desire to repay Antonio for his abominable behaviour towards him. Bronstein (1969, 9) asserts how “moral weakness is found not alone in ‘the Jew’, but in all men[;] […] all men have foibles, are weak, commit sins, are sometimes greedy and hateful, as they are all sometimes noble”. So, while Shylock’s monologue should under no circumstance be a justification for his vengeful attitude, this passage stresses his “complicating humanity” (cf. Said 1979, 150).

Still, it cannot be overlooked that Shylock’s attempt to deconstruct the Jewish stereotype and negate the Jew’s Otherness from the Christian fails to deliver fully due to the ambivalent ending. As Gross (1994, 54) points out, it “would be plainly wrong to suppose that [Shylock’s monologue] somehow excuses everything else he does,” but it is important to note that his words are not planned as a calculated move in his pursuit of revenge. As I have argued above, the words, expressed in prose language, are full of emotion and spontaneity and are not some calculated ploy to further his motives. Therefore, this part of the play definitely marks a turning point in the perception of the Jewish stereotype. “The words have been spoken; the stereotype will never be the same again.” (Gross 1994, 55)

The first scene of the fourth act marks the last scene for Shylock and his inevitable downfall by the hands of the Christians. The beginning of the trial the Duke does not represent an impartial judge but a biased noble, who condemns Shylock and offers sympathy for Antonio in his first words: “I am sorry for thee. Thou art come to answer a stony adversary, an inhuman wretch incapable of pity, void and empty from any dram of mercy.” (MV, 4.1. 2-5) Already, the audience is confronted with the stereotypical image of the Jew as the cold villain, lusting for the Christian’s life. And, to some extent, this is definitely true. Shylock is intent on carrying out the bloody bond in the name of ‘justice’, which intensifies his negative image for the audience.

This scene is filled with instances where the Christian protagonists, most prominently Antonio’s friends, hurl insults at Shylock and characterise him as inhuman, villainous and evil. During most of the scene, he is not addressed by his name but repeatedly called “the Jew” (MV, 4.1. 13), sometimes including various condemning adjectives, e.g. “harsh Jew” (ibid., 122). Once again, the image of the devil is stereotypically projected onto Shylock (ibid., 214). Moreover, Shylock is likened to an animal, more specifically an “inexecrable dog” (ibid., 127) and his desires are described as “wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous” (ibid., 136-137). Animal imagery was common in describing aliens and strangers at the times (cf. Loomba 2002), so these adscriptions are not unusual but were stereotypically entrenched in society.
Nevertheless, they serve to alienate the character and reinforce the binary opposition and the ‘us/them’ dichotomy by attributing animalistic features to the Jew, setting him apart from the Christians. Using animal imagery to describe Shylock as “wolvish” (ibid., 136) might also be counted as an example catachresis, i.e. name-calling.

From the beginning of the scene, it is made clear that the Christian protagonists expect Shylock to show mercy and not go through with cutting the pound of flesh from Antonio’s body. The Duke’s demands are issued in very clear way: “We all expect a gentle answer, Jew!” (MV, 4.1. 33) The Duke also uses generalisations to show opposition with Shylock’s claims: “Shylock, the world thinks – and I think so too […]” (ibid., 16). This utterance is interesting insofar the Duke uses generalisation to indicate that the world is of the same opinion as him; up to this point, generalisations were primarily used to summarise all (negative) Jewish traits or all (positive) Christian traits. By ‘the world’ the Duke also denotes the Christian world, which rules the majority of the Western world and which is the governing force of Venice – their world. This foreshadows the concluding developments of this trial against Shylock, where the outsider has no chance of winning his case. An exclamation by Antonio illustrates the negative attitude towards Shylock as he stylises himself as the victim of a bloodthirsty villain: “You may as well do anything most hard as seek to soften that – and which what’s harder? – His Jewish heart!” (ibid. 77–79) Antonio’s use of the phrase “his Jewish heart” needs be highlighted here because it shows how Shylock’s individual villainy is attributed to his entire faith and might even allude to the fact that Shylock’s heart cannot be anything different from hard because he is Jewish. Thus, the image of the stone-cold Jew is reinforced.

This image is supported by the fact that Shylock is indeed resolute in cashing his bond and does not seem to care or be able to give reasons for his determined vengeance. “So can I give no reason, nor I will not, more than a lodged hate and a certain loathing I bear Antonio, that I follow thus a losing suit against him.” (ibid., 58-61) Shylock even points out that he pursues an unprofitable bargain because he loses 3,000 ducats (or more) in insisting on the pound of flesh. This indeed emphasises the Christians’ assertions that he is a heartless Jew. However, we cannot forget that Shylock has given reasons for his hatred towards Antonio and his lust for revenge against him. Antonio himself confesses to Solanio that he knows why Shylock hates him so in an earlier scene: “He seeks my life, his reason well I know: I oft delivered from his forfeitures many that have at times made moan to me; therefore he hates me.” (MV, 3.3. 21-24) This is not the only reason, though, for the dislike between the two characters. Antonio has physically and verbally abused Shylock as well. Still, Shylock’s determination shines an ambivalent light on him.
Shylock brings forth an example of the not so merciful and holy Christians. He accuses the Christians of slavery, of holding slaves in their households and of mistreating them, which is an inhuman and ultimately cruel thing to do. Shylock argues that they would not set their slaves free because they bought them (MV, 4.1. 89-97), just as Shylock has bought the right to cut a pound of flesh from Antonio’s body. Shylock’s comparison (ibid.) successfully demonstrates the fault in Christian thinking and creates an uneasy common ground between the counterparts. His arguments here are in the same vain as his justification for revenge in his monologue in the third act and once again, it has an ambivalent effect. On the one hand, Shylock deconstructs the image of the good and infallible Christian and simultaneously elevates his (and the Jewish) image of the cruel villain. On the other hand, his argument is faulty in itself and no sound justification at all. Moreover, it should be noted that Shylock’s claim is composed in verse and, comparing it to his monologue from the third act, seems more rehearsed and with less sincere feelings. As mentioned above, verse was used to reveal profound and deep thought and it can be assumed that Shylock prepared this argument to help his case in the court of law, which detracts from its sincerity to some extent because it is a calculated move to get his ‘justice’.

During the course of the trial, it starts to look as if Shylock will get his due and he starts to whet a knife savagely on his shoe. If the audience ever had any doubt about the sincerity of Shylock’s design, these doubts are scattered now. Here, we encounter the bloodthirsty Jew in action, looking forward to his vengeance and we cannot forget that his cutting a pound of flesh from Antonio was agreed upon nearest to the heart, which would undoubtedly mean his death. The image of the Jew, whetting his knife, is the last image that fortifies the stereotypical portrayal of Shylock. With the appearance of Portia and Nerissa, Shylock’s fate is sealed.

One of the most noteworthy utterances in the trial scene is Portia’s opening question: “Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?” (MV, 4.1. 171) Portia illustrated that despite all the alleged obvious differences between the Christians and Jews, she is not able to distinguish immediately between Antonio and Shylock. This counters the common practices of stage productions at the time, which relied on portraying the Jew with red clothes, a hooked nose and a hat because, in real life, such devices usually did not exist.

At this point, it would be too extensive to discuss the scheming which ultimately dooms Shylock and turns him into the defendant; the Venetians’ understanding of mercy must be discussed, though. As mentioned above, Shylock is entreated to show mercy from the beginning of the trial and it is inferred that the Jew is not capable of mercy. Such a notion is ridiculous, however (cf. Gross 1994, 81). Ryan (2009, 119) argues that mercy was just a
“euphemism for Shylock’s compliance” and once the roles reverse and it would be the Christians’ duty to be merciful, Shylock’s mercilessness “becomes a smokescreen for retaliation”. Ultimately, it is Portia, a Christian, who is not capable of showing mercy. If she had only done justice, she would have taken up Bassanio’s offer to pay the bond three times over or to just repay the initial sum of money (cf. Ryan 2009, 120). But Portia promised Shylock that “thou shalt have justice, more than thou desir’st” (MV, 4.1. 313) and by revealing the Venetian law to be unequal towards strangers:

If it be proved against an alien
That by direct or indirect attempts
He seek the life of any citizen,
The party ’gainst the which he doth contrive
Shall seize one half his goods; the other half
comes to the privy coffer of the state,
And the offender’s life lies in the mercy
Of the Duke only […].
(MV, 4.1. 345-352)

The inherent inequality, the “double standard” (Loomba 2002, 142), thereby lies in the law itself and the domination of the white, Christian population ensures Shylock’s “losing suit” (ibid., 4.1. 61). This reinforces again the ‘us/them’ dichotomy and binary opposition between the Christians and Jews.

The Duke spares Shylock’s life and his sentence is ‘reduced’, whereby he shall give half of his wealth to Lorenzo and Jessica then, and bequeath the rest of his fortune to the couple after his death and is forced to convert to Christianity. Shylock’s plea “You take my life when you do take the means whereby I live” (ibid., 372-373), falls on deaf ears. The cruelest punishment, though, is Antonio’s desire to convert Shylock. Forceful conversion was still common at the time, even though it was officially illegal. Liberal interpretation of the law allowed to use near-violence (e.g. threat of expulsion) or to use different forms of social or economic pressure (Gross 1994, 77). Ryan (2009, 120) summarised Shylock’s fate thus:

But the concerted evidence of the play as a whole conspires to make us conscious that under the guise of Christian clemency the Jew has been robbed of his daughter and his religion, and robbed of the wealth that has financed Bassanio’s wooing of Portia and Lorenzo’s elopement with Jessica, secured the prosperity of the latter’s marriage, and thus bankrolled the festive conclusion of the comedy in marital badinage.

The unfair treatment of the stereotypical character is apparent and it is hard not to feel sorry for the Jew, who could have gotten his bond, and in the process of the trial, has lost everything. His final words of the play seem muted. After his fate is revealed to him and his punishment exacted, he remains mostly silent and begs Portia to be allowed to go home: “I pray you, give
me leave to go from hence. I am not well. Send the deed after me, and I will sign it.” (ibid., 391-393) This does not only stand in stark contrast to Shylock’s usual emotional, often angry, responses, but also differs from reactions of other Shakespearean villains, e.g. Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* (cf. Breuer 2005, 14), which might indicate that he is indeed not a villain. He seems defeated and leaves the courtroom without further protest. It can be assumed that he knows he is beaten and does not want to attract more unwanted attention. Despite his silent exit from the stage, the audience feels the absence. While the audience might have celebrated the Venetian triumph over the Jewish villain, the harsh ‘justice’ against Shylock and his utter desolation curbed their enthusiasm (cf. ibid.).

Overall, this play heavily employed the following strategies to construct racial stereotypes. Primarily, generalisations served to paint a picture of Shylock as the stereotypical Jew and many stereotypical features for Jews were presupposed. The audience knew – from personal experience and typical performances of the time – from the beginning that Shylock was supposed to be the antagonist. Shakespeare relied heavily on Christian preconceptions (cf. Gross 1994, 82) and a Christian world-view. Shylock’s character was mostly shaped by commentary from others (cf. Baumbach & Nüning 2009, 109) with the commentators always being Shylock’s enemies or friends of his enemy, i.e. Antonio. Shylock never had the luxury to have an impartial party speak positively about and for him. Jessica gives a brief characterisation of her father but, as I have pointed out above, it is ambiguous.

Nevertheless, there are several instances where Shylock was afforded the opportunity to speak for himself. He recounts several instances of mistreatment and the audience was exposed to unfair treatment against him, especially by the ‘noble’ Antonio. Shylock manages to create common ground with the audience, disclosing similarities between them and forming a new ingroup with them. With the help of his seminal monologue, Shylock initiates important counter-discourse by highlighting human equality and showing that his pains are equal to the pains of Christians. However, as mentioned above, his monologue ends as a justification of his revenge fantasies and left the audience with the image of a villainous Jew once more.

The construction of the Jewish stereotype further relied heavily on creating binary or extreme oppositions between Christians and Jews. Beginning with Shylock’s first appearance, an opposition is created, where he refuses to dine with Christians and this antagonism is only reinforced the more the plot progresses. Shakespeare put two antagonistic characters on stage – the Christian and the Jew, thus utilising the inherent conflict between the two religious groups. Shakespeare used Christian morals and sentiments to justify their opposition of the
non-Christian, as it was common at the time (Al-Joulan 2017, 70). Ironically, the Christians fail to adhere to their own morals and cannot show mercy to Shylock at the end of the play.

Ultimately, Shylock is not afforded complete individuality. Shylock or simply “the Jew” cannot be removed from his religion. Instances where he is allowed to speak for himself and he can underline individual hardships are constantly overshadowed by faulty arguments (e.g. his justification for revenge) or Shylock’s bloodthirsty desire for revenge. In the end, Shylock does adhere to the Jewish stereotype, who lusts for the Christian’s life even in the face of monetary loss just to feed his revenge. Shylock is the stereotypical, parsimonious Jew, who mourns the loss of his money at least nearly as much as the loss of his daughter. Even metaphorically stripping him bare at the end of the trial does not change the fact that he already whet his knife in anticipation of cutting a pound of flesh from Antonio. Nevertheless, Shylock’s muted exit leaves an uneasy feeling that cannot completely overshadow the merry conclusion to Shakespeare’s comedy.

Concluding this chapter, it is not easy to determine whether the Jewish stereotype has been deconstructed to a certain degree. Charney (2009/2010, 100) perfectly summarises the predicament:

There are no neat solutions. We have to remain with the paradox that Shylock is the most sympathetic and highly characterized Jewish figure in Shakespeare and in all of Elizabethan drama, but he is also a ferocious and savage killer, intent on a monomaniacal revenge […]

Eventually, Shylock is not afforded the amount of individuality to escape the shadows of the Jewish stereotype because, after all, he is supposed to be the villain and Maufort (2010, 42) indicates that the “play’s comic effects almost entirely rely on caricature” He cannot be removed completely from his religion. While Shakespeare relied heavily on explicit anti-Semitic and stereotypical characteristics when creating Shylock the Jew, he also incorporated many elements that undermine and prevent a completely stereotypical portrayal as seen in the strategies employed to deconstruct the stereotype. The best example for this ambivalence might be Shylock’s seminal monologue in 3.1., where he justifies his need for revenge by demanding equality. These ambivalences prevail throughout the play, complicating the analysis of the stereotypes but pointing towards a not completely stereotypical portrayal of the Jew.
4. “Of one that loved not wisely but too well”\(^6\)

The Stereotypes of the black African in *Othello*

4.1. Historical and Literary Background

It is assumed today that *Othello* was first performed after Queen Elizabeth I.’s death and soon after James I.’s ascension to the throne around 1603-1604. Scholars have found quite a few texts which seem to have inspired and influenced Shakespeare while creating this seminal tragedy. Some connections, e.g. Kit Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus* (c. 1589) (Neill 2006, 17), seem far-fetched and should be considered more like influences than sources. Neill (ibid.) argues that Marlowe’s play about damnation anticipates Othello’s and Iago’s fateful relationship and Iago’s role as the tempter can be likened to Marlowe’s Mephostophilis, just like Othello might be connected to the ultimately doomed Faustus (ibid.). Other texts affiliate much more closely with Shakespeare’s *Othello* and at this point, I would like to introduce the most important ones.

The most prominent and significant source for Shakespeare’s *Othello* must be Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinthio’s novella *Gli Hecatommithi* from a collection of stories, which Shakespeare had used before as inspiration in *Measure for Measure* (Novy 2013, 95). Cinthio’s story revolves around a madly jealous Moorish captain, who falls prey to his ensign’s scheming and kills his wife (Neill 2006, 22). Shakespeare did not only adopt the basic plot structure from Cinthio but also some details, including Desdemona’s name (Disdemona in the original), Desdemona’s virtuous efforts to mend fences between her husband (unnamed in the original) and his friend and Iago’s ingenious ploy to turn Othello against his colleague and wife (ibid.). Nevertheless, Shakespeare did implement some changes especially concerning characters and character development. He reinforced the importance of Othello’s position in Venice as a general and thus highlighted his acceptance in Venice’s society (ibid., 27). Furthermore, contrary to Shakespeare’s imagining, the original Moorish captain was naturally prone to jealousy, which was a well-known fact to his wife (ibid., 28).

Another possible source would be Pliny’s *Natural History*, one of the oldest geographies available to Shakespeare (ibid., 19). It is possible that Shakespeare might have been inspired by Pliny’s accounts to include the accusation against Othello that he used magic to seduce Desdemona. Moreover, Othello mentions the ‘Anthropophagi’ and other monstrous people “whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders” (Oth., 1.3. 144-145). Neill (2006, 20)

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\(^6\)Oth., 5.2. 343.
also suggests that Shakespeare might have known the popular fifteenth-century fantasy *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* and Sir Walter Raleigh’s *Discoverie of Guiana* (1595) due to the mention of cannibals.

A similar source for Shakespeare must have been Leo Africanus’ *A Geographical History of Africa*, which had been translated into English a couple of years before *Othello’s* first performance (Novy 2013, 93). Leo Africanus was a Moor, who was raised in Africa as a Muslim, later converted to Christianity and was baptised by the Pope (Bartels 1990, 436). Africanus’ account of Africa offers different perspectives and opinions on Africans: on the one hand, people from Barabary (an African region, where Morocco is located today) were supposed to be honourable, brave people and experienced in warfare, but on the other hand, he noted that they are particularly prone to jealousy (ibid.). About black Africans, he wrote that they were “beastly” and lived a life without reason or intelligence (Barthelmy 1987, 5). As one of the reasons for their beastliness, Africanus cited missing governmental structures, scant clothing and polygamy (ibid.). Barthelmy (1987, 5) observed that in the 16th and 17th centuries, the term ‘bestial’ inferred salacious sexuality and referred as much to inappropriate manners as to sexual misconduct. Complicating matters, the translator John Pory took some liberties when translating Africanus’ story into English and did not always stay true to the original (Bartels 1990, 437). Bartels (ibid., 437-438) points out that the introduction and conclusion added by Pory to his translation of Africanus’ narrative are clearly anti-Moslem and that he wanted to use his translation for anti-Moslem propaganda; i.e. Pory stressed the threat of Muslims and their savagery (ibid.). Additionally, in the early part of the early modern period, travel literature often objectively described customs, manners, social organisation, skin colours and typical features (Neill 1998, 366)

It is extremely difficult to pinpoint the exact attitude of the Elizabethans towards and their prejudices about black people and Moors. Most importantly, contact to black Africans and Moors was very limited during Shakespeare’s time and only during Elizabeth’s reign did the country see an opening towards Northern Africans. The English became more acquainted with the picture of the Moor through literature (as presented above) and also in person (Bartels 1990, 434). Along the lines of the saying, “My enemy’s enemy is my friend”, Protestant England’s animosity towards Catholic Spain created a shaky alliance between England and Morocco. As mentioned in Chapter 2.2., a Moroccan ambassador was invited to London and him and his entourage spent the majority of 1600 in London, generating mixed attitudes towards them (Loomba 2001, 154). Moreover, Turkey was considered a potentially lucrative trading partner (ibid., 70). An alliance between England and Muslim countries proved
difficult, though, in the light of centuries of animosity between Christianity and Islam (e.g. Crusades) (Loomba 2002, 71).

