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**Suicide as a Way of Redemption, Salvation, and
Reunion in Shakespeare's Selected Tragedies:
*Othello, Macbeth, and Romeo and Juliet***

Master's Thesis

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ETİK BEYAN

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ONAY

Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Ana Bilim Dalı öğrencisi Açelya Su Türkeli tarafından hazırlanan “Suicide as a Way of Redemption, Salvation, and Reunion in Shakespeare’s Selected Plays: *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*” başlıklı tez çalışması 11/07/2025 tarih ve 15.00 saatinde yapılan tez savunma sınavında aşağıdaki jüri tarafından OY BİRLİĞİ ile YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ olarak KABUL edilmiştir.

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**SUICIDE AS A WAY OF REDEMPTION, SALVATION, AND REUNION IN
SHAKESPEARE’S SELECTED TRAGEDIES: *OTHELLO*, *MACBETH*, AND *ROMEO
AND JULIET***

Açelya Su TÜRKEİ

MA Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This thesis evaluates the central characters’ act of voluntarily ending their lives in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet* as a way of redemption, salvation, and reunion in the context of the decision they make in the face of emotions such as guilt, remorse, and love. In this study, suicide is evaluated not as a psychological collapse or despair experienced by tragic characters, but as a means of the individual’s journey of subjectivation in the Renaissance Period, which is a process of self-return in which the medieval religious oppression was removed. Therefore, this study argues that the act of suicide in these three works of Shakespeare is not only a cathartic phenomenon from an Aristotelian point of view, but it also becomes a tool that individuals make meaningful according to their own ethical value systems and serves their emotions and experiences. The thesis utilizes Émile Durkheim’s sociological typology of suicide, Edwin Schneidman’s concept of “psychache” and Albert Camus’ definition of suicide in his existentialist philosophy. In this framework, Othello’s suicide is interpreted as a way of redemption for the murder he committed, Lady Macbeth’s suicide as a way of salvation from the remorse of conscience, and Romeo and Juliet’s suicides as a way reunion of two young people who succumbed to the social and feudal order in the other world.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Free Will, Renaissance, Suicide, Othello, Lady Macbeth, Romeo, Juliet

**SHAKESPEARE’İN SEÇİLİ TRAJEDİLERİNDE KEFARET, KURTULUŞ VE
KAVUŞMA YOLU OLARAK İNTİHAR: *OTHELLO*, *MACBETH* VE *ROMEO VE
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ZET

Bu tez, Shakespeare’in *Othello*, *Macbeth* ve *Romeo ve Juliet* eserlerinde yařamına kendi isteđiyle son veren ana karakterlerin bu eylemini; deneyimledikleri suçluluk, vicdan azabı ve ařk gibi duygular karřısında verdikleri karar bađlamında kefarete, kurtuluř ve kavuřma yolu olarak deđerlendirmektedir. Çalıřmada intihar, trajik karakterlerin yařadıkları psikolojik bir çkř ya da çaresizlik olarak deđil, bir nevi Orta Çađ din baskısının ortadan kalktıđı ve bireyin kendine dnř sreci olan Rnesans Dnemi’nde bireyin zneleřme yolculuđuna bir ara olarak deđerlendirilmiřtir. Dolayısıyla bu çalıřma, Shakespeare’in bu  eserinde intihar eyleminin Aristotelesi bakıř aısıyla katartik bir olgu olmasının yanı sıra, bireylerin kendi etik deđer sistemlerine gre anlamlı kıldıđı ve onların duygu ve deneyimlerine hizmet eden bir ara hline gelir. Tez, kuramsal zeminde mile Durkheim’in sosyolojik intihar tipolojisinden, Edwin Schneidman’in “psychache” (ruhsal acı) konseptinden ve Albert Camus’nn varoluřu felsefesinde intiharın tanımından yararlanmaktadır. Bu çerevede, Othello’nun intiharı iřlediđi cinayet iin bir kefarete yolu; Lady Macbeth’in intiharı yařadıđı vicdan azabından bir kurtuluř yolu; Romeo ve Juliet’in intiharları ise toplumsal ve feodal dzene yenik dřmř iki gencin teki dnyada kavuřma yolu olarak yorumlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Shakespeare, zgr İrade, Rnesans, İntihar, Othello, Lady Macbeth, Romeo, Juliet

