Abstract

The thesis is concerned with the portrayal of the minorities in William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello, the Moor of Venice*. By means of close reading and the compare-and-contrast approach, the two main minority representatives – Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and Othello in *Othello* – are analysed from various perspectives. A special attention is paid to the comparison of the way they are presented to the audiences and the way they present themselves; how do they operate in the majority society and how their identities transform throughout the plays.

The introductory chapter defines the key terms relevant for the thesis, the structure of the thesis and its main goals.

Chapter 1 provides an insight into the perception of Jews and Moors in the European context from the Middle Ages up to the Early Modern period. Special attention is paid to the variety of popular stereotypes, prejudices and myths circulating in England and how are these reflected in the portrayal of the two minorities in the literature of the period.

The main focus in Chapter 2 is on the analysis of the mutual relationship between the majority and the Other in the two plays, on the respects in which the Other is differentiated from and distanced by the majority and how these two groups coexist in the given context. Consequently, the major part of this chapter deals with the close reading and interpretation of the main representatives of the Other in both plays.

Chapter 3 focuses on the process of identity transformation of the Other throughout the plays. The whole process is observed from several perspectives: stimuli of the process, the various stages of it and the consequences of the process for the minority representatives.

**Key words:** William Shakespeare; *The Merchant of Venice*; *Othello, the Moor of Venice*; Elizabethan England; Venice; stereotypes; prejudices; minorities; Jews; Moors; identity; identity transformation