Additionally to the limited encounters with Moors, the inconsistent terminology also poses a challenge. ‘Moor’ was a term, which was widely used and did not have a singular definition and as Barthelmy (1987, 6) asserts ‘Moor’ held several different meanings for various people throughout the centuries leading up to Shakespeare’s seminal tragedy. There was one common undertone, though, which was the meaning of alien or stranger, i.e. foreigner (ibid.). The definition of Moor contained the markers Negro and Islam, but not necessarily in connection with each other. Islam is not a clear racial marker because Muslims are represented in many countries and regions of the world and therefore ‘Islam’ could mean many different races (ibid., 7). Thus, Barthelmy (ibid.) finds a fitting description for the Moor with “non-black Muslim, black Christian, or black Muslim” and definitely “not a European Christian”. Neill (2006, 115) also posits that ‘Moor’ could also be used as a geographical marker and “be applied to any people of colour, regardless of geographical origin or religious affiliation.” Today, we cannot determine what kind of Moor Shakespeare intended Othello to be. All we know is that he was a converted Christian of darker skin colour than the other European protagonists.⁷

While being a Moor could entail different kinds of characteristics, he was always described as Other, though (Bartels 1990, 435). Despite efforts by Queen Elizabeth to form a connection with Muslims, the Christian attitude towards Islam was negative as well as tainted by fear and misunderstanding since the Middle Ages (Barthelmy 1987, 10). Even before slave trade started to flourish and the desire to justify this abominable practice, the feared and misunderstood non-Christian adversary was instilled with stereotypes (ibid.). Barthelmy (1987, 12) suggests that due to such attempts to justify an animosity towards Muslims “the inevitable occurred: Moors became thought of as black.”

Traditional, biblical ideas about black and white were projected on black-skinned people, e.g. darkness was associated with evil, sin and death (Neill 2006, 126). Therefore, dark skin was considered a visible marker for sin. Some theories about skin colour even suggested that colour was about the depth of the skin and that it could be washed away (Loomba 2002, 56). There are also several romances that recount the story of a black Muslim, who miraculously turned white after his baptism (Barthelmy 1987, 11). Recalling the supposed origin of black skin, Ham’s filial disobedience towards God allegedly turned his skin black,

⁷ There are a few strands of criticism that focus on the possibility that Othello was supposed to be a lighter-skinned Northern African. Nevertheless, he was darker than the other protagonists and as recent research shows, colour prejudice also effects lighter-skinned blacks as well as dark-skinned blacks.
marking him as a sinner forever. His filial disobedience was also considered a sexual transgression (Neill 2006, 126). Additionally, since Ham was tempted by the devil (himself often portrayed as black), the affiliation of blacks with the devil was established (Loomba 2002, 55). Sexual abnormality and jealousy was attributed to black people due to their ‘Southern’ temperament, like I have touched upon in Chapter 2.2., even though the issue of attributing humours seems to be complicated and not straightforward (cf. Floyd-Wilson 2003). Despite the contradicting geohumoral theories, Loomba (2002, 93-94) reports that early modern travel accounts were fascinated with the East’s sensuality and their jealousies in the private as well as public sphere.

The Moor or black person as a villain was deeply ingrained stereotype at the beginning of the 17th century. Barthelmy (1987, 147) states that one of the first “nonvillainous” Moors on stage was Morocco in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* at the very end of the 16th century. Only during the 17th century were valiant Moors oftentimes represented on stage but they usually served as a foil for their villainous brethren, who were still the majority of black-skinned people on stage. Going back to the Middle Ages, the adversary of the romantic knight was usually a dark-skinned Saracene, who often had malformed facial features and a monstrous appearance (Hunter 1968, 142). Moreover, pictorial tradition from the Middle Ages until the 16th century relied heavily on portraying evil men as black-skinned (ibid.). Hunter (1968, 145) also found proof of the villainous Moor in civic pageants, where Moors were used as “bogey-man figures” to disperse the crowd before the main procession.

Nevertheless, there are also accounts of noble, valiant Moors, who were celebrated for their keen military mind. If a positively connoted Moor was present on stage, he was infused with the stereotype of the noble, tawny Moor (Neill 2006, 121). Floyd-Wilson (2003, 140) confirms that “Othello stands at the crossroads in the history of ethnological ideas when an emergent racial discourse clashed with the still-dominant classical and medieval geohumoralism.” Therefore, while some scholars argue that race was not a dominant factor at the time and that we cannot act on the assumption that there was unquestioned racism (cf. Sokol 2008, 117), Barthelmy (1987, 17) perfectly summarises the situation of the Moor:

> What we see is the continuous use of Moor to serve as a general term for those who were strange. This strangeness may have been religious, ethnic, or national, though frequently it was a combination of the three. At no time was the strangeness of those who were identified as Moors viewed neutrally or benignly.
4.2. Othello: (De-)Constructing the Stereotypes


text

Othello is very much a play about contradictions. The main protagonist is a black Moor, which makes him an outsider in a society dominated by white, rich men. Othello is noble, talented in his occupation as a general but as the play progresses, he regresses and falls back into the pejorative stereotype of the jealous, violent black man. Othello is the main character of the play and as such, he is present in every scene and act. Therefore, some decisions had to be made on which scenes could be analysed in accordance to the scope of this thesis and the scenes chosen are the ones that focus most prominently on the theme of racial stereotypes.

Before going into detail and analysing specific scenes in Shakespeare’s play, I would like to take consider the introduction of Othello in the title and dramatis personae. The title already refers to Othello as the “Moor of Venice”. On the one hand, connecting Othello with the title of Moor of Venice might mark a distinction as other high-ranking and distinguished Shakespearean protagonists are also identified thusly, e.g. Antonio, the Merchant of Venice. On the other hand, Moor does have a certain negative connotation. Othello is described as “the Moor” (MV) and a general of Venetian forces in the dramatis personae. This in itself might already invoke inherent stereotypes in readers but it is impossible to pinpoint exact attitudes toward the Moor at this stage. It can be noted, though, that Shakespeare seems to rely on the image of the noble Moor, considering his high military rank. Additionally, it is safe to assume – even though there is no critical consensus about this – that describing Othello as ‘the Moor’ indicates a dark-skinned person. Like Barthelmy (1987, 17) explained, this already marks him as different or ‘strange’, which is an attribute that does not evoke positive or neutral associations. Concerning his name, the etymology is not completely clear; the name ‘Otello’ did exist in Italian, albeit uncommon (Neill 2006, 193). Scholars see a connection to Othman, the founder of the Turkish Empire (ibid., 194), as well, which could have created an impression with the original audience. Considering the strained relationship with Turkey (or rather the Ottoman Empire), audiences could have already attached a negative connotation to the name due to the similarity to Othman. Furthermore, Othello is seldom referred to by his given name but constantly called ‘the Moor’ by friends and foes alike, stripping him slightly of his individuality and forming a strong connection between Othello and the various stereotypes about Moors.

The first mention of Othello in the play proper is found in the first scene of the first act, where he is characterised by Iago and Roderigo. The audience is informed that there is a conflict between the present figures and Othello, who is not yet named but alluded to. Roderigo acknowledges, “Thou told’st me thou didst hold him in thy hate” (Oth., 1.1. 6), to which Iago
gives his agreement and goes on to explain that Othello’s choice of Cassio as his new lieutenant turned Iago against Othello. Othello had apparently turned down Iago’s petitioners for the job and had “horribly stuffed with epithets of war” (ibid., 13) informed them of his appointment of Cassio. Iago goes on to lament that he had been grossly overlooked by Othello and mocks “his Moorship” (ibid., 32) for his choice. He also reveals that he only remains in Othello’s service to one day outdo him and become the master (ibid.42-60). In this passage, we do not only get an indicative picture of Othello, but also a clear impression of Iago, who desires social ascension and wealth. Iago’s hate for Othello is a clear indicator that he is not impartial and his characterisation of Othello is tainted by his own feelings and wishes. It is safe to assume – even at this point – that Iago’s commentary on Othello might be unreliable and biased.

Roderigo offers the first insult clearly directed at Othello’s appearance and race by calling him “thick-lips” (ibid., 66) and suggesting at the same time that Othello only wishes to marry Desdemona for her money (ibid., 66-67; cf. Neill 2006, 201). Iago and Roderigo wake Brabantio, Desdemona’s father, to inform him of his daughter’s elopement with Othello. At this point, Iago also uses pejorative language to shock Brabantio into pursuing justice from Othello: “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your white ewe. […] Awake […] or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.” (ibid., 88-91) In this passage, Iago does not only reveal a colour bias but also invokes the picture of the sexually abnormal black man. Iago contrasts Othello and Desdemona by focusing on their skin colour, thereby successfully creating a binary opposition (cf. Mehl 1999, 79). Moreover, it is made clear that Brabantio should have reservations about having a black son-in-law and that Othello’s and Desdemona’s coupling is not desirable. It could be argued as well that the ‘white’ Desdemona is spoiled after being ‘tupped’ by Othello since the terminology suggests transgression. Iago also makes use of animal imagery (ewe, tupped, ram) to radicalise the interracial marriage between Othello and Desdemona. Iago further connects Othello with the image of the devil, suggesting that Othello himself is the devil (Oth., 1.1. 91). Since Brabantio is reserved at first and does not want to believe Iago and Roderigo about the elopement, Iago evokes the animal imagery once more, saying, “You’ll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse, you’ll have your nephews neigh to you, you’ll have coursers for cousins and jennets for Germans.” (ibid., 110-113) This brute imagery suggests that Othello is wild and beastly and follows his sexual desires without hesitation or restraint. This goes hand in hand with the typical stereotype of the uncivilised beastly Other and also indicates the sexual abnormality of black people.
Shakespeare actually used more animal imagery in this play than in any other (Novy 2013, 91).

Interestingly, Brabantio’s first reaction is adverse to the vile accusations thrown against Othello. Brabantio asks Iago plainly “What, have you lost your wits?” (Oth., 1.1. 92), which leads to the assumption that such slander against a black man and a white woman is not part of civil discourse and is frowned upon – a fact, which I will come back to below. Iago manipulates Brabantio into believing him and Roderigo, and Brabantio is thrown in a desperate rage against Othello. It is important to note, though, that Brabantio’s first reaction does not concern the miscegenation but his daughter’s betrayal – “she deceives me past thought!” (ibid., 164-165) – and laments her deception: “O treason of blood!” (ibid., 168). Neill (2006, 207) points out that blood has different meanings here: “Desdemona’s elopement is a violation of her noble nature and lineage […]; a betrayal of duty to her family and especially to her father.” He does not seem concerned about her particular choice of husband but only wants to know if they are perchance not married yet so he could prevent the marriage. Brabantio’s angry agitation is quite natural at this stage because at that day and age, an elopement was quite a scandal and she did betray his trust. Looking for reasons as to why Desdemona did not take her father into her confidence about her love for Othello, it can be argued that Brabantio’s reason against the marriage would be their different social standing and not Othello’s race or misgivings about miscegenation (cf. Sokol 2008, 130). Othello is only a general and it is not yet known that he was born from “men of royal siege” (Oth., 1.2. 22) to many Venetians, including Brabantio.

Upon seeing Othello for the first time after the elopement, Brabantio’s feelings are clear, though, concerning Othello’s race: “Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her; […] run from her guardage to the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou – to fear, not to delight?” (ibid., 63-71) Here, Brabantio evokes typical racial stereotypes, i.e. ‘damned’, referring to the assumption that dark skin colour is an indicator for evil and sin; ‘enchanted’, ‘thing’ and ‘fear’ referring to the fact that dark skin can never be desirable and therefore some magic had to be responsible for Desdemona’s love. Furthermore, the word ‘thing’ conjures the image of something sub-human, beastly and animalistic, which needs to be feared. Othello is thus connected with some typical generalisations about his race and the binary opposition is reinforced. Catachresis comes into play here as well because of the name-calling and assigning qualities to Othello, he does not really represent.

Othello’s introduction paints him as a composed individual, who – in the face of Brabantio’s promised wrath – remains calm and is determined to argue his case in front of the
Duke (Oth., 1.2. 26-24). He is sure that his perfect reputation will afford him an advantage and cool tempers (ibid.). Othello’s demeanour stands in stark contrast to the image Iago had been conjuring. There is no sign of lascivious behaviour, Othello even mentions he loves Desdemona (ibid., 25) and that this love is what will get him through future trials. Even in his initial confrontation with Brabantio, who hurls racial slurs at him, he remains calm and collected, ready to defend his case in front of the Duke. This is the first step of portraying him as the noble, tawny Moor and distancing him from the pejorative image of the lustful, savage Moor. As I have mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, though, the noble, tawny Moor is also a stereotype, who serves as a foil to the lustful, savage Moor – something Othello eventually turns into in a sense. This marks the first instance, where Othello is caught between these contrasting images of the stereotypical Moor: the noble, tawny Moor vs. the violent, jealous black man.

Iago’s accusations and description of the elopement are very crass and stand in contrast to previous passages just between Roderigo and Iago or following passages. Othello is greeted by the Duke with the words “Valiant Othello” (Oth., 1.3. 49) and the Duke is relieved by Othello’s arrival because he is a talented military general, whose talents are in need. Brabantio, bringing forth his suit, does not use any racial slurs or insults but maintains that only through magic or some potion could Othello have won Desdemona over “in spite of nature, of years, of country, credit, everything – to fall in love with what she feared to look on” (ibid., 97-99). With the use of this passage, Barthelmy (1987, 131) challenges the view that Brabantio is in any way influenced by Othello’s race in opposing his marriage to Desdemona. It is true that Brabantio only focuses on Othello’s advanced age, his nationality and his status (ibid.); nevertheless, Barthelmy fails to mention the previous scene, where Brabantio calls Othello “damned” (Oth., 1.2. 63) and “a thing” (ibid., 71) in direct connection with his skin colour. Furthermore, Brabantio claims that Desdemona should be afraid of Othello (ibid., 99) but this would only make sense if she were afraid of him because of his race and not his age or status. Bartels (1990, 448) suggests that the narrative of Brabantio and Iago changed in the third scene of the first act because “the fact that he uses indirect means to discredit Othello at court suggests that the terms of the stereotype are not acceptable within the dominant setting.”

Othello’s defence stands out because of his use of language, as well. It was a common stereotype in the Renaissance that the Other was not in full control of his master’s language and he was often thus identified (Smith 1998, 175). Smith (ibid., 176) points out that Othello represents an interesting paradox because he is a “barbarian who not only speaks well but who stands out as eloquent”. Othello shows humble deference as he addresses the Duke and other
nobles: “Most potent, grave, and reverend signors, my very noble and approved good masters”. First, it can be assumed that Othello used such self-deprecating language to assuage his judges, as he and his marriage are dependent on their judgment. Moreover, Othello is addressing his superiors and it would only be right to speak humbly to them. It cannot be forgotten, either, that Othello is the Other. He is different and strange and, arguing on the basis that strangeness is never a neutral or positive thing, Othello as a wise man knows his position and the typical attitudes towards him as a black man even though he is a priced general.

He is the black man who provokes a crisis by his sexual relationship with a white woman. He must, therefore, immediately and uncompromisingly identify his state of subservience and remain there; by so doing, he at least can assuage one fear and dismiss one threat. (Barthelmy 1987, 154)

To illustrate Othello’s eloquence, I would like to include his whole speech on winning Desdemona:

Her father loved me, oft invited me, Still questioned me the story of my life From year to year: the battles, sieges, fortunes That I have passed. […] I spoke of most disastrous chances: Of moving accidents by flood and field, Of hair-breadth scapes i’th’ imminent deadly breach, Of being taken by the insolent foe And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence, And portance in my travails history, Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle, Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,

It was my hint to speak—such was my process— And of the Cannibals that each other eat, The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear Would Desdemona seriously incline; […] She’d come again, and with a greedy ear Devour up my discourse; […] And often did beguile her of her tears When I did speak of some distressful stroke That my youth suffered. […] She loved me for the dangers I had passed, And I loved her that she did pity them. This only is the witchcraft I have used. (Oth. 1.3., 128-169)

Othello’s words are in some sense reminiscent of magic as his words entrap the signory as well as the audience with their eloquence (Smith 1998, 176). By learning about Othello’s trials and tribulations, we get a glimpse of the real Othello, a brave man, who has overcome many challenges. We get to experience him as a real, fleshed out human being, complete with all the faults and vices found in a real person. We see his hardships in his captivity as a slave, which awakens sympathy in the hearer, but we also get to see his triumph over all these hardships, including slavery, indicating an extraordinary human being. Smith (ibid.) asserts that Othello’s tales are “the stuff of romance” and they truly are. Othello is afforded many opportunities to speak for himself as the Other; this scene, though, is the first (and maybe last?) to mark and fully disclose the true nature of Othello. Smith (ibid., 176-177) argues that Othello’s speech serves to “blanch” his black face with his performance of “cultural
whiteness” and “render him substantial and big”. This might be the case to some extent, as can be claimed that such a heroic life would usually be reserved for a white character, but I still feel an overwhelming amount of individuality in Othello’s narrative, which cannot be explained by a performance. Therefore, Othello holds his ground against the negative stereotypes starting to form against him because of Iago and Brabantio.

Othello also successfully dispels the prejudice which determines that black men are lascivious and have a beastly sexual appetite. When Desdemona asks if she could come to Cyprus with her husband, Othello consents so he can fulfil her wishes but not “to please the palate of my appetite, nor to comply with heat the young affects” (Oth., 1.3. 260-261). It seems like Othello is very much capable of curving his appetite, thereby introducing important counter discourse. On the other hand, Shakespeare might still rely on the ‘older’ stereotype about black men, which render them almost impotent (cf. Floyd-Wilson 2003). There is no clear indication for his impotence, though, and we can conclude that Othello is represented as a rational man, capable of restraining himself.

The Duke’s parting words once again indicate the binary opposition of black and white. While addressing Brabantio, the Duke exclaims, “If virtue no delighted beauty lack, your son-in-law is far more fair than black.” (Oth., 1.3. 288-298) This reinforces the assumption that there already was a sense of racist thinking in Shakespeare’s time. Othello’s virtues are indicated as fair, i.e. beautiful and free from moral blemish, which hints at the presupposition that this is something novel or to be remarked upon because Othello’s dark skin colour would lead to different conclusion as black signifies sin. It is certainly not a coincidence that Shakespeare evoked the black and white imagery if there was no connection whatsoever to Othello’s skin colour. This passage therefore negates the apparently common stereotype of the morally degenerate black man and connects the Moor with attributes usually assigned to white men. However, Erickson (2014, 160) claims that the Duke grants Othello the “status of an honorary white man” and thus vilifies the stereotypical black man.