DEDICATION

To the memory of all those who silently struggle with their invisible suffering, who suffer loneliness in crowds and who end their lives by suicide. May your memory inspire us to listen more attentively, look more deeply and show more compassion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Human life spans the period between birth and death. While birth is taken as the beginning and death as the ending of life, the existence of the latter has been the subject of more debates and philosophical inquiries throughout history largely due to the fact that what happens to man after death is unknown. Being a unique part of the natural order of the universe, death has been traditionally defined as “irreversible cessation of spontaneous cardiac and respiratory function” (Morrison, 1971, p. 696). Although it is commonly agreed that death is an enemy and something to be feared on account of its role in putting an end to the visible, physical and concrete life in this world and pushing those who are left behind in suspense about the rest of the story, the meaning of death varies widely depending on ideological, religious, sociological, emotional and philosophical backgrounds. In this sense, not only is the issue of death treated in terms of its ability to end one’s life, but there also appear frequent and hot debates on the way(s). of death. Even the fact that one dies is sometimes overwhelmed by the way or means of death. In this sense, it is the cultural, religious, social and traditional perspectives that divide death into two main groups: natural death on one hand and unnatural death on the other.

In simple terms, natural death can be explained as the end of life for such natural reasons as an illness, or organ failure. In medical terms, similarly, the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws in 1980 formulated the Uniform Determination of Death Act as follows:

An individual who has sustained either (1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions, or (2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem is dead. A determination of death must be made in accordance with accepted medical standards (Uniform Determination of Death Act [UDDA], 1981)

In this type of death, the person dies not because of the anthropic factors but because of the factors that are already working as a mechanism in the course of universe (Hume, 2017, p. 21). In other words, natural death is often treated as a divine issue regarding the fate of one determined by God, who is believed to know when one is to be born and to die. However, because the person as a supreme being, when

compared to the other beings living on the Earth, has already been in this unstoppable mechanism of life and he constantly makes contributions to the work and continuation of this mechanism, he himself can be a contributor to the end of his own life either through his awareness or unawareness of it. What makes a case of death unnatural is, on the other hand, the death choice and/or decision of the one who dies. Just as birth is accepted as a natural event without any intervention and/or contribution of the one who is born, so death is accepted as natural only when the one who dies faces or embraces death without his own determination to die as when he attempts at suicide.

In this context, the concept of suicide is traditionally associated with unnatural death, as man assumes himself to be the terminator of his own life in violation of God's will and order, as reflected in the saying, for example, of the living American talk-show host and satirist Bill Maher: "Suicide is our way of telling God, 'You can't fire me – I quit.'" (as cited in Challa, 2011, p. 200). However, what is called suicide is open to dispute in modern terms, opening the traditions and traditional and/or religious beliefs to discussion and inquisition. What distinguishes one's engagement in a behaviour that will most probably result in his own death in the long run from his committing suicide or killing himself in an instant manner is the presence of his deliberate intention to die because it is recognised in most philosophical analyses of suicide that "the crucial factor in ascertaining whether a person's death should count as suicide is not whether the person caused his or her own death but whether it was intended that the actions would cause the death" (Cholbi, 2007, p. 155). Therefore, suicide can be depicted as an act of killing oneself intendedly within a short period of time or instantaneously. If death takes a relatively longer time than few minutes or hours, for example, the common tendency is to disregard it as a suicide. To give a specific example, when a person smokes too much though aware that smoking is much likely to kill one in the long run, he happens to increase the chance that he will die of lung cancer, which usually takes a long period of time. What makes it a long process is that the development of the disease and its rise to fatality may often cover too long a time and/or it may not even be the cause of any cancer in some cases. Viewed from this perspective, it cannot be said that a smoker has pursued the aim of committing suicide just by smoking, because what he is after while smoking is not the expectation of dying but that of taking some sort of pleasure in smoking though transiently, and the hazardous effects of smoking are disregarded or ignored in this sense.