After all of the characters have exited except Iago and Roderigo, the quality of the discourse changes again. Noteworthy at this point is that Iago and Roderigo switch from verse to prose, indicating emotional agitation, especially on Iago’s part. They plan their next steps with Iago taking the lead and continuing to manipulate Roderigo to do his bidding. Iago reiterates his hatred for Othello and his desire to see his downfall. After Roderigo exists as well, Iago reveals additional reasons for hating Othello next to his being passed over for a promotion. He has heard rumours that Othello has “done [his] office” (Oth., 1.3. 377) and while he concedes that he does not know about the truthfulness of these rumours, he is
determined to believe them because he has had suspicions about this himself all along. Therefore, he wants equal retribution. Iago claims that Othello has a “free and open nature that thinks men honest that but seem to be so” (ibid., 388-389) and would easily be manipulated by him into thinking that Cassio is engaging in an affair with Desdemona. Iago is revealed to be the villain of the play from the beginning (also stated thus in the *dramatis personae*) and his scheming is shared with the audience. Hence, everything Iago utters is tainted by his desire for revenge and his hatred for Othello, making him unreliable in showing Othello’s true nature. We are much more likely to believe the Duke, Desdemona and the other signors about Othello’s virtuous qualities (and Iago does not even deny that Othello has said virtues) than to believe in Iago and his commentary on Othello.

Consequently, Othello is integrated as a well-respected member of Venetian society but the shadows of racial stereotypes linger in the background and have been thoroughly established by Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio. Othello has been connected to beastly imagery, sexual debauchery and jealousy and he has been characterised as a noble, tawny Moor. We have seen some of his individuality but not enough to form a clear picture of Othello the Moor.

The pattern of Iago constructing the negative racial stereotype and Othello’s friends deconstructing it is continued in the second act of the play. Anxiously awaiting the arrival of “brave Othello” (Oth., 2.1. 39) and his entourage, the governor of Cyprus and his attendees assert Othello’s value as a general and keen military mind: “the man commands like a real soldier” (ibid., 36-37). Once again, Othello’s prowess as a military leader is underlined and there is no mention of his race as a diminishing factor in his valour. Othello himself further moves away from the image of a lascivious Moor after safely welcoming Desdemona to Cyprus, whose ship had been separated from his due to a fierce storm. He is clearly relieved to see her unharmed – “It stops me here, it is too much of joy” (ibid., 192) – stressing his true, virtuous love for Desdemona, which is removed from a love based on sexual desire alone.

Iago, however, continues to sow the seeds of his racist and vengeful thinking. He is confident in his belief that Desdemona must – despite her obvious love for Othello – soon start to hate Othello because “very nature will instruct her in it” (ibid., 228). Iago intends to help her along as her “eye must be fed” (ibid., 220) and is willing to present Roderigo as a new candidate for Desdemona’s affection, who is closer to her in “loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties” (ibid., 223-225). He insinuates that Roderigo and Desdemona would fit together more beautifully due to external characteristics – beauty, age and noble demeanour and at the same time suggests that Othello lacks all these characteristics. He is older than Desdemona, cannot be considered beautiful (in Iago’s and Brabantio’s eyes)
because of his dark skin and “thick-lips” (Oth., 1.2. 66) and lacks a certain kind of refinement. Iago endorses the typical generalisations about the black beast in comparison to the white ruling class. Still, his assertions ring unfair and untrue in the light of his own jealousy and the continuing endorsement of noble characters, who praise Othello. Iago reveals his own jealousy by admitting that he loves Desdemona, too, “not out of pure lust […] but partly led to diet my revenge, for that I do suspect the lusty Moor hath leapt into my seat” (Oth., 2.1. 282-287) and that he would endeavour to pay Othello back in the same way or “put the Moor at least into a jealousy so strong that judgement cannot cure” (ibid., 291-193). Sokol (2008, 138) actually argues that the sexual abnormity lies not in Othello but Iago, whose “unfounded jealousy may be the least of these”. Floyd-Wilson (2003, 133) proposes the idea that the Jacobean audience would have been more familiar with the image of the jealous Italian because according to geohumoralism, jealousy was seen as a “state of paranoid suspicion born out of a corrupt inwardness” traditionally connected to Italians. For me, it is unclear whether Iago demonises Othello as the black devil in order to justify his revenge fantasies and right the wrongs (allegedly) done to him or because he really does believe in Othello’s inferiority due to his race. Iago indeed confesses to Othello that “oft my jealousy shapes faults that are not” (Oth., 3.3. 151-152) when he is in the middle of convincing Othello of Desdemona’s and Cassio’s affair. Iago even admits that Othello is “of a constant, loving, noble nature” (Oth., 2.1. 280) and he would “prove to Desdemona a most dear husband” (ibid., 281-282). Only through Iago’s scheming would it then be possible to incite such a violent jealousy in Othello as is supposed to be inherent in the black African.

The third scene of the third act can be seen as the key scene in this play because here Iago successfully plants doubt about Desdemona’s infidelity in Othello. There are no specific utterances that pertain to Othello’s race or further the impression of a stereotypical portrayal of Othello. Iago eloquently and smartly crafts his accusation, ensnaring Othello with well-timed and subtle hints. Othello’s reactions move from incredulous and angry to quiet (Oth., 3.3. 109-115; 129). He becomes less and less sure of his conviction concerning Desdemona’s virtue and reverts to short answers towards the end of the scene before Iago takes his leave (ibid., 246-247). Othello’s initial reaction is hard to interpret. On the one hand, we have experienced him as a calm and collected person up to this point. On the other hand, he had always been outspoken in defending Desdemona and himself, which he does not do. Floyd-Wilson (2003, 147) also asserts that such a calm reaction would be typical for Othello, considering traditional geohumoral theory, as it attributes a cool and calm manner to Southerners. This would confirm Othello’s insistence that he does not give in to jealousy as
normal men do, which would correspond to the classic theories according to Floyd-Wilson (2003).

’Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well
[…] Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes and she chose me.
(Oth., 3.3. 186-192)

Othello’s initial reaction runs contrary to Iago’s deep-seated suspicion about his wife’s fidelity and Othello is willing to believe in his wife’s honesty (cf. Floyd-Wilson 2003, 149).

Nevertheless, after Iago’s exit, Othello is left to contemplate the new information. He seems completely convinced of Iago’s reports and as one of the reasons for Desdemona’s infidelity he wonders if her love cooled so quickly due to his skin colour: “Haply, for I am black and have not those soft parts of conversation that chamberers have.” (Oth., 3.3. 266-269) This is the first time that Othello explicitly refers to his skin colour as something inferior and ungainly. It is noteworthy that Othello starts to doubt his self-worth regarding his race after Iago has poisoned his ear with jealousy. Sokol (2008, 139) argues that Iago does not only plant the seed of jealousy in Othello but also his racialist thinking. Othello himself also invokes the black/white binary in this utterance, signalling an inferiority of the black man to the white man. At first glance, Othello’s uncertainty about his eloquence seems falsely modest, as we have seen his magnificent speech in an earlier scene, where he was able to ensnare not only the signory but he also initially captured Desdemona’s interest by speaking. However, he might allude to the fact that he is not as experienced in the subtleties of noble social behaviour as a soldier and military general, which is also not true because in the third scene of the first act, his deference to the signory revealed a keen knowledge about his social position and how to handle himself around people of higher social ranking (see above).

Othello’s initial insistence on not giving in to base suspicions, his insecurity and blooming jealousy soon turn the tables and he requires “ocular proof” (Oth., 3.3. 362) of Desdemona’s infidelity. There is a first glimpse of violent behaviour as he insists on proof from Iago, when Othello seizes him by the throat and threatens “by the worth of mine eternal soul, thou hadst been better have been born a dog than answer my waked wrath” (ibid., 363-365) if Iago cannot produce proof for his allegations. Iago himself seizes this situation, casts doubt on Othello’s humanity, reinforces the image of the beastly, wild black man and furthers his own agenda by asking, “Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense?” These questions serve as a tool to remind the audience of the uncontrolled, hot nature (according to newer theories
perpetuated by Leo Africanus and Jean Bodin) of the Moor, while casting himself as a victim of Othello’s unfounded wrath. Othello himself then calls forth the black/white binary by exclaiming that Desdemona’s “name, that was as fresh as Dian’s visage, is now begrimed and black as mine own face” (ibid., 388-390) and calling Desdemona a “black weed, who art so lovely fair” (Oth., 4.2. 67). Here, Othello suggests that Desdemona’s fairness is tainted by her alleged infidelity, which turns her black, implying sinfulness and sexual abnormality. Desdemona’s virtue is thus blackened by her supposed infidelity and simultaneously Othello indicates how his own black face mirrors his inner blackness, falling back into racial stereotypes. Othello’s utterances also call into question if skin colour actually gives an insight in the soul’s purity. While Othello infers that he is indeed damned due to his skin colour, Desdemona’s light skin colour allegedly does not seem to indicate her inner fairness as much as her exterior fairness.

Towards the end of the third scene of the third act, Othello has finally fully embraced the violent jealousy: “Arise, black Vengeance from thy hollow hell, yield up, O Love, thy crown and hearted throne to tyrannous Hate.” (Oth., 3.3., 447-449) He insinuates that revenge is something inherently black and derives from hell, with which the black man is connected with due to the colour symbolism. Neill (2006, 310) points out that the character of Revenge is usually dressed in black, reminiscent of the colour of death and sin; in the context of this play, he also connects this blackness with Othello’s burgeoning racial insecurities. Othello abolishes all love he has ever held for Desdemona and gives himself over to hate. This marks the end of a potentially happy marriage, which has been portrayed as unusual from the beginning anyway (cf. Loomba 2002, 99).

His lovely wife, though, unaware of her husband’s change of heart, is steadfast in her belief that he is a valiant man. In a conversation with Emilia, Desdemona laments the loss of the handkerchief Othello had gifted her (and which will be used to provide ocular proof to Othello) but is certain that her husband will not be angry:

DESDEMONA  [M]y noble Moor
Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness
As jealous creatures are, it were enough
To put him to ill thinking.
EMILIA  Is he not jealous?
DESDEMONA  Who, he? I think the sun where he was born
Drew all such humours from him.
(Oth., 3.4. 24-29)
Desdemona has a clear positive picture of her husband and is sure of his calmness and good humour. She even calls him her ‘noble Moor’, possibly alluding to the image of the noble, tawny Moor. This would also go hand in hand with the classical geohumoral theory that the temper of Africans is mild and subdued due to the hot climate (cf. Floyd-Wilson 2003). Desdemona even references this theory by saying that the sun has burnt such base thoughts as jealousy. In the face of Othello’s emerging jealousy, Desdemona is quite surprised and proclaims that this behaviour is very unlike him. She attributes certain supernatural qualities of the handkerchief to be the cause of Othello’s rash behaviour and odd demeanour (Oth., 3.4. 96-98.

Othello’s interactions with Desdemona become more and more convoluted and confusing. Othello continues to throw accusations at Desdemona implicitly (e.g. Oth., 4.1. 220) but does not confront her outright with his suspicions because he relies too heavily on Iago’s provision of proof. After Desdemona has passionately defended Cassio in Othello’s presence, he lashes out and strikes her – seemingly unprovoked (ibid., 231). Desdemona is not the only one, who is perplexed (and hurt) by this violent act; Lodovico, Desdemona’s cousin, who has arrived in Cyprus to deliver a letter from the Venetian signory, does not shy away from showing his surprise and disdain at Othello’s conduct: “My lord, this would not be believed in Venice, though I should swear I saw’t.” (Oth., 4.1. 233-234) and “Is this the noble Moor, whom our full Senate call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature whom passion could not shake?” (ibid., 256-258). This confirms the assumption that Othello had been completely integrated in Venetian society as a white man, who is beyond suspicion of rash and violent behaviour naturally associated with the black man. At this point, Othello irrevocably moves away from the stereotypical picture of the noble Moor and moves towards the image of the violent black man, who is overcome by his passions. Othello himself shows more of his cruelty: after Lodovico entreats him to call back a retreating Desdemona and make amends to her, Othello mocks his wife’s behaviour, who complies with his demand to turn around without hesitation, and accuses her display of tears of dishonesty (ibid., 240-250).

Othello’s upstanding character suffers more and more by the changes wrought upon him due to his jealousy. Next to his abominable behaviour towards Desdemona, his plans to murder her in her bed stand out for their brutality as he swears that he “will chop her into messes” (Oth., 4.1. 193). His initial plan, though, is to poison her so that he is not swayed by Desdemona’s beauty and body to give up his murderous intentions, but is convinced by Iago to strangle her in the very bed she allegedly committed all her sins (ibid., 197-202). The “justice” (ibid., 202) of this pleases Othello. More and more, Othello’s mind turns villainous
by seeing justice in murdering his wife for her adultery. He slips into the role of the villain, which his dark skin enhances due to its association with evil and sin. He is completely transformed from the noble Moor, we have encountered at the beginning of the play. Othello also delights in the downfall of his enemy – his former friend and close companion Cassio. After noticing Cassio’s run in with Roderigo but not observing Roderigo’s failed attempt on Cassio’s life, Othello seems accredited and surer in his plan to murder Desdemona: “Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust’s blood be spotted.” (Oth., 5.1. 37) Despite this bloody image, Othello is not capable of actually drawing blood from Desdemona, as this would reveal her inner rottenness – a rottenness Othello also fears in himself (cf. Floyd-Wilson 2003, 155). By this point, Othello’s fully conforms to the stereotype of the violently jealous black African and his character is infused with the generalisations about this stereotype.

The black/white binary and Othello’s sexual lasciviousness determine the last scene of the play, which have been major motifs throughout the play. Othello elicits the black/white opposition when he asserts that he will not “scar that white skin of [Desdemona’s] than snow and smooth as monumental alabaster” (Oth., 5.2. 4-5) and attempts to restore her former light by killing her. While Othello delivers his soliloquy (ibid., 1-22), he kisses her again and again, indicating a torn conscience, which his words betray as well to a certain extent. His tenderness as well as his words, which are often characterised by ambiguity, towards Desdemona in the minutes leading up to her murder provides the scene with sexual innuendos. For example, he speaks of plucking her rose, which is an image that does not only refer to death but also to taking the virginity of a woman (cf. Neill 2006, 373). Therefore, his closeness to her in the final minutes leaves an uneasy feeling of sexual abnormality because he is in the process of killing her.

Desdemona’s awakening helps to describe Othello’s state of mind. Desdemona, who has continuously defended her husband and never shown any reservations about his race, starts to fear her husband’s appearance despite her attempts to believe in his virtues: “I fear you, for you’re fatal then when your eyes roll so.” (ibid., 37-38) His rolling eyes can be a sign for madness and Desdemona furthermore notices other signs of his madness because he is biting his lower lip and “some bloody passion shakes [his] very frame” (ibid., 45). The hot passion of the uncontrollable black man has taken over Othello, transforming his former calm self into a beast, whose facial features betray his madness. Othello shows no mercy whatsoever in Desdemona’s pleading to let her live, even if it is only for one night. The negative stereotypes are further reinforced because Desdemona becomes afraid of her husband just like her father suggested in the beginning she should be (Oth., 1.2. 71).
Next to the visible changes in Othello, there is also an alteration in his manner of speaking compared to the beginning of the play. His line of thought becomes harder to follow the more the scene progresses and there is a clear difference between the eloquent story of his life from the first scene and his confused reaction to Desdemona’s death and Emilia’s entreaties to enter the room (cf. Novy 2013, 98). Smith (1998, 186) sees the onset of change in Othello’s speech in 4.1. and posits that this change cannot only be contributed to Othello’s mental instability but his

linguistic collapse [...] is indicative of culturally pejorative barbarism. If the barbarian is deemed uneloquent – if he cannot speak or speak well – then his narrative enargeia, his ability to produce images within a cultural dialogue, is seriously impaired and rendered rhetorically non-persuasive.

Accordingly, Othello’s language reflects the changes in himself from the noble, eloquent Moor to the barbarous, evil black man.

The image of the evil black man returns in full force after Emilia discovers Desdemona’s body and it is revealed that Othello has killed her despite Desdemona’s final attempt to protect her husband. Emilia gives free rein to her anguish: “O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!” (Oth., 5.2. 131), “thou art a devil” (ibid., 133), “thou art rash as fire” (ibid., 134) and “cruel Moor” (ibid., 248). The image reversal Othello attempted in previous scenes by blackening Desdemona is rejected and the blackness with all its stereotypical associations is firmly reassigned to Othello (cf. Novy 2013, 99). Moreover, Emilia connects Othello’s jealousy and failure to believe his wife with fire, conjuring the image of heat, passion and no control, which connects to the newer theories of racialist thinking. She also refers to Othello as “dull Moor” (Oth., 5.2. 224) after revealing Iago’s scheming which caused the tragedy. This is an intricate word-play as ‘dull’ is not only a stereotypical characteristic attributed to Moors, but there is also a connection in the etymology of ‘Moor’, i.e. Moor derives of the Latin morus, which means ‘dull’ or ‘stupid’ (Neill 2006, 388). Other’s reactions to the deed are tinged with disbelief as they are unable to recognise the Venetian general Othello in the murderous Othello (cf. Hunter 1968, 157) and disdain at the “monstrous act” (ibid., 187), e.g. “O thou, Othello, that was once so good, fallen in the practice of a damnèd slave” (Oth., 5.2. 289-290).

Concerning Othello’s final words before his own death, they are reminiscent of his glorious past and his hard downfall. Taking the weapon in his hands, which will be his suicide weapon, he remembers past glories and is intent on taking his own life as retribution for his actions (ibid., 338). He slowly reverts back to the noble Moor by assuaging Gratiano’s fear as he faces an armed Othello because this is his “journey’s end” (Oth., 5.2. 266). Othello refers
to himself as a “cursèd slave” (ibid., 275), damning himself and his fate with the typical language used to condemn black devils (Barthelmy 1987, 158). He also brings up the idea of heaven in contrast to his damned state, whishing upon himself cruel punishments, e.g. “roast me in sulphur, wash me in steep-down guls of liquid fire” (ibid., 278-279). He also denounces his own name by declaring, “That’s he that was Othello: here I am.” (ibid., 282) Neill (2006, 392) considers how Othello is thus revoking his Venetian identity and, paired with the fact that Othello is only called by his name twice in this last scene, Othello has turned into the stereotypical Moor, who lives in anonymity without any individuality. Before taking his own life, Othello’ eloquence returns as bids farewell and tries to explain how it could have come to this:

When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
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,
perplexed in the extreme; […]
And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by th’ throat the circumcisèd dog
And smote him – thus.

_He stabs himself._
(0th., 5.2. 340-355)

Othello mourns the loss of his former calm disposition (cf. Floyd-Wilson 2003, 156) but also highlights passion in his changes – he loved “too well” and when being goaded, he is “perplexed in the extreme”. These changes indicate an extreme opposition within himself, which is also revealed in the last passage of his monologue. Othello seems to symbolically look down on his two roles in the play: Othello the noble Moor with all his past glories and virtues on the one hand, and Othello the black man caught in the violence and jealousy of his race on the other hand. The noble Moor Othello takes matters into his own hands and kills the villainous black Othello he has turned into in the course of the play (cf. Loomba 2002, 97). Thus, Othello attempts to vindicate not only himself but also the Moor in general by executing justice against himself (cf. Bartels 1990, 454). One stereotypical image of the black man erases the other stereotypical image of the black man.