Unnatural death, on the other hand, encompasses a more complex terrain, involving deaths due to reasons that transcend the boundaries of the organic rhythm of life. This refers to the killing of a person in unnatural ways or interventions from inner or outer forces, such as homicide, suicide, medical interventions, drug overdoses, etc. The presence of differing views on the (un)naturalness of death is largely attributed to the authority of religious sources and interpretations on the worldly issues for long periods of time, especially until the late 19th century, when man began to interpret the worldly issues not just on religious sources but on scientific and intellectual, namely secular and individual, ways of thinking and reasoning. In Christianity and Islam, for example, one is strictly banned from killing himself on purpose as life is accepted as a kind of gift bestowed upon him by the Creator: “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (Jacob: 1-17). Any attempt at suicide is, therefore, deemed as an intervention into God’s will in that God is the only authority that decides on the time of the one who is to die and on the one’s lifespan (Corinthians 3:16-17; Surah Al-An’am 6:2). Indeed, not only is suicide forbidden, but homicide is also strictly banned and presented as one of the most sinful acts in all religions of the world. There are eight verses, for example, in the Quran which strictly forbid one to kill those who believe in God: “And whoso kills a believer intentionally, his reward shall be Hell wherein he shall abide. And God¹ will be wroth with him and will curse him and will prepare for him a great punishment” (4:93). Thus, the unnatural, or sinful, aspect of suicide can be said to be resulting from the act of killing in the religious context. If killing someone is a sinful act, so is killing oneself.

While there are some other verses that refer to unnatural deaths such as martyrdom and homicide in the Quran, there is no surah in which the word “suicide” is found, and it is hardly possible to see a verse that mentions killing oneself. However, surah 4:29 is the only passage that clearly proscribes self-killing in the Quran: “O believers! Do not devour one another’s wealth illegally, but rather trade by mutual consent. And do not kill each other or yourselves. Surely God is ever Merciful to you” Surah 2:195 also emphasizes that one should not harm his own body: “And spend in

¹ In the Quran and Islam, God has ninety-nine names. “Allah”, on the other hand, is the most frequently-used name while mentioning God in Islamic countries. However, as the thesis is about the Western Culture and Literature, the name “God” will be preferred while referring to “Allah”.

the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good” In light of this verse, it can be understood that one should protect his body offered to him by God, and thus he should not even harm his own body and himself, let alone commit suicide.

It seems crystal clear that not only in Islam but also in Christianity, preceding it in chronological terms, is one absolutely required to avoid killing himself as it is considered to be a kind of rebellion against God’s will. Because life is an amazing phenomenon that God bestows on human beings, they are not entitled or allowed to end their life, for it is solely God Himself who has the right to take the life from them as the giver of life to them. Accordingly, it is stated in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 of the New Testament: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple” This means that “the body” given to human beings as a kind of gift by God should be protected well and meticulously. It is important to know that in the Bible, human beings are not accepted as the owner of their own bodies, which means that the body given to them is a loaned gift for a certain period of time: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). In this context, it can be understood from the Bible that a person is not the authority that decides whether his life is to come to an end or not at his own will, namely by committing suicide.

Despite the strict pursuit of biblical verses until the secularization of man and life towards the late 15th century, not excluding the case of suicide, the biblical ban on suicide appears to have been alleviated with the progress of Protestantism along with Catholicism since the early 1500s. This is best illustrated by Emile Durkheim’s statement in his famous book entitled *Suicide*: “...everywhere without exception, Protestants show far more suicides than the followers of other confessions” (2005, p. 109). Jeffrey Watt also argues that suicide was “a product of early modern Europe”, explaining that “suicide as we know it had taken j-hold among Europeans by the late 1700s” because the Enlightenment, he says, caused a fundamental transformation of European society, leading to modern understandings of family life and voluntary death (2004, p. 8). This, however, should not be taken as meaning that suicide was allowed with the rise of Protestantism, but rather man gradually felt free to refer to his own free

will in his decisions and actions from then on.

With the above interpretation of suicide in mind, it would be better to turn to historical and contemporary definitions and discussions of it in modern context. Suicide, meaning one's killing oneself deliberately, has been a common phenomenon since ancient times. It derives from the Latin *sui*, which means 'self', and *cidium* meaning 'killing'. Though there exist many different cultural and scientific approaches to suicide today, especially with the impetus of psychologically in-depth studies and researches on psyche, human nature and motives following the epoch-making hypotheses and claims of Sigmund Freud in the late 19th and early 20th century, there is a common consensus that suicide is not the right way one should follow. However, for many reasons such as depression, crises, and/or exposure to violence and/or traumatic behaviour either by someone in or out of family, one may tend to commit suicide.

It's now believed that around 43 percent of the variability in suicidal behaviour among the general population can be explained by genetics, while the remaining 57 percent is attributable to environmental factors. ... The vast majority of those who die by suicide, with some estimates as high as 90 percent, have underlying psychiatric conditions, especially mood disorders such as depressive illness and bipolar disorder. (Bering, 2018, p. 3)

Even though an overall correlation has been established between suicide and psychological disorders, one can also impulsively commit suicide in the moment of a crisis as well (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>), which can be defined as an abnormal state of mind imposed on one by outside forces with no intention of doing so beforehand. This makes it a unique act or experience on the side of the one who chooses suicide as a way of dying as can be seen in the famous words of Schneidman: "Each suicide drama occurs in the minds of a unique individual" (1993, p. 3).

For a brief history of suicide, except for the Biblical and Quranic approach to it as outlined above, Ancient Greece is often necessarily the starting point. However, Confucius, a famous Chinese philosopher who lived in the 6th century BCE and is commonly considered to be the greatest of all sages, deserves a mention in this context

as he precedes the known Greek philosophers. Confucius refers in his works to the fact that a person should protect his own body, implying it as his duty. In his *Analects* 8.3, he depicts Master Zeng on his deathbed. Zeng asks his disciples to uncover his feet and hands to make sure that he managed to keep his body intact and he has physical integrity (Battin, 2015, p. 54). It can be clearly seen in the *Analects* 8.3 that Zeng is satisfied as he could preserve his body, accepted as a kind of duty for human beings. In this context, it can be inferred that according to Confucius, one must not harm or exterminate his own body or life. In his *Analects* 15.3, however, the only context in which the act of killing oneself is not seen as a perpetration is that one's death will be a favour to the goodness of life. Therefore, one can apply to the way of killing oneself with the aim of achieving *ren*, a term referring to the virtuousness of altruism of a person in order to promote and protect a community. However, *Analects* 15.3 does not necessarily seem to be concentrating primarily on the act of killing oneself, but rather it seems to be focusing on what is necessary for the achievement of *ren* (Battin, 2015, p. 55). This could as well be called altruistic suicide, which would appear in the critical writings of Durkheim centuries later. In a sense, Confucius privileges the unity, solidarity and continuity of the society and individual in it, as can be seen in "theory of five relationships" considering "the ruler above subject, father above son, husband above wife, elder brother above the younger one, and friend above another friend" (Confucius, 1967, p. 313). In the similar vein, man could as well be taken as above his body, which requires him to take utmost care of it and avoid harming it, let alone kill himself.

In Ancient Greece, almost one century after Confucius, suicide is not seen as an acceptable act almost for the same reasons as in Islam and Christianity: Life is a gift conferred on mankind by the gods, and the act of killing oneself is viewed as a rebellion against the gods' will. The only exception for such an acceptance is when it is preferred and carried for such reasons of significance as bereavement, illness, honour, and so on (O'Connor & Sheehy, 2000, pp. 30-31). The earliest known philosopher of the age is Socrates, the teacher of Plato and one of the key figures in the history of philosophy, who lectures against the act of killing oneself. To him, "man is a prisoner who has no right to open the door of his prison and run away. ... A man should wait, and not take his own life until the god summons him" (as cited in Sacharoff, 1972, p. 118). However, it is widely known that Socrates committed suicide by drinking a cup of

hemlock when he was sentenced to capital punishment for impiety and corrupting the new generation of Athens with his philosophy. Most probably, Socrates wanted to make a decision about his time of death rather than leaving it to the discretion of others and intended to open the door and just exit the prison instead of being pushed out. In this case, the side that conflicts with the divine will of the gods is not Socrates but the Athenian jury that has condemned him to death penalty for unjust reasons. His can, therefore, be categorised as an act of suicide for honour. A contemporary and student of Socrates, Plato declares himself in his *Phaedo* to be strictly against the act of killing oneself, stating:

... perhaps you will be surprised if I tell you that these men [those for whom death is better than life], for whom it would be better to die, may not do themselves a service, but that they must await a benefactor from without. (1951, p. 6)

From this aspect, Plato can be said to have believed that death is something universal and it should take place due to outer interventions rather than an inner one or self-determination. He also considers the gods to be the guardians of men and men to be a part of their property, questioning one's individual autonomy on his own body and timing his own death. (1951, p. 6).