The last references of Othello in this play come from Cassio and Lodovico. While the wronged Cassio highlights his general’s “great” (Oth., 5.2. 360) heart, Lodovico eventually refers to Othello as “the Moor”. In the end, Othello is relegated to anonymity and stripped of
any individuality (cf. Neill 2006, 397). He is once more the ambiguous Moor with all its collective abstractions and the conflicting stereotypes of the noble Moor and the black African.

The most prominent picture of racial stereotypes in *Othello* are actually twofold. The play is characterised by the opposition of the noble, tawny Moor and the black, villainous African. Othello is even introduced as both: first by Iago, who paints Othello as the evil, lascivious black man, and then by the Duke, Desdemona and the other nobles of Venice as the noble, calm Moor with a keen military mind. As Floyd-Wilson (2003, 140) pointed out, Othello is on the brink of older, classical geohumoral ideas about race (calmness, dullness, sexual impotence) and newer, racist ideas (hot, passionate, lasciviousness, jealousy). She also alleges how certain characters perpetrate different theories of racial ideologies (ibid.): Iago embodies the newer, emerging ideas and is also responsible for propagating the pejorative, extreme racist ideas; Desdemona is her husband’s most ardent defender and is holding fast to the image of the noble, calm Moor. Barthelmy (1987, 159) proposes the idea that Othello never fully transforms into the villain as he “lacks the love of evil that underlies the villain’s every act” and I support this suggestion as Othello seems blinded by his jealousy and is trapped in the extreme passions of his temperament. Therefore, I argue that Othello does not so much represent the stereotypical black villain as the stereotypical jealous black man, who loses his common sense in violent emotions of inferiority, betrayal and jealousy.

Despite the opposition of his two stereotypical roles, both stereotypes are characterised by generalisations and collective abstractions. Furthermore, Shakespeare’s play with black and white symbolism and metaphors heavily relies on pre-established notions of blackness and fairness. Shakespeare did integrate an interesting contradiction in viewing the black and white characters by introducing Iago as the villain from the very beginning. Iago is the born villain, he flourishes in his intrigues and he is an excellent manipulator. Iago – despite being a white Venetian – is infused with the stereotypical characteristics of the black villain and he even exhibits the telltale signs of easy jealousy (cf. Smith 1998, 180). Iago becomes Othello’s “dramaturgic mirror” (Smith 1998, 180), something Othello is supposed to be. Instead, we get the stereotypically ambiguous Othello, whose jealousy is only aroused by Iago’s scheming and plotting. In the end, the audience does feel a keen sense of injustice done to Othello by Iago’s plots and vengeance.

In the end, though, it does not matter if Othello was incited by Iago and “being wrought, perplexed in the extreme” (Oth., 5.2. 344-345), Othello does not have the luxury to be seen as an individual – everything he does is connected with his race. Even in the beginning when he is accepted as the honorary white man and when he beautifully renders his personal life’s
story, he is connected with his race because he is so unlike the typical rash, dull Moor and serves as a foil to this negative image. Ultimately, Othello cannot be separated from his skin colour; chromatism makes sure that he is always part of his race and his actions are seen as general characteristics of his race. His nobility and virtue is as much connected to his race as his jealousy and his villainy. Even though Othello never struggles against openly racist behaviour towards him and does not have to defend himself against racial slander (as in the vain of Shylock), his deference in approaching the signory shows self-awareness in racial hierarchy (cf. Novy 2013, 97) and his insecurities about himself – “Haply for I am black” (Oth., 3.3. 266) – are quickly ignited after Iago’s successful attempt to incite them.

For this thesis, it actually does not matter if Othello is the black, villainous Moor or the virtuous, noble Moor but, finally, Othello as the noble Moor kills the black, evil African and achieves some vindication through his suicide. How much vindication and how much justification for his actions this achieves, is a question, which every audience member needs to answer for themselves. At this point, it is only left to point out that Othello is the Moor; he portrays both stereotypical views to see a black man at the beginning of the 17th century and is afforded next to no individuality. The only instance of deconstructing the stereotypes can be found in his life’s story in 1.3. Just as the stereotypical image of the Moor was changing during Shakespeare’s time, the images of race are continually changing today. Shakespeare was one of the first writers to show how perceptions of race could change and are ambiguous in themselves even though he relied so heavily on the circulating stereotypes:

Thus *Othello* fuses various contemporary discourses of Moorish ‘difference’ which circulated in Shakespeare’s times, reminding us that ‘race’ is not a homogenous or clearly articulated category. (Loomba 2002, 109)
5. “And here you sty me / In this hard rock”
The Stereotypes of the New World native in *The Tempest*

5.1. Historical and literary background

The Tempest marks the last of Shakespeare’s plays and was most likely first performed in 1611 at the court of King James I. Today, The Tempest is mainly regarded as a metaphor for colonial enterprises and the early modern attitude towards natives and the ‘uncivilised’ Other. The sources for Shakespeare’s last play are even more ambiguous and uncertain than with his other plays and scholars do not agree on many. Vaughn & Vaughn (1991, 25) suggest that there is not one particular source for *The Tempest* but that Shakespeare drew from different documents, historical texts and ideas. Caliban is a very ambiguous character himself and scholars have agreed that Shakespeare most likely incorporated several historical and literary models and theories to create a wholly new character (ibid.). Today, it is commonly accepted that *The Tempest* is informed by the colonial efforts of England in the New (and Old) World and post-colonial theory has taken the play, and especially Caliban, under its wing. There are also a few other sources and theories, which are reflected in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, which I would like to highlight in this chapter.

Shakespeare seems to have inspired by a famous shipwreck, which happened in 1609, where a governor’s ship on its way to the New World was separated from the main fleet during a hurricane. The 150 passengers were able to safely reach the Bermuda islands, where they wintered and repaired their ship to continue their journey to Jamestown, one of the first English colonies in the New World (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 39). The reports coming back to England were positive: the tropical climate and the abundant resources of the island were paradisiacal (ibid.). Even though the most prominent account of this shipwreck by William Strachey was only published in 1625, it is quite likely that Shakespeare had heard about the disaster from one of his friends since it is believed that Shakespeare was acquainted with several of the leaders of the London Virginia Company, who were involved in this enterprise (Orgel 1987, 32). Furthermore, Vaughan and Vaughan (1991, 40) report that Shakespeare must have been able to read an early manuscript of Strachey’s. In any case, London was flooded with several pamphlets and sermons about the events of this adventure in 1610 and Shakespeare was thus informed (Salingar 2006, 209).

\[\text{Temp., 1.2. 342-343.}\]

\[\text{There is actually a strand of literary criticism that focuses on the connections between James I. and Prospero as well as the themes of the play The Tempest. (cf. Orgel 1987, 30)}\]
Shakespeare most likely consulted several different travel accounts, pamphlets and essays of the time to inform his picture of Caliban’s island and Caliban himself. Montaigne’s essay *On Cannibals* was one of the most prominent works on the natives of New Worlds and differentiates between the European and the ‘savage’: the natives were said to be illiterate, had no political systems, no wealth, wore no clothes and were not acquainted with agriculture (Loomba 2002, 162). Montaigne praised the natural order of the natives’ lives and suggested that the Europeans were unnatural and their judgement too clouded by their belief in their own superiority (ibid.). Nevertheless, the natives’ affinity to nature was not always seen as a positive thing but rather highlighted their inferiority and lack of civilisation (ibid.). The New World became a popular theme and throughout the 16th century cannibalism, utopia and free love were well-known characteristics of the New World (Orgel 1987, 33). Several accounts spoke negatively about the lives of the natives encountered on expeditions, e.g. how they were ugly, lived in caves, ate raw (even spoiled) meat and fish and were insatiable in their appetites (ibid., 35). The Renaissance people were fascinated with monsters and nonhuman creatures in general, and travel accounts and stories real or imagined of the New World about monstrosities fuelled the imagination of Shakespeare’s contemporaries (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 76). For example, Joseph Hall’s satire *The Discovery of the New World* tells about the natives of Antarctica as monsters with strange deformities, including two faces and traits of animals like a dog and a monkey (Salingar 2006, 218).

The New World native was ascribed numerous attributes and stereotypes, ranging from beastly to noble (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 46). Orgel (1987, 34f.) contrasts iconography of Picts with iconography which arrived from the Americas and found astounding similarities. While it is never suggested that the early Britons were cannibals, the similarities in the depiction of the two cultures are apparent and theories were founded that the British themselves had been a savage people a long time ago (ibid.), only to be ‘saved’ and civilised by the Romans (cf. Floyd-Wilson 2003). This view allowed parallels with the wild men of medieval stories and Caliban shows more similarities with these beasts as described by people like Hariot and Captain John Smith than with Montaigne’s cannibals (Orgel 1987, 35). The stereotypical wild man was described as “a hairy man curiously compounded of human and animal traits, without, however, sinking to the level of an ape.” (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 62) Further characteristics are that they lived in the woods, inhabited caves or slept under thick branches (ibid.). It was generally agreed upon that the wild man was “humankind at its most primitive” (ibid., 63). They were godless, had no real language, were supposed to have supernatural powers and a keen knowledge about the secrets of nature (ibid.). Nevertheless,
the wild man could be educated and his savagery suppressed to a certain point; he embodied humans before civilisation, representing the animalistic characteristics of men and their struggle with the process of civilisation (ibid., 63ff.).

The wild men did not only represent the British savage before the Roman conquest, but also the Irish savage before British conquest (cf. Fuchs 1997). It is important to point out that the English did not encounter and engage with natives in an unbiased way. The adventurers and colonisers were always aware and reminiscent of previous experiences in other lands and applied already established stereotypes about the Other to newly discovered cultures (ibid., 47). Fuchs (ibid., 51) recounts how there are not only similarities between costume (the gaberdlne) in New World natives and the Irish beast but also in cultural practices like devil worship and transhumance: “[I]t becomes easier to see how such comparisons contribute to the ‘othering’ of a culture by assimilating it conceptually to one already subdued”. These assimilations and comparisons also served to domesticate the new Other (ibid.). Shakespeare’s use of the monster and wild man might have also been influenced by the Italian tradition of commedia dell’ arte (Munoz Valdivieso 1996, 294). Vaughan and Vaughan (1991, 70) point out that the wild man could be a “ferocious cannibal” or a “benign savage” but he always was a social symbol and inferior to the English.

Interestingly, Caliban has been more often connected to the New World savage than black Africans in literary criticism even though his mother was from Algeria (Munoz Valdivieso 1996, 294). Nevertheless, Shakespeare’s savage was often portrayed as a black man in the 19th and 20th century versions of the play, where he was identified as a black monster because “colonial history had made blackness synonymous with bondage and inferiority” (Loomba 2002, 168). Caliban’s stage history begins in the early 17th century, though, and it is hard to confirm today if Shakespeare intended Caliban to be coloured because he left no stage directions or allusions appertaining this. However, Caliban is indeed connected with the devil, supposedly his father, like many Others of the time, including Jews and black Africans. What does connect the savage in Shakespeare’s The Tempest and the black Other in general, is the status of a slave.

As we have established in Chapter 4.1., slave trade was not thoroughly established during Shakespeare’s lifetime and the trade only started to flourish in England later (Sokol 2008). Horror stories about the enslavement of Native Americans and black Africans in the New World started to spread in Europe in the 16th century (ibid., 143). The Spanish relied heavily on slaves in establishing their empire in the New World and some travel books recounted the atrocities committed in the Americas by the Spanish (ibid.). The mistreatments
sometimes led to mass suicide of the natives but there is evidence that English pamphlets about the settlement in Jamestown tried to censure cruel mistreatment of natives at the hand of the Spanish colonisers (ibid.). At the time, slavery was a familiar practice from warfare, where enemies relegated black as well as white captives to slavery and there were allegedly up to 5,000 white slaves in Algiers during Shakespeare’s time (ibid., 143f.). While slave trade might not have prospered yet in English colonies, the settlers in Jamestown were very much reliant on the natives to help them in their everyday lives in a new environment (ibid., 161). Whether this service was always provided out of free will or later forcefully demanded, is just as ambiguous as Caliban’s status as a servant or slave, especially compared to Ariel’s status in Prospero’s household. The non-literal use of the word ‘slave’ also has to be considered, though, and Sokol (ibid., 146) alleges that Shakespeare used the term most often to signify “disparagement or abuse” and a person that is “degraded in behaviour or sensibility”.

Therefore, the attitude towards the New World native is probably the most ambiguous of the three races presented in this thesis. Shakespeare drew from many different sources when creating Caliban, which is apparent in the manifold interpretations of Caliban. It can be established, though, that negative or at least berating attitudes toward natives existed during Shakespeare’s time and that these attitudes, while maybe not fully-fledged stereotypes yet, informed Shakespeare’s portrayal of Caliban. Just like black men, the savage or wild man was integrated in civil pageants during Shakespeare’s lifetime to disperse crowds before the main procession (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 65). The connection between the colonial effort of England and The Tempest cannot be denied:

Europeans arrive in the New World and assume the can appropriate what properly belongs to the New World Other, who is then ‘erased.’ The similarities are clear and compelling […]; the problem, however, is that while there are also many literal differences between The Tempest and colonialist fictions and practice, the similarities are taken to be so compelling that the differences are ignored. (Skura 1999, 80)

The interpretative value regarding The Tempest, which has arisen in the last decades due to the efforts of postcolonial scholar, will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.
5.2. Caliban: (De-)Constructing the Stereotypes

Shakespeare’s Caliban may not be the main character in *The Tempest* but he is the character, who has gotten the most attention from literary scholars since the late 20th century. His role as a colonised subject has garnered a lot of interest and different approaches have been established, including the American school (New World theories), Caribbean interpretations (postcolonial theories), etc. Caliban is probably the most ambiguous characters of the ones analysed since the New World savage or native did not have a completely fixed stereotype yet, even though it might be argued that Shakespeare not only drew from previous colonial enterprises (e.g. Ireland) but also already anticipated certain tendencies that would develop in the course of the English colonial effort.

In this chapter, I would also like to start with analysing Caliban’s name and his description in the *dramatis personae*. Caliban is introduced as a “savage and deformed slave”, already establishing his social role and hierarchical position in the play compared to the kings, dukes and lords, who dominate the main action. The word ‘savage’ refers to Caliban’s heritage as a New World native and indicates pejorative attributes like barbarous, uneducated, undomesticated and most prominently uncivilised (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 8). Uncivilised people were not capable of written language, an orderly government or sophisticated appearance (e.g. dress), speech and food (e.g. eating raw meat) (ibid.). The word ‘savage’ was by no means a term reserved for the New World native, but had been assigned to the Irish and other peoples of Africa or Asia (ibid., 9). Caliban’s status as a savage most of all reveals his cultural inferiority compared to the Italian nobles. His social inferiority is inferred by the term ‘slave’; he is not even a servant but beneath such dignities as payment and humane treatment in the exercise of his duties. Like mentioned above, during Shakespeare’s time, slavery was not yet as common as it would become in later centuries but there was a clear notion of what being a slave entailed and there were many practices in place, which justified the enslavement of certain peoples. In the description of Caliban in the *dramatis personae*, we also get a first hint about his physical appearance, which has been a matter of debate for as long as the play exists. Caliban’s ‘deformed’ appearance goes hand in hand with a few theories about New World natives and the wild men of the Middle Ages, even though the word might invoke different kinds of physical features.

There are two dominant theories about the etymology of Caliban’s name. The most widespread theory is that it is simply an intentional anagram for ‘can(n)ibal’, allegedly a common trait for New World natives and savages (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 26). The second theory is very much connected to the first, since it is believed that Caliban derived
from ‘Carib’, who were people from the West Indies and who were known to be anthropophagi, i.e. cannibals (Orgel 1987, 25). It has been confirmed by etymologists that the word ‘cannibal’ derived from this Caribbean tribe, which infuses Caliban with certain assumptions about his eating habits (ibid.). However, Vaughan and Vaughan (1991, 27) argue that Shakespeare maybe only meant for Caliban’s name to be connected to the New World tribe alone rather than to their cannibalism. In any case, both explanations are likely as both the terms ‘Carib’ and ‘cannibal’ were widely used in English and European publications during Shakespeare’s time and the name definitely instils the character with a certain kind of moral deformity (ibid., 27f.). Another possible source for the name, though rather unlikely, is its origin in a gypsy language and the word ‘cauliban’, which means ‘black’ or refers to things associated with darkness (ibid., 33f.). The most relevant explanation for this theory is that gypsies themselves were the Other and they were attributed with many pejorative characteristics usually connected with the Other, e.g. savage behaviour, an unintelligible language, deceptiveness, etc. (ibid., 36). Whatever Shakespeare’s motivations behind the name were, Caliban’s name is definitely supposed to be an apronym and indicate to the reader certain assumptions about the character. Caliban’s introduction in the play is already coloured by racial assumptions about him: savage, deformed, slave. These descriptions mark him as anonymous; he is not an individual but is only considered in his relationship to other, more powerful characters, which already creates a dichotomy and opposition between him and the other characters. Furthermore, his name is reminiscent of cannibalistic native peoples of the New World, which does not only further the impression of him as a savage, but also is an instant of catachresis because nowhere in the play is it suggested that Caliban is indeed a cannibal.

In the play proper, Caliban is introduced through his relation to his mother Sycorax, who had been banished from Algeria to the island for the use of dark magic, while being pregnant with him. Caliban was born on the island before his mother died and he was ultimately left alone on the island after her death, save for Ariel, who was confined to a tree, though, until Prospero released him. Sycorax’s origin might suggest that she has a darker skin colour than the Europeans, which would mark Caliban’s appearance as Other by default. Caliban’s skin colour is never mentioned, though. Prospero elaborates on Caliban’s appearance and the island’s condition before his arrival: “Then was this island – save for her son that she did litter here, a freckled whelp, hag-born – not honoured with a human shape.” (Temp., 1.2. 281-284). While Shakespeare does not give any indication to the colour of Caliban’s skin, he illustrates how Caliban is not entirely human; with the word ‘whelp’ he
suggests that Caliban has traits of a dog, which is intensified by Prospero saying that Sycorax ‘littered’ Caliban. Caliban is thus imbied with subhuman characteristics, alienating him from the rest of the island’s population. This passage has often been misinterpreted, actually, due to misquoting, to mean that Prospero does not attribute any human shape to Caliban (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 10). In truth, Caliban was indeed the only human shape on the island before Prospero and Miranda arrived. Nevertheless, Caliban was often portrayed as more animal than human on stage for a long time (Orgel 1987, 70ff.). This practise of ascribing animal traits to the Other only serves to reinforce their stereotype (catachresis) and set him apart from the rest of the characters.