Aristotle accompanies his predecessors in his treatment of suicide, stating "What the law does not order it forbids" (Aristotle, 1893, p. 177). If one hurts himself voluntarily, he argues, he happens to act unjustly against not himself but the laws, and thus the state; that is why the state punishes and "pronounces a particular kind of disfranchisement upon the man who destroys himself" (Aristotle, 1893, p. 177). For instance, whoever commits suicide is not considered to deserve proper death rituals and last rite in Ancient Greek society, so the last rite is not conducted for a person who has died because of killing himself (Retterstøl, 1998, p. 2). This punishment of not conducting the last rite for a dead person in Ancient Greece is deemed as humiliating for him and his family that would be in shame and cursed by the gods because a dead one's soul is believed not to be in peace in the afterlife if not buried in accordance with the last rite rituals and such an act is believed to threaten the social order.

Another classical approach to suicide comes from the Hippocratic School, a small group of physicians almost contemporaneous with the above philosophers, in

their opposition to what is called euthanasia as a practice of ending one's own life with medical interventions in the hands of physicians either upon the request of the patient or his close relatives. The name of the school is attributed to Hippocrates, who lived in the late 5th century BCE. He is called the central figure and even the father of western medicine in that medicine consisted of trial-and-error methods until his development of empirical approach to it. His ethical principles and guidelines in medical practices are collectively called "Hippocratic Oath" of huge importance in today's medical community and it is that which determines the duties and responsibilities of physicians against the patient to this day. The original form of the oath basically requires physicians to see patients as "more than objects" and to treat each person who suffers from an illness even if it is incurable (Bando, 2018, p. 9). This is almost tantamount to admitting that physicians are not allowed to leave the patient to the arms of death even if there is hardly any or no hope for him to escape from the clutches of his disease. Moreover, the original oath also requires physicians not to give any drug to anybody and/or patients at the behest of the patient or his relatives as long as that drug does not serve the treatment and it is only demanded by others (Bando, 2018, p. 9). This prohibition necessarily means that physicians are not permitted ethically to give a deadly drug to a patient with the purpose of hastening his death, let alone killing him to prevent him from suffering from the disease more even if it is the patient's request.

Of almost equal importance as a classical philosopher, Epicurus is renowned for his emphasis on the principle of joy and pleasure. Not surprisingly, he suggests that death is a kind of "annihilation" and is not to be feared because as long as an individual exists, death is not there. And once it does come, he ceases to exist and he is no longer there:

So death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more. (as cited in Oates, 1940, p. 31)

In this context, it would not be wrong to say that Epicurean philosophy reduces death to "nothing" by degrading its importance in human life due to the fact that death is something beyond the perceivable realm of human beings, putting death out of judgement. However, as it welcomes such a sharp reality of life, it could as well be

said that Epicurean philosophy undermines the beliefs of common sense such as the fact that homicide, or suicide, which can be the other categories of death under the title of “unnatural deaths”, is not the way an individual should follow. Basing his philosophy upon the principle of pleasure, Epicurus would naturally condemn these two actions of killing either oneself or someone else owing to his belief that both would be the source of pain.

As for Stoicism, another school of philosophy that flourished in Ancient Greece and Rome, life is an opportunity for man to improve his inner wisdom and ethical perfection. The Stoics diverge from the Athenian philosophers in that they are in favour of the fact that one should have the free will to end one’s own life, which is an act or choice of wisdom. Seneca, a famous Stoic philosopher of the 1st century A.D., for example asserts in his *Letters on Ethics to Lucilius*: “The wise man will live as long as he ought, not as long as he can” (Seneca, 2015, p. 209). From this perspective, ending one’s own life is thought of as a necessity rather than an ability to do so in certain circumstances, especially when “what he has is only a dribble”, because “no one can lose much [if he dies]” when this is the case (Seneca, 2015, p. 210). According to Seneca in his “Letter 70”, mankind is in “a prison without walls” and one can find an opportunity to smoothly quit the prison in lots of ways (Seneca, 2015, p. 213). Contrary to the common belief in Ancient Greece that committing suicide is a kind of rebellion against the nature as it decrees the time of one’s end, Seneca opposes and criticizes one’s act of leaving the time of his death to nature for “blocking the road to freedom”, and he also asserts that man should decide how he will die as “the best death is the one he prefers”:

If one is a death with torture and the other easy and uncomplicated, why not put out your hand and take the latter? If I were getting ready to sail, I’d pick out a ship; if I were getting ready to move in somewhere, I’d pick out a house; just so, if I were about to die, I would choose my manner of death. Besides, in the same way as long duration does not of itself make life better, so long duration does make death worse. In death, even more than in other things, we ought to make allowances for temperament. Let a person make his exit according to his own inclination. Whether he prefers the sword or the noose or some poison that spreads through the bloodstream, let him go forward

with it and break the bonds of servitude. (Seneca, 2015, p. 211)

It goes without saying that suicide was a taboo subject in the monotheistic and medieval age of Christianity, spanning the time from the 2nd to the 15th century A.D. in the aftermath of the polytheistic Greek and Roman civilizations. Catholicism and the Bible as its holy book ban one strictly from committing suicide. In *The Divine Institutes*, one of the earliest systematic presentations of Christian theology in Latin, the prominent early Christian author and rhetorician Lactantius explains the issue of suicide in clear words, based on the divine order:

For if a homicide is guilty because he is a destroyer of man, he who puts himself to death is under the same guilt, because he puts to death a man. Yea, that crime may be considered to be greater, the punishment of which belongs to God alone. For as we did not come into this life of our own accord; so, on the other hand, we can only withdraw from this habitation of the body which has been appointed for us to keep, by the command of Him who placed us in this body that we may inhabit it, until He orders us to depart from it; and if any violence is offered to us, we must endure it with equanimity, since the death of an innocent person cannot be unavenged, and since we have a great Judge who alone always has the power of taking vengeance in His hands. (Battin, 2015, p. 166)

With the rise of the Renaissance, however, man begins to put himself in the centre of universe with his reasoning capacity and free will. Things begin to change, though gradually. Although the underlying reason for the emergence of the Renaissance in Europe shows a difference between Western and Eastern sources, it is commonly agreed that the conquest of Istanbul by Ottoman Empire, causing the philosophers and scholars to escape to Italy in the second half of the 15th century, is one of the most important events that paved the way for the emergence of the Renaissance. With the increase in the scientific curiosity and philosophical studies conducted by scholars in Italy, the Renaissance, which means “rebirth of man”, was born into the Continent and spread rapidly. Upon the emergence of the Renaissance in Italy from the mid-14th century on and the invention of printing press in the mid-15th century in Germany, which made way for cheaper and easier access to written sources, people started to question and problematize the authority of the Church and God’s

centrality to the cosmos and human life. Attaching a great deal of importance to human and putting him into the centre, the Renaissance required him to be more rational and individualist rather than being imprisoned by the strict rules of the Church and its understanding of God.

Between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries there emerged in Italy a distinctive culture that set the Italians apart from other peoples of the Western world, making them “the first-born among the sons of modern Europe” The distinguishing feature of this culture was a strong individualism. The highly individualistic society of the Italian Renaissance with its predilection for the secular and its emphasis on the well-rounded person constituted a counterbalance to the backward, corporate Church of the Middle Ages and the medieval world in general. (Mazzocco, 2006, p. 2)

Therefore, Ancient Greek and Roman texts were accepted as the main reference instead of the Bible for the way of living. With the importance attached to man rather than God and Classical antiquity rather than the Bible, there appeared Renaissance Humanism, an intellectual thought and worldview that emerged with the Renaissance from the mid-14th century on. Humanism “involves above all the rediscovery and study of ancient Greek and Roman texts, the restoration and interpretation of them and the assimilation of the ideas and values that they contain” (Mann, 1996, p. 2). An eminent critic on Renaissance Humanism, Eugenio Garin also comments on the issue:

The essence of (Italian) humanism is most clearly defined by its attitude to the civilization of the past. And that attitude is not confined to an admiration or a love for antiquity, nor to a greater knowledge of antiquity, but consists rather in a well-marked historical consciousness. ... The humanists discovered the classics because they managed to detach themselves from the barbarians (the medieval cultural figures) and comprehend their Latin without confusing it with their own Latin. It is for this reason that it is true to say that antiquity was discovered by the humanists. (1965, p. 14)