The first appearance of Caliban on stage is preceded by a conversation between Prospero and Miranda about him:

PROSPERO
We’ll visit Caliban, my slave, who never
Yields us kind answer.
MIRANDA ‘Tis a villain, sir,
I do not love to look on.
PROSPERO But as ‘tis
We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,
Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices
That profit us. What ho, slave! Caliban!
Thou earth, thou speak!
(Temp., 1.2. 307-313)

Once more, Caliban’s status as a slave is reinforced by Prospero’s words and his treatment of him. He further alleges that Caliban is insubordinate and challenges his masters with spiteful words. Miranda is clearly opposed to their slave not only because of his appearance but also because he is apparently a villain – a word, which is routinely ascribed to the Other, as we have seen in the course of this thesis. Prospero, on the other hand, can acknowledge the value Caliban has for him and Miranda because they are reliant on him to perform menial task like building a fire, etc. As Orgel (Orgel 1987, 24f.) points out, Prospero and Miranda as the ruling instances of the island require servants – Caliban and Ariel – to do their wishes, to ensure and confirm their hierarchical position since a ruler needs someone to rule over.

Further insults at the hand of Prospero follow until Caliban deigns to appear on stage to accept instructions by his master. Prospero calls him a ‘tortoise’ and some scholars have interpreted this to mean that Caliban indeed has the shape of a turtle, thus reinforcing his non-human shape (cf. Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 13). However, as Vaughan and Vaughan (ibid.) correctly indicate, read in context, this ascription most likely refers to the common metaphor of the unhurried pace of a turtle and therefore to Caliban’s laziness and slowness in carrying
out his master’s orders. Prospero furthermore accuses Caliban of being a “poisonous slave” (Temp., 1.2. 319) and says that his father is “the devil himself” (ibid.). Orgel (1987, 119) indicates that stories about affairs between witches and the devil were well-known during Shakespeare’s time and said liaisons often resulted in a monstrous child with no human traits at all. It cannot be determined, though, if Prospero used the term ‘devil’ as a general insult or if there is truth in his allegation.

Caliban’s eventual arrival onstage is accompanied by his own curses and profanities. It becomes clear that he is no meek servant or obedient slave as he showers Prospero and Miranda with ill wishes. The retribution for his insubordinate behaviour follows shortly, though, as Prospero promises “cramps, side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up […] [and] thou shalt be pinched as thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging than bees that made ‘em” (Temp., 1.2. 325-330). There is no doubt again that Caliban is on the bottom of the hierarchical order on the island and even though Prospero and his daughter rely on Caliban’s services, they treat him like scum. This becomes especially unfair in view of Caliban’s next words:

This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak’st from me. When thou cam’st first,
Thou strok’st me and made much of me; wouldst give me
Water with berries in’t, and teach me how
To name the bigger light and how the less,
That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,
And showed thee all the qualities o’th’isle
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile–
Cursed be I that did so! […]
For I am all the subject 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’th’island.
(Temp., 1.2. 331-344)

Caliban recounts how Prospero and Miranda treated him most kindly upon their arrival on his island, taught him their language among other things, and in return, Caliban formed an affection for them, welcoming them to his island and introducing them to all the ideal places. At one point, however, Prospero and Miranda changed their attitude towards him and subdued him, took from him his freedom to roam the island as he wished and relegated his living quarters to a cave. Caliban claims that the island was his by right and that he had been his own master before their arrival. Caliban’s claim on the island is indeed legitimate. He did inherit the island from his mother Sycorax, who was the first inhabitant and conqueror of the island (cf. Gurr 2006, 197). Orgel (1987, 25) stresses, however, that Caliban’s claim based on
inheritance is shaky because if Prospero’s allegation of Caliban’s illegitimacy is true, he does not stand to inherit anything as a bastard. Nevertheless, even if he had not inherited the island from his mother, the island would be his by right of prior possession but Caliban never makes this claim, which makes it easier for Prospero to dismiss it (Orgel 1987, 25). Caliban’s claim and his story about how Prospero conquered his island highlights the unfair treatment Caliban suffered at the hands of Prospero. Not only was his island taken from him but also his freedom. Caliban establishes important counter-discourse in marking Prospero as the coloniser, who had no right to the island, and showing the mistreatment he has suffered at the hands of his master. However, it also indicates Caliban’s inferiority as a native and that he has no right to the island despite prior possession.

At the present time, I would like to analyse Caliban’s role as a slave in Prospero’s household. Before Prospero came to the island, Caliban lived in a paradisiacal world with no hierarchies, no authority, no government and no servitude – Caliban was his “own king” (Temp., 1.2. 342). Lindsay (2016, 401f.) argues that Caliban lived like one of Montaigne’s cannibals before Prospero arrived (except the part about eating human meat) – living “freely off his homeland’s abundant natural resources” and even his attitude towards strangers echoes Montaigne’s cannibals because he invited Prospero and Miranda to his island, showing them how to prosper there, something he later also offers Stephano and Trinculo. Prospero, being a duke, did not regard Caliban as egalitarian and equal (ibid.). Much like a noble in Milan would take on a servant in their home, provide education, occupation and training, Prospero initially took on Caliban as an inferior servant (ibid.). Prospero’s phrasing – “I have used thee […]” (Temp., 345) – indicates his attitude towards Caliban as somebody lesser and to be ruled over (cf. Lindsay 2016, 403). In the early modern age, servants were treated “in loco parentis”, i.e. masters had to fulfil their servants’ physical and spiritual requirements, which included corporeal punishment if the need arose (ibid., 405). As we have seen and how we will see as the play progresses, Caliban is submitted to such punishments at the hand of Prospero but Prospero’s abuse is excessive and does not truly reflect Caliban’s misdeeds. Lindsay (ibid., 411) points out that Prospero’s reasons for educating Caliban were solely to further Caliban’s abilities to fulfil his duties as a slave rather than servant. Caliban, who is smart and capable of cunning plans, feels this exploitation and turns their “gifts” against them – “You taught me language, and my profit on’t is I know how to curse.” (Temp., 1.2. 362-363). Thus, Caliban achieves a small moral victory over Prospero (Greenblatt 1990, 35) because Prospero cannot control what Caliban says with the language he taught him.
Miranda and Prospero do have one good reason for excluding Caliban and degrading him to the status of a slave, though. Prospero responds to Caliban’s sufferings by revealing how Caliban has tried to rape Miranda once: “I have used thee […] with humane care, and lodged thee in mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate the honour of my child.” (Temp., 345-348) Many scholars (see Fuchs 1997, 61; Gurr 2006, 203; Skura 1999, 76; Lindsay 2016, 422) have either tried to justify Caliban’s attempted rape with different reasons and theories, which is something I will try not do at this point, or have just mentioned it and not dealt with it at all (Orgel 1987, 28). For me, the attempted rape cannot be justified by blaming it on the colonial context (Fuchs 1997, 61) and thus exclude this episode from the characterisation of Caliban and what it means for the audience’s view of him. The attempted rape and Caliban’s unapologetic answer to the accusation – “Would’t had been done!” (Temp., 1.2. 348) – is a good example of how sexual depravity was incorporated in the Other and thus used to alienate them. Prospero and Miranda see Caliban’s transgression as something that purely stems from Caliban’s inability to be civilised and to absorb Western ethical values as a savage (cf. Lindsay 2016, 22). Some critics have also taken Miranda’s angry words – “abhorred slave” (ibid., 350), “thy vile race” (ibid., 357) – out of context and have presented them as an unprovoked exclamation for the sole sake of being hurtful towards Caliban and as an example for her mistreatment of him (see Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 18). Miranda’s reaction to the memory of the attempted rape is the only thing that is understandable and justified in this situation since she was his teacher and taught him their language among other things.

Even though no justification exists for Caliban’s behaviour, we need to consider some elements here, which complicate the situation. Working on the assumption that Caliban is not purely evil – as there has been no indication of this so far –, he must have had a reason to try to use sexual violence against Miranda. The way Prospero presented the case, it seems like he banned Caliban from his cell after the attempted rape and this event was the sole reason for the further emotional as well as physical exclusion and mistreatment of Caliban. Prospero is a very cunning and calculating man, however, and it can be argued that he took this occurrence to finally expel Caliban and relegate him to the position of a degraded slave (Lindsay 2016, 422). Contrarily, it can be also suggested that Caliban pursued political reasons for the rape, namely to populate “this isle with Calibans” (Temp., 1.2. 350) (cf. Lindsay 2016, 422) since Caliban is indeed capable of thorough planning (see below). By producing children of his own, he might balance the population of the island and not be alone anymore. Furthermore, as Caliban indicates in his speech, he showed Prospero and Miranda the wonders of the isle and did come to love them – a love, which perished after they started mistreating him. This could
suggest that Prospero’s mistreatment of Caliban started before the attempted rape and Caliban’s actions were designed to hurt them back. The question at this point is, though, is not Caliban’s reason for the rape or to ignore or justify the attempted rape. The question is in how far is Caliban seen as an individual, who attempted to violate a woman? Or is Caliban not seen as an individual yet and is acting as the Savage, whose sexual depravity mirrors his “vile race” (Temp., 1.2. 357) and stereotypically reflects on his whole race? Sexual abnormal activities were often ascribed to the Other and also to the natives of the New World, who often engaged in free love, etc. (Shader 2009, 33). In a circular argument, I would posit that Caliban’s actions reflect on the whole of his race and that his actions are informed by the stereotypical behaviour of his race.

The scene concludes in threats of violence and mistreatment if Caliban does not adhere to his master’s orders. Caliban fears Prospero’s threats to “rack thee with old cramps, fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar, that beasts shall tremble at thy din” (Temp., 1.2. 368-370) and hurriedly leaves the scene to do as commanded. The first scene with Caliban ends with the image of him as a subjugated slave, who antagonises his master with rudeness and who attempted rape. On the other hand, Caliban also has a good claim to the island, we have seen his sufferings because he had his freedom taken away from him and he has suffered from his master’s cruelties.

The next scene including Caliban commences very much like the last scene ended; Caliban is in the process of gathering wood for his master while complaining about and cursing Prospero for his affinity for torture. He points out Prospero’s ghosts, who by themselves bear no ill will towards Caliban and only torment him when ordered by Prospero. Trinculo appears, a jester, who had been on board of the shipwreck, and in the following, we get an interesting glimpse into the mind of a new observer. Trinculo spots Caliban, who hides under his cloak because he thinks Trinculo is one of Prospero’s ghosts come to torment him:

What have we here – a man or a fish? – dead or alive? A fish, he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-John. A strange fish! […] Legged like a man, and his fins like arms! […] this is no fish, but an islander, that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt. (Temp., 2.2. 24-35)

Once more, we have a direct comparison to an animal to describe Caliban’s unusual appearance. Trinculo muses whether Caliban looks more like a fish or a human, finally settling on human. However, he does point out that Caliban has animalistic traits, e.g. he smells like a fish, indicating poor hygiene – a stereotype encountered even today with the Other – or the lack of opportunity to wash himself due to his position as a slave. Caliban is more often compared to or likened with a fish and Vaughan and Vaughan (1991, 14) claim that this has
little to do with Caliban’s actual appearance and more to do with Shakespeare’s “fixation on offhand epithets”. They also suggest that the frequent comparison with a fish stems rather from Caliban’s “oddity” than his looks (ibid.).

Trinculo’s musings further hark back to a common practice during Shakespeare’s time, where New World natives were transported to England to make an exhibition of them (cf. Loomba 2001, 154).

Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday-fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man – any strange beast there makes a man. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, the will lay out ten to see a dead Indian. (Temp., 2.2. 27-32)

Orgel (1987, 145) adds that it was a profitable business to exhibit American Indians – living or dead –, from the 16th century onwards and was even encouraged in the course of James I.’s colonial policy. This instance also confirms that the average Londoner had a notion of what a New World native looked like, how his language sounded – “gabble like a thing most brutish” (Temp., 1.2.355-356). It also reveals the exploitative practice of exhibiting the Other as if they were not human but an animal or a thing. Later on, Stephano and Antonio also plan on using Caliban in such a manner, bestow him upon an emperor or sell him to the highest bidder. Connecting Caliban with this practice also strips him of some of his humanity, establishing him as a member of a (diverse) whole and simplifying the process of making collective abstractions and generalisations about him.

In Act 2.2., Caliban is moreover introduced to Stephano, who he will have the most contact with continuing onwards. With Stephano’s introduction, we also have the opportunity to observe a newcomer’s reaction to Caliban. Stephano’s initial response upon hearing Caliban’s voice is that the island is peopled with “savages and men of Ind” (Temp., 2.2. 67). Orgel (1987, 146) points out that the terms ‘savages’ and ‘men of Ind’ complement each other and refer to New World Natives, whereas ‘savages’ is also reminiscent of the wild man of the Middle ages. Furthermore, Stephano thinks the island’s inhabitant has four legs since Trinculo and Caliban both hide under the same cloak. This also marks the first instance, where Caliban is called a monster – “This is a monster of the isle with four legs” (Temp., 2.2. 63). ‘Monster’ is the curse word most often ascribed to Caliban in the play, and it is exclusively used by Stephano and Trinculo (Novy 2013, 148). Similar to Trinculo’s comparison with a fish, Vaughan and Vaughan (ibid.) suggest that ‘monster’ does not primarily refer to appearance but calling Caliban thus is a means to establish some sort of superiority over the native. They further point out that while ‘monster’ did generally refer to physical deformity, it could be used metaphorically as well (ibid.). This instance can also be linked to a possible source for
The Tempest, i.e. Joseph Hall’s The Discovery of a New World, where the natives have two heads and two voices (Salingar 2006, 218). Whether Stephano and Trinculo refer to Caliban as a monster due to his appearance and it is their real reaction to him, or whether their established expectations about a New World native already colour their reaction, cannot be said with certainty. Fuchs (1997, 48) reasons that their reaction is indeed influenced by the European expectation of what the New World Other looks like. Stephano also refers to Caliban as a ‘mooncalf’, which was a monstrosity but also something that invoked stupidity (Orgel 1987, 148). All these references of Caliban can be counted as name-calling and are thus a strategy to construct and enforce a certain stereotype.

Henceforth starts a problematic plot, when Stephano forces Caliban to drink alcohol in order to calm his nerves and stop his shaking. While Stephano and Trinculo celebrate their reunion, Caliban reveals in an aside that he has taken a strong liking to the alcohol, calling it “celestial liquor” (Temp., 2.2. 112). Furthermore, he believes that Stephano is some sort of god because Stephano possesses such a beverage and he decides to make him his new master: “I’ll swear upon that bottle to be thy true subject, for the liquor is not earthly.” (ibid., 119-120) Caliban’s deference of Stephano is not only troubling because Caliban’s only possible reaction to newcomers can be fear or worship (cf. Lindsay 2016, 417) but the involvement of alcohol recalls also the Native Americans’ complicated relationship with alcohol. While Shakespeare could have never predicted the form this Native American epidemic would take, stories about introducing natives to alcohol were well-known (Shader 2009, 25). Shakespeare did exaggerate on the scope of the native’s reaction for comic effect but there is truth in his dramatization (ibid.). Shader (ibid., 27f.) maintains that these scenes are very indicative of early instances of sharing alcohol with Native Americans and proposes the idea that natives took such a liking to alcohol because it made them feel like an important and brave person. Moreover, some tribes allegedly believed that liquor had magical powers and allowed them to get into close contact with the spiritual world (ibid., 29). Therefore, Shakespeare makes a collective abstraction about natives and their reaction to alcohol, linking Caliban’s behaviour to a whole group and stripping him from some of his individuality in the process.

The striking thing about this scene is Caliban’s desire to pledge himself to Stephano, whom he only met moments ago. He debases himself and begs Stephano desperately to be his master: “I will kiss thy foot. I prithee be my god.” (Temp., 2.2. 143); “I swear myself thy subject.” (ibid., 146), etc. Stephano and especially Trinculo make fun of Caliban because of his raptures, e.g. “I shall laugh myself to death at this puppy-headed monster. A curvy monster!” (ibid., 148-149); “A most ridiculous monster, to make a wonder of a poor
drunkard!” (ibid., 159-160). Vaughan and Vaughan (1991, 50) insist that Caliban’s reaction to the newcomers is born of his own ambitions and partly also from “a native generosity toward strangers”. Caliban’s choice of words has a very degrading ring to it, however, and so much so that it seems unlikely that he says them only to benefit his own schemes since there is also no indication for this. Furthermore, Caliban does believe in their goodness and willingness to help him usurp Prospero. Travel accounts of the time speak of some natives, who thought explorers were deities and it can be argued that Prospero’s education taught Caliban to expect newcomers to be gods, which is also enforced by Stephano’s affirmation that he really does come from the moon (Temp., 2.2. 132-133) and Christian theology places their God in heaven (Lindsay 2016, 417). Additionally, Caliban’s willingness to submit to Stephano only enforces the ‘us/them’ dichotomy, which started to establish in the opposition between Caliban and Prospero/Miranda. Caliban is clearly different from the Italians and even sees himself as different because he willingly takes up the inferior position and wants to serve Stephano. This gives the impression that Caliban is indeed inferior, lower in the social hierarchy and something to be ruled over, which is enforced because Caliban has not had the opportunity to establish his individuality yet and because he was linked to the stereotypical attitudes of Europeans towards natives already. He is the Other, on the other spectrum of the binary opposition between him and the Italians and also on the margins of society – even below the European servants Stephano and Trinculo.

Concerning Caliban’s “native generosity” Vaughan and Vaughan (1991, 50) see in his willingness to share the island with the newcomers a typical trait for the New World native, which was something Montaigne ascribed to natives in his essay on cannibals (Lindsay 2016, 401). Moreover, it was also believed that the wild men were privy to the secrets of nature just like Caliban shows a close connection to his island (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 63). Caliban exhibits a very close relationship with his island, as he is clearly an expert on how to live there successfully (cf. ibid.). He is eager to introduce Stephano and Trinculo to his island, show them the best and most interesting places to hunt and gather berries, proudly showing off the riches of his home. Lindsay (ibid., 418) furthermore sees a development in Caliban’s attitude towards Stephano as this scene progresses: “Caliban goes from being an abject foot-licker, to an active hunter-gatherer to a teacher who is going to ‘instruct’ Stephano in catching marmosets, to a man celebrating independence.” Just as I pointed out above, Lindsay (ibid.) agrees that Caliban’s desire for a new master is a clear sign of total submission. It becomes clear that Caliban hopes his new master will treat him differently than Prospero and that he might go back to his old ways, hunting, gathering and roaming the island freely – a wish that
reflects also in his song at the end of the scene: “Ca-Caliban has a new master – get a new
man! Freedom, high-day!” (Temp., 2.2. 179-181) This contradicts the common belief of the
time that natives are born slaves and since Caliban clearly yearns for freedom and
independence from his old master, who oppressed him and also his talents. On the one hand,
Caliban desires freedom. On the other hand, he is trades his old master for a new master in the
blink of an eye rather than consider being his own master again – something he suggested to
Prospero when highlighting that he had been his “own king” once (ibid., 1.2. 342). Therefore,
the impression still lingers here that Caliban is inferior to the Italians and believes himself that
his only role can be a slave to the colonisers.

The following scene with Caliban – 3.2. – focuses on Caliban’s desire to overthrow
Prospero with Stephano’s and Trinculo’s help. The beginning of the scene stands in stark
contrast to Caliban’s hopes to have acquired a new master, who will treat him as more than a
slave or servant when both Stephano and Trinculo refer to him as a “servant-monster” (Temp.,
3.2. 3-4) and all other kinds of monsters. Interspersed by attempts from Ariel to create mischief
between the new alliance against Prospero, Caliban tries to win Stephano for his suit to get rid
of Prospero. Moreover, he is antagonised by Trinculo (courtesy of Ariel), who calls him
“debauched fish” (ibid., 25), “half a fish and half a monster” (ibid., 28-29) and a fool. Caliban
urges his new master to stand up for him and punish his tormentor. This might be an endeavour
to test his new master’s kindness and loyalty to his new subject and to gage Stephano’s attitude
towards Caliban. Stephano indeed defends Caliban, although it seems more of a mockery and
imitation of a noble than an honest effort to chastise Trinculo for is alleged disturbances (ibid.,
67). Stephano is quite interested in Caliban’s plan to overthrow Prospero. Interestingly,
Caliban does mention here that Prospero took the island away from him but he is also planning
to make Stephano the new ruler of the island – “Thou shalt be lord of it, and I’ll serve thee.”
(ibid., 56) Caliban’s words contradict each other insofar he desires his freedom but gives it
away willingly to Stephano, his new master.

It is not quite clear what notion of freedom Caliban actually has and if his ‘freedom’
only signifies a newer, kinder master, who lets him roam the island as he wishes. It could be
argued here that servitude seems to be inherent in the New World subject as Caliban does not
seem understand the concept of total freedom. The ‘us/them’ dichotomy is reinforced, marking
Caliban as someone who cannot understand certain principles of Western civilisation. Once
again, this would demote him and put him at the margin of the European world-view, where
the Italians – it does not even matter if they are noble or not – are in the centre. This might
even suggest that he does not deserve such a freedom since he is incapable of understanding
it, exposing this situation as a typical justification for colonisation – if they cannot even understand the concept of freedom, what would they even do with said freedom and colonisers would do the Other a favour in enslaving them or installing them as servants.

In addition, it is noteworthy how Caliban reacts to the supposed disruptions by Trinculo. He is very cruel and violent in his words towards Trinculo and his entreaties towards Stephano to punish him, e.g. “I would my valiant master would destroy thee!” (Temp., 3.2.45); “I do beseech you, give him blows” (ibid., 63). Moreover, he delights in Trinculo’s punishment when Stephano finally does beat him for his alleged insolence and reveals that he wants to beat Trinculo himself, too (ibid., 82-83). It is unlikely that Caliban’s insistence on and reaction to Trinculo’s punishment stems purely from a bad personality, though, and Caliban’s behaviour is more indicative of his previous experiences with insubordination.

Prospero most likely physically punished Caliban for any misbehaviour or at least threatened violence, which is what Caliban has become to expect from masters and something which he now also applies to Stephano as normal conduct between master and servant. Lindsay (2016, 419) claims that Caliban consciously uses political schemes, which were informed by Prospero’s education and example, to enthrall Stephano in his plan and exclude Trinculo. I propose that Caliban is less politically conscious and his reaction is more informed by his desire to be rid of a violent master. His attitude towards Trinculo can be explained by his desire not to be at the bottom of the new hierarchy again as well as to have power over someone himself. Even though the New World savage is supposed to be inferior to the European, Caliban does attempt to position himself above Trinculo, meanwhile exhibiting savage traits in his delight over corporeal punishment. Ironically, his delight in violence was taught to him by the Europeans and was not inherent in him in the first place as far as we can tell. This successfully contradicts the notion of the brutal savage or wild man and deconstructing the stereotype of the New World native to a certain extent.

Contrary to the stereotype of the wild man as opposed to civility and education (cf. Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 63), Caliban is capable of learning and learning quick as such. Caliban’s plan to usurp Prospero is sound and well thought through – it is also a plan that he devices himself without the help of the Europeans: “[A]lthough he shows naivety amounting to folly when he offers his services to the European renegades Trinculo and Stephano, when it comes to plotting a usurpation, Caliban’s strategy and focus far excel theirs.” (Sokol 2008, 165) Furthermore, Caliban shows his mastery of the English language, even though he did not have a language before and would only “gabble like a thing most brutish” (Temp., 1.2. 355-
356) and despite Prospero’s insistence that his efforts to teach him were “all lost, quite lost” (Temp., 4.1. 189-190) on Caliban. In 3.2, Caliban draws a beautiful picture of his island:

> [...] 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 then had waked after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming
> The clouds methought would open and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
> I cried to dream again.
> (Temp., 3.2. 133-141)

Caliban successfully contradicts the common notion of the savage as a brutish thing, who cannot learn – “a born devil, on whose nature nurture can never stick” (Temp., 4.1. 188-189). Caliban actually learned more from Prospero than he probably wished he had – Prospero’s nurture, i.e. his attitude towards and treatment of Caliban, taught Caliban to be cunning and scheme against Prospero to free himself from his violent master’s clutches. Moreover, despite Caliban’s insistence that the only benefit of the language learned is to be able to curse, Caliban’s speech above stands out as a great poetry (cf. Orgel 1987, 23). Moreover, every time Caliban talks about his island he uses verse language, which can indicate profound emotions (Baumbach and Nünning 2009, 91). Verse language usually hinted at commoners (ibid.) but Caliban is a character, who uses both verse and prose in his speech, with the focus being on verse language. Baumbach and Nünning (ibid., 92) suggest that Caliban’s language reflects his ambiguous character in the play: “Even though he speaks in verse, his speech is vulgar, flawed and tainted by grammatical mistakes”. Albeit Caliban’s language marks him as an outsider, who is maybe not in full control of the English language (ibid.), his speech has the potential to charm and enthral just as much as Prospero’s. Maybe Prospero and Miranda cannot see Caliban’s eloquence and beauty of speech because they have treated him so badly that he never reveals it to them. According to Lindsay (2016, 410), Prospero’s only incentive to teach Caliban a language is for him to be able communicate with his new master and to make him well-behaved, thus turning him into a better slave. Fuchs (1997, 53) sees a model strategy of colonisation in Prospero’s and Miranda’s attempt to teach Caliban their language because language was seen as marker for civility and this ‘high goal’ certainly legitimised the use of violence if Caliban did not learn. Greenblatt (1990, 31; cf. also Loomba 2002, 164) emphasises the contradictory colonial approaches to language: on the one hand, the colonisers ignored or denied the natives’ capacity for literacy as well as culture and painted them as wild beasts.
without the facilities for civility; on the other hand, declarations were issued informing the natives of their dispossession and enslavement should they not convert to Christianity or obey the colonial masters, implying the natives’ ability to read and understand the declarations. Thus, Caliban’s excellent use of language in this instance is indicative of his ability to learn, creating counter discourse to Prospero’s view that Caliban cannot learn. Caliban’s speech also refers to the common notion that savages had a close bond with nature (cf. Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 63).

The first scene of the fourth act dashes Caliban’s hopes to overthrow Prospero as he attempts to steal Prospero’s magic books from him with Stephano’s and Trinculo’s help. His new friends depart from the carefully laid out plan and get distracted by clothes, which were washed ashore from the shipwreck and hang outside of Prospero’s cell. Instead of executing their plan, Stephano and Trinculo decide to loot the clothes amid Caliban’s protestations: “Let’t alone, and do the murder first.” (Temp., 4.1. 231-232); “We shall lose our time, and all be turned to barnacles.” (ibid., 248) While momentary riches easily distract the Europeans, Caliban is the one who can focus on the plan and attempts to save their endeavour. He only gives up on the plan, when his new master Stephano threatens to “turn you out of my kingdom” (ibid., 252-253). In the moment, Caliban starts to carry away the loot, Prospero and Ariel storm onto the scene and Prospero incites his ghosts to punish the three thieves. Ultimately, Caliban’s plan is thwarted due to Stephano’s and Trinculo’s lack of concentration and Prospero’s superior intelligence, courtesy of Ariel’s spying and powers. In the end, Caliban is defeated in the eyes of an almost almighty magician he cannot escape due to Prospero’s superiority. This can be read as a colonialist metaphor as well, where the colonised are defenceless in the opposition of a technologically superior coloniser.

In the last scene, Caliban only plays a minor role. Prospero bids Ariel to bring the three thieves on stage, where most of the characters are assembled after the conflicts of the other action have been resolved. Sebastian and Antonio, who have never seen Caliban before, invoke certain stereotypes we have already encountered previously, e.g. “What things are these […]? Will money buy them?” (Temp., 5.1. 264-265). This exclamation mirrors Trinculo’s Stephano’s reference to the common practise to exhibit New World natives in England for financial gain. Moreover, Antonio calls Caliban a fish again, indicating an inherent animalistic trait in Caliban and Alonso proclaims that Caliban “is a strange thing as e’er I looked on” (ibid., 289), which suggests that Caliban is less than human and cannot even be categorised. Prospero clarifies his slave’s origin and invokes Caliban’s parentage by referring to him as a “demi-devil – for he is a bastard one” (ibid., 272-273). Moreover, Prospero alleges that
Caliban’s outer, misshappen appearance reflects his inner ugliness by saying “He is as disproportioned in his manners as in his shape.” (Temp., 5.1. 291-291) He also utters one of the most disputed words in relation to Caliban: “This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.” (ibid., 275-276) Some have taken it to mean that Prospero fully acknowledges Caliban now (see Novy 2013, 150), others think that it reflects Shakespeare’s guilt of the colonial effort in the Americas (see Shader 2009, 34). Greenblatt (1990, 36) recognizes the ambiguity in Prospero’s words: they might only indicate that Caliban is part of Prospero’s household as a slave or that there is a deeper – albeit unsentimental – connection between them. Greenblatt (ibid.) claims further that the word ‘acknowledge’ refers to a certain kind of moral responsibility. For me, there is also the possibility that Prospero accepts the fact that Caliban represents humans at their most basic level, a wild man without civility – something his forefathers once were as well. Conversely, he might see in Caliban animalistic traits, Prospero denies in himself.

Caliban, admitting to his defeat, refers to Prospero as his master again and expects a harsh punishment from Prospero after his scheming against him (Temp., 5.1. 262-263). Caliban is relieved to fall back into his services after Prospero gives his pardon (ibid. 293). Prospero’s mildness might be connected to his general change in character and his revelation to abandon revenge against his brother (which is a disputed plot line in itself). Nevertheless, Prospero’s words indicate that he still thinks of Caliban as inferior by saying, “Go, sirrah” (ibid., 291). Orgel (1987, 203) clarifies that the term ‘sirrah’ “expresses contempt, reprimand, or assumption of authority on the part of the speaker”. Caliban promises to “be wise hereafter and seek for grace” (ibid., 294-295) and also denounces Stephano as his new master, saying he was a fool “to take this drunkard for a god and worship this dull fool” (ibid., 295-297).

Thus, we leave Caliban in the same position as we found him in the first act. He is a slave to Prospero’s wishes and he even promises to better himself, expressing reformation of his behaviour. This could be connected to colonial ideas, where the colonised realises how the coloniser is the new ruler, someone to be worshipped, to follow and obey, and a model human to strive towards. In the end, Caliban is on the margin of the island’s population and while some scholars argue that Caliban will gain his freedom after Prospero and his companions leave the island (cf. Orgel 1987, 26f), Prospero’s words do not indicate his intentions towards Caliban in any way. It would be more likely for Prospero to take Caliban with him because – like many interjections of the characters show – there is financial gain in bringing Caliban along and even if Prospero does not take him, one of the other characters most likely will. Since Caliban is not viewed as an individual, who has the same rights as the Europeans, and
is regarded as something inferior, a slave and New world native, no one will stop his new captor or think twice about their intentions.

Overall, it is difficult to pinpoint what strategies Shakespeare used to create the stereotype of the New World savage. While there are some instances were collective abstractions and generalisations were used to mark Caliban as the Other, e.g. assigning him animalistic or non-human traits and characteristics, making him inherently inferior to the coloniser, etc., it is hard to pinpoint the exact stereotype because Shakespeare seems to have drawn from so many different sources. Contact with the natives of the New World had only just really begun in the 16th century and travel accounts varied on how the natives looked like, how they behaved, what made them different from the Europeans, etc. There are accounts and essays that suggest a positive view of the New World native but many scholars concentrated on negative characteristics, things that marked the natives as Other, which would later simplify justifications for colonisation and enslavement. Shakespeare also incorporated typical traits and characteristics of the wild men of the Middle Ages to construct Caliban. The ambiguous picture of Caliban is very much the ambiguous picture the Europeans had about the New World natives.

Most prominently, though, Caliban is not seen as an individual in the play. He is always considered in his relation to other characters, may it be Prospero, his master, Sycorax, his mother, or Stephano, his new master. He is a slave and is defined by his servitude towards his masters, e.g. he is a bad slave to Prospero, he attempts to be the best servant for Stephano and in the end, he hopes to improve and reform to become the best slave for Prospero. Only once in the play does Caliban refer to his own total freedom, which was before Prospero and Miranda came to the island and he was his own king. In the course of the play, however, Caliban never attempts to win this freedom back. When he gets the opportunity to overthrow Prospero and re-establish his old freedom, he pledges himself to Stephano immediately – relegating himself again to an inferior position. Whether Caliban worships Stephano because of the “celestial liquor”, because he really thinks Stephano is a god or because he actually believes in his own inferiority, cannot be said. The other characters never take Caliban seriously. Prospero keeps Caliban on as his slave even after Caliban attempts to rape his daughter and he keeps Caliban in check with corporeal punishment. Stephano, who happens upon Caliban after his arrival on the island, exhibits curiosity rather than fear from the unknown. Hopkins (2005, 172) confirms that Caliban is never seen as a real threat, who has the actual power to overthrow the ruling classes of the island – the Europeans; it does not even matter whether these Europeans are nobles or not. Caliban is ever inferior. No character – not
even Caliban himself – entertain the idea that he could be equal to the Europeans. Therefore, the most prominent strategy Shakespeare employed might have been to relegate Caliban to the margin of society, ever separated from the centre without the chance to ever join it.

Catachresis and name-calling is also a strategy that sticks out in *The Tempest*. Caliban is cussed at and insulted more by a big margin than the other characters analysed. Stephano and Trinculo alone refer to him as a ‘monster’ more than 40 times in the course of the play (Novy 2013, 148). Furthermore, he is called ‘slave’ often, he is ascribed animal traits by being called ‘fish’, etc. and he is even relegated to the status of a sub-human by being referred to as a ‘thing’ twice. Prospero admits to using Caliban, which also indicates non-human characteristics.

Caliban was afforded with opportunities, though, to speak for himself. His speech “the isle is full of noises” in 3.2. marks one particular example, where Caliban cannot only illustrate his love for the island but also his mastery of the English language. Despite Prospero’s insistence that his teachings of Caliban failed miserably, Caliban does learn the language well and even uses it for his own gains – to curse his master. We have also seen that some of Caliban’s ‘savagery’ was taught to him by Prospero, e.g. his desire to punish Trinculo. However, it could also be argued that Caliban’s speech on the wonders of his island is also an indication for the stereotype that the natives had a close relationship with nature (cf. Loomba 202, 162). Like mentioned in Chapter 5.1., this close relationship was not always a good thing either because it displayed the savages’ inability to be civilised. Caliban’s sound planning skills have also been pointed out above but his thorough plans were thwarted because he relied on the help of the drunken Stephano and Trinculo. It could be argued that Caliban could have actually been successful by himself and if he had had the courage to believe in himself. Therefore, some counter discourse to the dominant white perspective, courtesy of Prospero, were offered in the course of the play.

In short, Caliban individuality never completely establishes itself. While the stereotypes about the New World native were ambiguous, Caliban does seem to exhibit some of them because he is identified as a savage. Due to his lack of individuality, his actions do reflect stereotypically on the New World natives. Therefore, Caliban might be different from Shylock and Othello insofar that he shaped the stereotype of the New World savage rather than being shaped by an already fully established stereotype. This idea is backed by the varied reception of the character of Caliban in literature and literary criticism:

Caliban has been an ineducable brute, a sensitive savage, a European wild man, a New-World native, ugly, attractive, tragic, pathetic, comic, frightening, the rightful owner of the
island, a natural slave. [...] Its critical history is a good index to the ambivalences and ambiguities of the text. (Orgel 1987, 11)

The text does not give a clear answer to the stereotypes of the New World native but it has become clear in this analysis that Caliban is supposed to be part of a marginalised whole and this whole had only started to develop during Shakespeare’s time.
6. Contrasting Shylock, Othello and Caliban

This chapter is dedicated to the Shakespearean characters analysed in Chapters 3-5 and now we will consider the similarities as well as differences in how the racial stereotypes were (de-)constructed in the respective dramas. At first, I will point out the various strategies employed to construct and deconstruct the stereotypes in each play, then will tackle the specific complications, which upset the stereotypical view of the racial Other, and finally we will observe how Shylock, Othello and Caliban are perceived at the end of the play regarding their racial stereotypes.

Concerning generalisations, all the plays analysed heavily rely on already established or currently developing generalisations about a certain race. Shylock as ‘the Jew’ is the most prominent example for generalisations. The stereotypes concerning Jews had been created centuries before Shakespeare tackled Shylock in The Merchant of Venice (see Chapter 3.1.) and these stereotypes were only reinforced over time. A Jew was stereotypically a villain in a drama, he was evil and lusted for the Christian’s life (see Chapter 3.1.). It could be argued that the Jewish stereotype was so deeply ingrained in society already that it became one fluent stereotype, who encompassed several different prejudices held against Jewish people. Shylock’s religion seems to justify vicious, insulting and degrading behaviour towards him, e.g. Antonio’s, his friends’ and the Duke’s attitudes and actions towards Shylock. This could be contrasted with how Othello is perceived in Venice and that openly degrading behaviour towards Moors was not socially acceptable (yet) (see Chapter 4.2.). Othello, the Moor of Venice, is steeped not in one all-consuming stereotype like Shylock but is torn between two prevailing and contradicting stereotypes – the noble, tawny Moor vs. the villainous, jealous black African. Due to changes in society (e.g. geohumoralist theories) and racialist thinking, the noble, tawny Moor slowly turned in to the evil black man – a stereotype which is still present today – and Othello seems to reflect this change. In the end, Othello kills one stereotype and portrays the noble Moor by extinguishing the evil black man. Caliban’s stereotypes are the least developed and perpetuated in society because contact with New World natives had only started about a century before Shakespeare wrote The Tempest. Shakespeare was clearly influenced by several, often contradicting accounts about the New World native as well as older stereotypes about the wild men, for example, and infused Caliban with these various characteristics (see Chapter 5.1.). While these characteristics and attributes could maybe not be called stereotypes yet, I still identify these racial prejudices as stereotypes because – even though Shakespeare could not have known this – they would later become
common stereotypes about the New World native. Overall, Shakespeare did always rely on generalisations and incorporated them in his racially diverse characters. Many stereotypes are inherent in Shylock’s character, e.g. his usury, but with Othello and especially Caliban, it is harder to pinpoint the exact generalisations against black Africans and natives at the time because they were still diverse.

We can also find binary oppositions between the racial Other and the dominant society in all of the analysed characters. Shylock as a Jew is not only in opposition to the other Christian characters, but he is also in an extreme opposition with Antonio, his biggest enemy and oppressor. One could also argue that the opposition between Judaism and Christianity is exemplified with Shylock’s and Antonio’s opposition. Interestingly, in *The Merchant of Venice* the white Christian character Antonio is not free from blame and is not the stereotypically ‘good’ Christian because he lacks mercy (just like Portia, another ‘good’ Christian) and is vicious in his behaviour towards Shylock. Conversely, Shylock does not only inhibit bad Jewish attributes like villainy but also has high moral aspirations like equal human rights. Similarly, Caliban is opposed to all the European characters – especially Prospero – and even Ariel, who could be considered a native also. Caliban’s otherness stands in constant contrast to the other characters and he is characterised through his relationship to them most of the time, i.e. he is Prospero’s slave, Stephano’s servant, Sycorax’s son. Even though the stereotype of the New World native had not been properly established yet in Europe, Caliban stands in for his brethren and symbolises the inferior New World Other in opposition to the superior white European coloniser. In *Othello*, this binary opposition is not as pronounced since Othello is integrated well into Venetian society and is a valuable asset for the Venetians. It is true that some characters have a deep-seated dislike towards Othello but often they are not racially motivated, e.g. Iago’s hatred for Othello most likely found its origins in not getting a promotion, and Brabantio’s anger at Othello originates in an unsanctioned marriage to his daughter. The strongest opposition found in *Othello* is the black and white imagery, which does not only include contrasting the black Othello with the white Desdemona (literally and metaphorically) but also contrasting Othello’s and Iago’s darkness.

Despite these oppositions, every racial Other has a particular role to play in the dominant society (see also Boyce 1990, 686). Shylock is a usurer and his occupation ensures the riches and economical wealth of Venice (Gruber 2003, 69). Othello is a heavily decorated and respected general, whose military talents protect and empower Venice and its citizens. From the beginning of the play, it is clear that Othello is valued in Venetian society and his murder at the end of the play stand in stark contrast to the image Venetians had of him, e.g.
Lodovico’s exclamation: “My lord, this would not be believed in Venice, though I should swear I saw’t.” (Oth., 4.1. 233-234) Caliban is an important part of Prospero’s household and was integral in ensuring Prospero’s and Miranda’s survival on the island. Prospero himself acknowledges that they rely on Caliban’s services: “He does make our fire, fetch in our wood, and serves in offices that profit us.” (Temp., 1.2. 311-313) Furthermore, all characters are fully aware of their important roles in their society. Shylock condemns Antonio for his violent behaviour towards him even though his occupation is perfectly legal in Venice (O’Rourke 2003, 377); Othello is proud of his military accomplishments and revels in his successes (Oth., 1.3. 135-141); and Caliban knows that holding back his knowledge about the island would have caused Prospero’s and Miranda’s end after they had first arrived (Temp., 1.2. 336-339).

Connected to the strategy of extreme opposition are other strategies, which differ, though, from play to play. In The Merchant of Venice, Shylock is often cast as an outsider due to group dynamics, i.e. an ingroup and outgroup opposition. Shylock is the member of the Jewish outgroup, whereas the dominant Christian ingroup seizes almost all of the power. However, Shylock also knows how to work with these group dynamics in his powerful monologue in 3.1., where he successfully erases the concept of religious ingroups and outgroups by arguing that every human is the same regardless of religious difference: “If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?” (MV, 3.1. 60-62) In The Tempest, we also have a strong ‘us/them’ dichotomy, which is indeed part of the binary opposition between Caliban as a native and the other European characters. Nevertheless, the ‘us/them’ dichotomy is very fitting for The Tempest because Caliban is opposed to the Europeans in a postcolonial context, marking him as the Other by introducing notions about his alleged inability to learn or to integrate into a civilised society. Furthermore, Caliban is on the margin of society and is doomed to stay there; he does not undergo any character development in the course of the play that would allow him to escape this space and become part of the centre. This might suggest an inherent inferiority in the New World native and their inability to ever achieve equality with the dominant European group.

Another strategy which was featured prominently in all the plays analysed is name-calling. Regarding specific examples, Shylock is most often associated with villainy and is regularly referred to as “villain” (e.g. MV, 1.3. 176) or “evil” (e.g. ibid., 96). For Othello, we can find many insults specific to his race and skin colour, e.g. “thick-lips” (Oth., 1.1. 66) or “old black ram” (ibid., 88). Caliban is most often referred to as a “monster” (e.g. Temp., 2.2. 63) by Stephano and Trinculo. Interestingly, some curse words were used for all characters, indicating that there are often no strict differences between ascriptions to certain races (cf.
Loomba 2001, 153). For example, Shylock, Othello and Caliban were all called “devil” (MV, 2.2. 23; Oth., 1.1. 91; Temp., 5.1. 272) at one point in their respective dramas. This illustrates how Otherness is often associated with the devil and thus moral corruption. While both Shylock and Othello were equated with the devil, Caliban was associated with him through an alleged paternal connection and therefore assigned the term “demi-devil” (ibid.) as well. Furthermore, all of the analysed characters were ascribed sub-human attributes and characteristics: Shylock was dubbed an “inhuman wretch” (MV, 4.1. 4) and Othello as well as Caliban were both referred to as a “thing” (Oth., 1.2. 71; Temp., 5.1. 289).

Animal imagery is another very prominent feature in describing or insulting the racial characters and thereby creating a racial stereotype. Loomba (2002) points out that the use of animal imagery to describe the Other was a common practice in early modern times. Shylock is mostly connected with canine terminology, e.g. “inexecrable dog” (MV, 4.1. 127), “thy desires are wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous” (ibid., 136-137). Othello is associated with animals in regards to his alleged overt sexuality – “old black ram” (Oth., 1.1. 88) – and these ascriptions do not only describe Othello but also the alleged dirty act of miscegenation, e.g. his and Desdemona’s sexual relations are likened to animalistic intercourse when Iago indicates to Brabantio that Othello “is tupping your white ewe” (ibid., 88-89) and their offspring would be animals and “neigh” (ibid., 112). Caliban is also associated with canine attributes when Prospero refers to him as a “freckled whelp” (Temp., 1.2. 283) and that his mother “litter[ed]” (ibid., 282) him. Moreover, Caliban is compared to a fish more than once (e.g. 2.2. 24) but, as I have posited in Chapter 5.2., this might have more to do with his smell and oddity than his actual appearance. Connecting the characters with these animalistic traits has different effects. First, these ascriptions separate the characters further from the dominant, white characters of the play and they strip them of their humanity. They stand apart from the other characters and this actually enforces an ‘us/them’ dichotomy. Second, this view seems to legitimise and justify cruel attitudes towards and violence against the racial Other by alienating them and assigning them non-/sub-human traits.

One of the most prominent strategies to deconstruct the racial stereotypes is to let the Other speak and let the audience experience their side of the story. Shylock is afforded many opportunities to speak up for himself and the Jewish community, and establish individuality. In his seminal monologue in Act 3.1., he gives one of the most famous speeches on equal human rights in literary history. Even though this monologue is tainted to a certain extent because Shylock uses it as a justification for revenge against Christians, it rings true and resonates with the audience until today. Similarly, Othello’s big monologue in act 1.3. (Oth.,
3.1. 128-170) marks the only instance, where Othello can escape his stereotypes and exhibit some individuality by recounting his life’s story and his love story with Desdemona. While this speech is not the most acclaimed and analysed in Othello’s repertoire, it stands out for its eloquence, sincerity, and in the context of this thesis, for its value in deconstructing the stereotypes of the noble, tawny Moor and the violent black man. Caliban is likewise afforded opportunities to speak up for himself and the most prominent example would be his speech “the isle is full of noises” (Temp., 3.2. 133-141). There Caliban can illustrate his love for the island, the beauty in it and his dreams concerning it. These instances of the Other speaking for themselves are not only strategies to deconstruct their respective stereotypes because they show mistreatment, individuality, equality and hybridity, they also counter the notion that the language of the Other is inferior (cf. Smith 1998, 175). Each of the characters’ monologues expresses a particular eloquence in their character, however, which was unusual for the time (ibid.). Shylock’s and Othello’s skill with language are noteworthy but Caliban’s monologue stands out insofar that he is the most ‘savage’ of the racially diverse characters analysed in this thesis. Caliban inhibits the attributes of the wild men, who supposedly had no real language themselves (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 63) but his speech counters this stereotypical discourse and also counters the colonial custom to devalue the Other’s language skills (Burney 2012, 51). Moreover, these instances present important moments to establish counter-discourse and to work against the main stereotypical current of 16th and 17th century Elizabethan England.

Another possibility to deconstruct racial stereotypes would be by positive characterisation through other characters in the play. Interestingly, while Shylock is afforded the most and the most impactful opportunities to speak for himself and his community, he is not spoken of well by any other characters throughout the play; we do not encounter a Christian (or Jewish) character, who stands up for him. Contrarily, Othello is characterised positively by several characters in the play. Desdemona stands out as the most outspoken concerning Othello’s virtue and valiant character; so much so that she even defends him in her hour of death. Furthermore, several nobles and high ranking Venetians continuously point out Othello’s value for the city (e.g. Oth., 2.1. 35-41). It could be argued that Desdemona’s and the signorys’ declarations are actually vital in constructing the stereotype of the noble, tawny Moor because they rely heavily on his military prowess and his virtuous character. Caliban, just like Shylock, is afforded no positive characterisation through other characters and the only positive aspects of his character stem from himself.
Another possible strategy to deconstruct racial stereotypes is the display of mistreatment, which was present in all of the plays analysed. Shylock suffered not only from degrading insults (see above) but was also exposed to physical mistreatment by the hands of Antonio and his comrades (MV, 1.3. 104-125). This highlighted Shylock’s pain and suffering and thereby helped in humanising him. Caliban is also exposed to a lot of mistreatment from all of the other characters in the play, ranging from verbal insults, the threat of violence, to actual physical violence, e.g. Prospero’s preferred form of chastising a rude Caliban with “cramps [and] side-stitches” (Temp., 1.2. 325-326). Both Shylock and Caliban learn from this mistreatment and wish the same unfair treatment on other characters, e.g. Shylock yearns for Antonio’s life and Caliban delights in seeing Trinculo punished. Ironically, unfair behaviour seems to have caused these inclinations in both Shylock and Caliban. Othello, on the other hand, suffered the least from unfair treatment because he was well integrated in Venetian society at the beginning of the play. The only mistreatment he suffered came at the hands of Iago mainly, who schemes behind his back and commits psychological abuse. Othello actually never had to suffer through physical mistreatment or open verbal abuse. It could be argued that name-calling should be counted among the deconstructing strategies because they also show mistreatment; however, name-calling and certain terms for racial Others were long used to alienate them and mark them as different from the dominant white society – thus reinforcing their stereotype and status as an outsider.

Hybridity represents a deconstructing strategy, which can only be found in one of the three plays analysed. Shylock is afforded the most individuality and his character is fleshed out very well. He is a father, who has an unruly daughter and a deceased wife, is a successful businessman and a clever individual, who desires his enemy’s downfall. The audience is able to experience a full, well-rounded character with all his flaws, despite the fact that he is supposed to be the villain. As a wronged and a betrayed father, Shylock is afforded individuality and this draws parallels to other (even white) fathers, who might suffer the same fate (e.g. Brabantio). On the other hand, Othello and Caliban rarely get the opportunity to display some individuality, which could upset their inherent stereotypes. Othello’s life’s story is compelling and the only instance, where he is afforded a unique personality – throughout the rest of the play he is trapped between the warring stereotypes of the noble, tawny Moor and the jealous black African. Similarly, Caliban shows most of his character by revelling in the beauty of his island – a trait, which can be considered stereotypical in itself (see wild men of the Middle Ages). The audience does not gain much information about Othello’s and Caliban’s families, which steeps them in a mysterious, unknown past and creates the image of
a blank slate, on which white Europeans can project stereotypical conclusions about their race. It could be claimed that affording the racial Other with a chance for individuality and thus hybridity is the strongest tool to deconstruct a stereotype because it creates a new dimension in contrast to the one-dimensional stereotypical view of the character. Therefore, it could be argued that the Jewish stereotypes are deconstructed the most because Shylock is endowed with the most individuality.

Finally, Shylock’s, Othello’s and Caliban’s place at the end of the play should be considered. In the vain of the argument that individuality plays an integral role in deconstructing racial stereotypes, Shylock’s character is the most ambiguous at the end of the play. While he is afforded the most individuality in the play, he also uses this individuality and eloquence to justify his revenge against Antonio. It might not have mattered whether Shylock is villainous in the end if villainy was not a stereotype ascribed to Jews. Therefore, Shylock’s lust for revenge puts him squarely in the realms of the Jewish stereotypes. Shylock’s end, though, eases the stereotypical perception of him as he is left with nothing after ‘justice’ has been done – he loses not only a lot of money but also his religion and thus his community.

It could be argued that Shylock as the most developed character is able to deconstruct the Jewish stereotypes for two reasons: First, the Jewish stereotypes were so ingrained in early modern English society, so fully formed and commonplace that it was easier for Shylock to argue against the everyday mistreatment of him and his people. Second, Shylock was infused with the most individuality of the characters analysed and individuality stands in stark contrast to the generalising strategies, which construct a stereotype. Similarly, Maufort (2010, 40) argues that Shylock’s attitude and strong arguments against inequality based on race mirrors the postcolonial man, who tries to subvert the coloniser’s dominance. Shylock actually never wonders whether he is truly different from the Christians and has a deep-seated belief that he deserves the same treatment as Christians. Unfortunately, in the end we leave Shylock in a worse position than he had been at the beginning of the play. This suggests that the Other has no place in dominant society and will always be on the margins of society, ruled over by a white worldview. Like I argued at the end of Chapter 3.2., Shylock is afforded individuality and manages to deconstruct the Jewish stereotypes to a certain degree indeed but he cannot be removed from his religion and its stereotypical ascriptions (i.e. villain) at the time the play is set. Ultimately, he remains a stereotypical Jew because he could not escape the hegemony (cf. ibid., 51) and is relegated to the place a Jew allegedly belongs.

The conclusion to Othello supports the stereotypical views of black men during the early modern age. Othello is trapped between the noble, tawny Moor and the jealous, violent
black man; he chooses to be valiant and make an end of the black murderer. Othello’s dominant stereotype – the noble tawny Moor – survives in the end, which is the stereotype he has mainly portrayed from the beginning of the play. It could be argued that Othello never really exhibited the malevolent stereotype of the violently jealous black man because it was only incited by Iago’s scheming and thus Othello was forced into it. Othello still wonders about his inherent inferiority, though – “Haply, for I am black.” (Oth., 3.3. 266) – which sets him apart from Shylock’s sense of equality. Comparing Othello’s position at the beginning of the play and at the end, he has lost more than Shylock. He did not only lose his wife, job, reputation, respect and life but he has also lost the sense of self and individuality he briefly gave a glimpse of in his speech in Act 1.3. (Oth., 3.1. 128-170) because he fully conforms to the noble, tawny Moor in the end. It is true that the stereotype of the noble, tawny Moor is positive for the most part and might be preferable to the stereotype of the violently jealous black man but it limits his character nevertheless and restricts his humanity.

The last character analysed – Caliban – displays the most inherent racial difference albeit stereotypes of the New World native were not fully formed yet. As mentioned above, Shakespeare drew from several sources when creating Caliban – the wild men of the Middle Ages, the American Indians, etc. – and the stereotype of the New World savage had not completely formed yet. Nevertheless, Caliban exudes an inherent difference from the white European characters of the play. He does not wonder out loud if he is different but he reflects his difference in what he does. At the chance of escaping Prospero’s clasps, he pledges himself to a new master in the hopes he would treat him differently. Despite Caliban’s knowledge that he is the rightful owner of the island (see Temp., 1.2. 331-332), he does not stop to consider the possibility of real freedom before taking on a new master. I have discussed Caliban’s shaky notion of freedom in Chapter 5.2., which infers a certain inequality in his race and even suggests that enslaving them is justified. Caliban’s beginning and end in the play are one of the same: he was not able to fully utilise his opportunity to overthrow Prospero, which is not completely his own fault, and though he seems to have escaped punishment from Prospero, his fate lies in the hands of Prospero and the other Europeans. He is smart, a quick learner and capable of devising sound plans even though he is unable to implement them successfully. His inferiority to the other European characters, or even Ariel, is never questioned, not even by Caliban himself and his good qualities – being well acquainted with the island, loving the nature and being a fast learner – only help to highlight his advantages as a slave. Caliban’s fate is the most open ended in the plays analysed because we do not get to know whether he will remain on the island or go with Prospero or others to Italy. As I have argued in Chapter
5.2., it is unlikely that Caliban will gain his freedom like Ariel because he is valuable in Italy also – to be used as a slave or to be exhibited for money. Ultimately, Caliban cannot integrate into a society, which deems him an eternal outsider. (cf. Maufort 2010, 49).

Eventually, Shylock, Othello and Caliban are trapped in the hegemony of white society (ibid., 51). Othello and Caliban try to integrate into white society to a certain degree: Othello as the noble, tawny Moor is well-respected and welcomed into Venetian society but his marriage to Desdemona draws questions about miscegenation and the murder of his wife is blamed on his race and his inherent corruption; Caliban is keen on rising in the hierarchy when entering Stephano’s services and be a valuable part of his new master’s life, just like he was glad he used to be loved by Prospero and Miranda (Temp., 1.2. 332-336). Contrarily, Shylock never tries to be part of the white hegemony but desires a society, where all races are equal and coexist peacefully. Nevertheless, he is caught in the web of white hegemony and cannot escape it, just like Caliban (Maufort 2010, 51). None of the characters analysed can be fully incorporated into society (cf. Vaughan and Vaughan 1991, 83) because finally they are on the margin of society, the ‘them’ in the ‘us/them’ dichotomy and on the losing side of the binary opposition.
7. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to uncover the strategies used to construct and deconstruct the racial stereotypes present in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello* and *The Tempest*. Race and racist stereotypes still play a big role today and society is challenging this limiting view today more than ever before. Therefore, it was interesting to explore the treatment of race and racial stereotypes at a time where it was socially acceptable and commonplace to mistreat people of different ethnicities. While Shakespeare heavily relied on already established stereotypes about the Jew, the Moor and to a certain extent about the New World native, he also incorporated elements in his plays that negated a completely narrowed and stereotypical view of the racially diverse characters.

In order to achieve the objective of the thesis, a historical and methodological framework was established. It is important to create a context to fully understand literature and with dramas, this includes the theatrical context. Just as society was changing due to explorations to new worlds in Shakespeare’s time, the theatre changed with it and Shakespeare’s plays reflect these changes, e.g. they escape the narrow confines of the classical genre conventions. Furthermore, a historical context had to be presented to show attitudes towards other races in Elizabethan and Jacobean England and to show how strangers were incorporated in society. The methodological framework of this thesis consists of different strategies which help in constructing and deconstructing racial stereotypes. Some of the most prominent strategies to construct stereotypes are generalisations, binary oppositions and name-calling to alienate the Other from the dominant white society. Strategies to deconstruct racial stereotypes presented in this thesis were the display of counter-discourse, unfair treatment and, most importantly, incorporating hybridity.

In the following chapters (3-5), I analysed the Jew, the Moor and the New World native with the help of the strategies presented in Chapter 2.3. and the method of close reading. In each of the analytic chapters, I briefly gave an overview of the most prominent stereotypes about the Jew, Moor or New World native and also illustrated the literary context of the plays. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is represented as a stereotypical Jew mostly through generalisations, name-calling and an opposition with Antonio, a Christian. Shakespeare incorporated several strategies to deconstruct Shylock’s stereotypes, however, and managed to this with counter-discourse, letting the Other speak and infusing Shylock with individuality. Ultimately, the Jewish stereotypes were not completely deconstructed because Shylock is portrayed as a villain, albeit a fallen villain. In *Othello*, the titular character struggles between
two contrasting stereotypes: the noble, tawny Moor and the violently jealous black African. Othello is infused with these stereotypes due to the use of generalisations, chromatism and a black/white dichotomy. Othello manages to deconstruct his stereotypes only once by eloquently speaking up for himself and illustrating his life’s story. In the end, Othello chooses the stereotype of the noble, tawny Moor by killing the violent black man (and himself), whose constitution was responsible for murdering his wife. In The Tempest, we see an early depiction of the New World native, who is infused with various stereotypes ranging from the American Indians to the wild men of the Middle Ages. Generalisations, name-calling and a relegating Caliban to the margins of society are strategies used to construct the stereotype of the morally degenerative savage. Through monologues, Caliban manages to deconstruct these stereotypes to a certain degree through his eloquence, which shows that the savage can indeed learn and use the new knowledge to his advantages, e.g. cursing. Finally, Caliban cannot escape the confines of his race and remains a literal and metaphorical slave to the white conquerors. Chapter 6 explored the similarities and differences found in (de-)constructing the racial stereotypes in the three plays analysed and contrasted Shakespeare’s approaches to the stereotypical characters.

Ultimately, Shylock, Othello and Caliban’s portrayal is affected by similar as well as contradicting beliefs about the Other and was shaped by different stories of racial minorities. (cf. Loomba 2002, 168). While some stereotypes were firmly established in Shakespeare’s time, e.g. the Jewish stereotypes, some were contradicting each other, e.g. stereotypes about Moors and black men, and others were only starting to form and integrate into society, e.g. the stereotype of the New World savage. None of the characters manages to completely deconstruct their racial stereotype and have varying success on the degree to which they succeed to deconstruct it at all. All the dramas contain hints about the unfairness of racial stereotypes and the mistreatment of the racial Other but the stereotypes are not deconstructed in a sense to exemplify the hybridity of the racial Other and make them part of the Western world. Shakespeare’s accounts of the racial Other are still so popular today because they lend themselves to various interpretations (cf. Maufort 2010, 37) and performances today focus on countering the stereotypical portrayal of the Jew, the Moor and the New World native. For me, Shylock, Othello and Caliban were all portrayed stereotypically throughout most of their respective dramas and remain in their stereotypes despite Shakespeare’s attempts to highlight the abuse and unfairness in mistreating the racial Other.
8. Integrating Othello in the English Language Classroom to Raise Awareness about Racial Stereotypes

The following chapter will deal with the question how Shakespeare’s works – in this case *Othello* – and the issue of racial stereotypes can be implemented in an English language classroom. The goal of the lesson plan will be to contrast early modern English stereotypical perceptions of the black man with stereotypical perceptions of the black community today, to find hybridity in members of the black community rather than simplified stereotypes and raise awareness for stereotyping. Especially in the current political climate, where refugees and Muslims are scapegoated and portrayed overwhelmingly negative in the media, I find it important to discuss racial prejudices and stereotypes with the students and point out the diversity in the world and also within a culture.

8.1. Implementing Literature and Racial Stereotypes in the English Language Classroom

Literature is a key part of any culture and the only aim of language classes in school are not only to teach vocabulary, grammar and basic linguistic skills but also to put a language into context – culture. Literature and other media serve as great tools to learn about a country’s culture, its history and beliefs; furthermore, literature provides help in organising information, reflecting upon history and forming identity (cf. Neumann und Nünning 2011). Drama in particular is an effective genre to examine “man’s role(s) in the theatrum mundi as well as for communicating the rules and mechanisms of the worldly stage” (Baumbach and Nünning 2009, 10). Using literature in the language classroom further promotes increasing “awareness of different values, beliefs, social structures and so on” and can be a fun and exciting way to achieve understanding (Lazar 1993, 62). Moreover, it is suggested in the curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools (AHS) in Austria that literature should be included in English foreign language classes so the students can develop a comprehensive lexical repertoire and to cover various topics (BMBWF 2004, 4).

In the past, there have been concerns whether racial stereotypes should be implemented in school because the teacher might perpetuate the stereotypes rather than dispel them (Forsman 2010, 501). Forsman (ibid., 503) posits that the foreign language classroom is particularly well suited to work on racial stereotypes because foreign cultures and the perception of them are a constituent part of it; furthermore, English as a lingua franca
represents an excellent opportunity to bridge differences and gaps in understanding. Bryam’s model of *Intercultural Communicative Competence* illustrates how not only linguistic skills are needed for intercultural competence but also sociolinguistic skills and discourse competence (ibid., 502f.). By implementing perceptions of race and discussing these complex issues, intercultural competence should be increased. The Austrian curriculum also promotes tackling the issue of racial stereotypes in the language classroom to develop intercultural competence (BMBWF 2004, 1). One of the aims of language classes should be to enhance understanding of other cultures and ways of living and to promote a non-prejudicial and non-stereotypical perception of cultures (ibid.).

According to Forsman (ibid., 505) stereotypes hinder cultural understanding and she points out that everybody holds stereotypes. Van Ausdale and Feagin (as cited in Rosier 2003, 244) have found that children as young as three years old start forming stereotypes and use racial concepts to advance their own goals. Bogan and Slaughter-Defoe (2012, 7) support these findings and indicate that stereotype-consistent stories are remembered more easily than stories which counter stereotypes. After increasing racial prejudices during the ages of 7-8, adolescents seem to have more neutral views of racial Others but it could not be determined whether racial bias actually decreased in older children (ibid.). It could be proven, though, that children and adolescents from minority groups, who are stigmatized, are more keenly aware of racial prejudices and stereotyping (ibid., 15).

Nowadays media strongly influences adolescent’s perception of other cultures and media often perpetuates stereotypes (Forsman 2010, 505.). Just as Loomba (2002, 167) suggests that theatre had the ability to change and influence perceptions of the Other in the early modern age, new media plays an important role in conveying stereotypes and certain world views today (Childs 2014, 291). Childs (ibid., 292) found that adolescents were capable of leading a “sophisticated and complex discourse” about media representation concerning issues such as race, class and gender. As exposure to online media grows, it is important to tackle simplifications in racial representations with students. Childs (ibid., 296) also proposes how using historical cultural resources helps to discuss racial stereotypes. While Childs (ibid.) refers to popular culture resources in his article, the concept can also be applied to Shakespeare, who, strictly speaking, does not belong in the popular culture movement, but he and his works are a cultural phenomenon in their own right, so much so that Shakespeare is still widely discussed today. Furthermore, Childs (ibid., 299) asserts how popular culture still perpetuates racial stereotypes and serves “to reinforce old ideas about how individuals from certain groups should behave or think.”
8.2. Lesson Plan and Activities

The following lesson plan is directed at a fourth year of an Upper Secondary School (AHS Oberstufe) in Austria and because language classes are usually divided into two groups, the class should contain about 14 students. I have decided to tackle this topic in this grade because the students will require a B2 skill level in all language skills (more on this below) to be able to fulfil the goals of this lesson plan. This lesson sequence covers about six to seven lessons excluding reading time at home. The aim of this lesson plan is that students will have read Shakespeare’s *Othello*, will have explored the different stereotypes encountered in the play concerning black men and will have contrasted it with the development of the racial stereotype of the black man today. Furthermore, the students will have understood how stereotypes are limiting, usually not truthful and how the media can perpetuate a stereotype and change perceptions of users.

Concerning the B2 level of this lesson plan, I have chosen it in regards to the CEFR (COE 2018). Students achieve a B2 level by the time they graduate and take the school-leaving exam and the CEFR (ibid., 206) recommends including plays in lessons if the students have a B2 level. Knowledge about literature, in particular Shakespeare, can already be acquired at a B1 level for occupational purposes, e.g. to socialise with business partners or clients (ibid.). Furthermore, to work with literature and the specific purposes of this lesson plan, students need to have a B2 level in order to be able to read “with a large degree of independence” (ibid., 65). Even though we will re-read important passages in class, students will still have to read the majority of the play at home. While reading plays is included for the descriptors of a B2 level, the CEFR also mentions that the language should be “straightforward [and] unelaborated” (ibid.). Therefore, I have decided to use the *No Fear Shakespeare* edition of *Othello* for my students\(^\text{10}\). This edition contains the complete text of the original play alongside a translation that transforms Shakespeare’s English into an everyday English and boasts helpful commentary. Thus, students at a B2 level should be able to read Othello with little difficulty and they can use appropriate reference sources if necessary (cf. ibid.). Moreover, students need at least a B2 level to interact effectively with the play, to “relate the emotions experienced by a character in a work” (ibid., 116) and to show “awareness of the thematic, structural and formal features in order to give their well-thought-out opinion” (ibid., 117). Working with stereotypes and prejudices held against other cultures is specifically mentioned in the CEFR as well (ibid., 233) and the CEFR elaborates that students with a B2 level “can

\(^{10}\) [https://www.amazon.de/No-Fear-Shakespeare-Othello-William/dp/1586638521](https://www.amazon.de/No-Fear-Shakespeare-Othello-William/dp/1586638521)
recognise cultural stereotypes – favourable and discriminatory – and describe how they influence his/her own or another’s behaviour” (ibid., 233). This lesson plan further includes an interview, where students have to understand the main points from a discussion, which also refers to a B2 skill level (ibid., 66). A written essay reacting to the interview is also part of the lesson plan and students will have to be able to develop “an argument, giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view and explaining the advantages and disadvantages of various options” (ibid., 77). Working on this topic entails discussions in class and reflecting on personal experiences and opinions; therefore, students should develop clear arguments and give reasons to justify a certain viewpoint, which refers to a B2 or B1 level (ibid., 72).

Forsman (2010, 504) points out that in order to successfully work on racial stereotypes with students, lessons should follow certain components. First, students should be provided with concrete experience, e.g. through drama, the use of films (ibid.). Second, students should be afforded the opportunity to reflect on their observations through reflective essays or thought questions (ibid.). Third, abstract conceptualisation should be included, which can be achieved through theory construction and lecturing (ibid.). Fourth, active experimentation is vital as well so students can learn through projects or fieldwork (ibid.). Forsman (ibid.) highlights the importance of incorporating elements, where students participate actively and do not only receive passive teacher input because passive input might not automatically entail learning. Thus, I have tried to integrate all of these four components in my lesson plan.

At the beginning of this sequence of lessons, I want to raise the students’ interest in the play and Shakespeare by showing a video on YouTube, where Akala, a British rapper, journalist and activist, performs one of Shakespeare’s most famous poems, Sonnet 18, in a contemporary way.11 This should highlight how Shakespeare and his works are still relevant today and can be reinterpreted and performed in a singularly different way than Shakespeare intended it. Then I would introduce the play Othello to the students, give a short synopsis and hand out the copies of the book. Before reading the book, I want to familiarise my students with the historical, cultural and theatrical background of the time the play was written. To read and effectively work with a play, it is always important to contextualise the play (cf. Baumbach and Nünning 2009, 14/17) and point out differences in perceptions, political environments, race relations etc. This would be done with teacher input and a handout indicating the most important facts about the time. The English Touring Theatre actually offers a very insightful leaflet about Othello, which includes information about Shakespeare, the play’s background.

11 It should be noted that I would only show a short clip from 5:17-6:15: https://youtu.be/DSbtkLA3GrY?t=317.
and inspirations as well as a character overview (ETT 2018) – all which could be used well for an overall introduction to the drama. Sections concerning the particular production of the play would be excluded from an eventual handout.

I would like to start reading the play in class but let the students read the bulk of the play at home. The students would have about two to three weeks to read the play at home and then I would like to resume working on the drama together in class. At first, I want to get a picture of the students’ impression of the book, which can be done with different methods, e.g. a plenary discussion, where every students is allowed to give their opinion, or – because time is short in every class – the students could discuss their impressions in small groups. As homework, the students will have to write a short review of the book, including their opinions on the play. At this point, I do not specifically aim at introducing the stereotypes of the Moor yet but want honest opinions, which are not influenced by my input.

Afterwards, I want to immerse the students and myself into the topic of stereotyping and the (de-)construction of the racial stereotypes in Othello. I want to raise the students’ awareness regarding stereotypes by preparing a couple of pictures, where members of different racial groups (not only blacks) are portrayed. The students are then asked to give their associations to the people on the pictures by giving prompts and help from the teacher, e.g. Do you think a typical black person/Jew/etc. dresses like this? What job do you think this person has? What kind of person do you think this person is? etc. Most likely, the students will recount stereotypical perceptions of the people of different racial backgrounds and will come up with a number of different racial stereotypes. However, there is also the possibility that the students will be aware of the stereotypes and will not endorse such generalisations. In this case, I will inform the students about the purposes of this exercise and tell them that I was actively looking for the stereotypes inherent in the people presented on the picture. Later, the students will be asked to evaluate the truthfulness, correctness and fairness of the stereotypes found and students will discuss these issues in small groups. The students should not only reflect the perception of other races but also the perceptions about Austrians and stereotypes about Austrians, which are certainly not always true. Moreover, it is important that the students reflect on where they have these stereotypes from. Do they come from certain sources like the Internet, books, movies? If so, the students need to become aware of the role media plays in their lives and how it can influence their perception about other cultures.

At this point, it would be advisable to revise the input the students have received at the beginning of this lesson sequence because two to three weeks have passed since then. Furthermore, the students will receive more input on race and racial stereotypes regarding the
Moor during early modern times. This also includes features such as language and metre because the Other was said to have a limited command of language. Furthermore, it should be pointed out to the students that stereotypes are not always presented explicitly, but that prejudices and stereotypes can be ‘hidden’ in the play in the form of subtle messages, characters or certain plot elements. Moreover, I will provide the students with some strategies, which can be used to analyse the (de-)construction of racial stereotypes such as presented in this thesis (see Chapter 2.3.).

Then, I want to closely work with different passages from the play to analyse Othello’s racial stereotypes and find out where they are perpetuated and where they might be dispelled. I will provide some vital passages for the students to discuss, e.g. Othello’s monologue in 1.3. (Oth., 1.3. 18-169), Desdemona’s insistence on Othello’s virtue (ibid., 34.4. 24-29) and Othello’s final speech (ibid., 5.2. 340-355). I also want to encourage students to find their own passages and instances, where they see the (de-)construction of a stereotype. I want to do this in a group project, where groups with three to four members work on a chart, where they categorise passages from the drama into instances of construction of a stereotype and instances of deconstruction of a stereotype. The students are not left to their own devices in this but will get input and help from the teacher if necessary. The results of this will be discussed in the plenary or the groups could all briefly present their findings in front of the class, which then will be followed by a discussion. For the next step of the lesson sequence, all students should save the charts.

To get more input on this topic, students are shown an interview\(^\text{12}\), where three different (black) people give their opinion on Othello and whether the drama perpetuates racism or not. The students should listen carefully to the different viewpoints presented in the interview and take notes. In a pre-listening activity, the students will get input on vocabulary needed to understand the interview. In the next step, the students are asked to write an essay of about 400 words about racial stereotypes in Othello. The students should work with the following essay question:

**Which of the following statements do you agree with the most? Why? Why not?**

- The portrayal of racial stereotypes in Othello in a production nowadays is okay because during Shakespeare’s time, racial attitudes were different and the play is still great art.

\(^{12}\) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zAcn8v9qZv
The portrayal of racial stereotypes in Othello in a production nowadays is not okay because racial attitudes have changed, attitudes of the past are unacceptable and productions today should include elements that indicate the racial injustices.

These questions should prompt the students to a particular opinion, the students should give reasons for their choices, and also why they did not choose the other option. In their essay, the students will be able to use their charts and the point of views of the interviewed to indicate the racial stereotypes inherent in the play and argue for or against presenting them in a production nowadays. This conforms to the CEFR’s (COE 2018, 77) standard that B2 students should be able to develop an argument systematically and synthesise information and arguments from a number of sources.

This essay could mark the end of this lesson sequence if the teacher is satisfied with the outcome. But to ensure that students really understood how stereotypes are negative and perpetuate harmful prejudices, I would advise to incorporate a more contemporary source to racial stereotypes as well to contrast it with the past and Shakespeare’s approach to stereotypes. This would be possible by using different music videos, where the stereotypes about the black community are endorsed, e.g. Snoop Dogg’s music video to Drop it like it’s hot. This particular video endorses several stereotypes about African Americans, e.g. drug and alcohol use, fancy cars, scantily clad women, lots of money to be used on money and cars. As in the beginning of this lesson sequence, where students were asked to identify the racial stereotypes, the stereotypes here will be pointed out again. This should be followed by some input of how traditional black music like rap and hip-hop have often perpetuated harmful stereotypes (cf. Reyna, Brandt and Tendayi Viki 2009; Nelson 1992). To contrast this harmful portrayal of race and racial stereotypes in music videos, students will also watch the music video for Childish Gambino’s This is America. The release of this music video garnered a lot of attention in the music world and beyond after its release in 2018 because it explores race relations and racism in America artistically. While the music video seems silly and quite brutal at first, an in depth analysis reveals how Childish Gambino uses this platform for social commentary on topics such as gun violence on black people and the 2015 Charleston shooting, where nine black people were killed in a church by a white supremacist (Gajanan 2018). Furthermore, the video also highlights diverse African (American) culture and its roots,

13 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1MQ95FhgUE
14 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYOjWnS4cMY
15 The song and music video went ahead and won four major awards at the 2019 Grammy Awards, including Record and Song of the Year, Best Rap/Sung performance and Best Music Video.
16 The teacher should definitely include a warning about the violent images in the video.
e.g. dance moves are reminiscent of hip-hop and traditional African dance elements (ibid.). It is also worthwhile to look at the lyrics in particular and not just rely on the visual treatment of the topic. The role of media in the perception of race and stereotypes can be introduced here once more and elaborated on. This last video should illustrate how contemporary media works to undermine the harmful perception of the black community and negate simplistic views of their culture.

To summarise, this lesson sequence aimed at illustrating the harmfulness and unfairness of racial stereotypes with the help of different sources. Shakespeare’s *Othello* worked as a window into the past, showed the beginnings of the racial stereotypes about the black community and how Othello suffered under racial assumptions about him. *Othello* and past perceptions were then contrasted with contemporary portrayals of black people in music videos with the goal of highlighting awareness about racial stereotypes today and the hybridity of the black community.
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