These shifts in the understanding of God’s and the Church’s role on human life can be said to have replaced, though sporadically, God’s will with the free will of man,

which meant one should reach one's potential and should have an individual autonomy on one's own life:

... The Renaissance, in a sense, stands for the return to this world of man who was believed to have been cut off from the world and who was lulled to sleep with the Catholic Church's preaches about the afterlife throughout the Middle Ages and obliged to the Church for the happiness and salvation of the afterlife. On the other hand, it [the Renaissance] is also considered to be the rebirth of science, education, culture, art and everything else related to human identity and selfhood in the world. This transition in which the Renaissance put man into the centre of the universe instead of God takes place in the fields of education and philosophy with Humanism; in religion and belief with the Reformation; in literature and art with Classicism. As a matter of fact, these three pillars consist of three separate developments that made the Renaissance possible and aimed at the freedom of man against the dogmatic oppression of the Church and, in a sense, to return to and find himself... (Çelik, 2024, p. 58)

The problematization of God's will on man's life paved the way for reinterpretation of man's authority on his own life, thus his body. In this context, the choice between life and death can be considered to have been left, though slightly in the beginning, to man's free will with the emergence and upheaval of the Renaissance Humanism. This case of choice between living and dying is also strongly emphasized in Deuteronomy 30:19, the fifth book of the Old Testament in Judaism: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live"

It is not a coincidence that Erasmus, often accepted as the father of Humanism and modern thought, wrote his ground-breaking work *On Free Will* in 1524, only to be followed by *The Enslaved Will* by Martin Luther, the pioneering figure of the Reformation. As the Renaissance could be accepted to be in its infancy when these two great figures of it produced their debate-provoking works that could be summarized in the popular expression "Erasmus laid the egg which Luther hatched," (Thompson, 1996, p. 342), a saying that recognises the debt of Luther and his

contemporary Reformers to Erasmus, they were both faced by strong opposition and attacks from the Church, but they did not hesitate to express themselves about what was then seen as “the characteristic difference between the evolving Catholic and Protestant positions concerning human nature, namely, the question of the freedom of the will” (Winter, 2013, p. 1). Erasmus defined free will as “the power of the human will whereby man can apply to or turn away from that which leads unto eternal salvation”, while Luther found man incapable of doing anything but continue to sin, except for God’s grace (Winter, 2013, p. 5). Such inflamed debates on the freedom of will or free will went into the neoclassical age, when the means whereby man turned to search for the meaning of life and living depended on his own reason and experience, not just on religious authorities’ lectures and tracts. In 1881, however, Howells gave a lecture about the free will of man in which he defined and described it as follows:

Man was made in the image and likeness of his Creator, and endowed with the powers necessary to this reciprocal relation. The chief of these endowments was freedom of the will; for without this freedom in its perfect form, love is impossible, since it ceases to be love whenever it is compelled. By virtue of this man was given the power to love whomsoever he willed to love, whether God and his neighbour himself and the world. (p. 4)

All such arguments and counter-arguments serve to confirm the existence of free will from the Renaissance into the early 20th century, and even from then on. Speaking of free will, one is quick to equate it with freedom to think, say and act. Thus, suicide can also be taken as an act, conducted by man’s free will and his ability to decide on human body to stop being alive. It is true that from the Early Modern Period of the mid-16th century on, man began to treat not only suicide but also many other issues, referring not to religious sources but to man-made ones on the whole. The same is true of such taboo subjects of the old times as suicide. Although its definition varies today and there is no absolute agreement on what suicide exactly means, many theories are able to narrow the meaning of the act. Michel de Montaigne, for example, the father of the essay form with his pioneering book, approaches suicide with a kind of tolerance like that of the Stoics, arguing that it could only be preferred for the purpose of escaping unbearable suffering. An important figure of the neoclassical thought in the

first half of the 17th century, René Descartes avoided debating the issue of suicide in depth but implied through his emphasis on the preservation of the self and rational mind that it was irrational and harmful to commit suicide. Seventeenth-century philosophers like Descartes usually seem to have condemned suicide as they were still under the influence of the dominant Christian moral framework. With the Enlightenment of the 18th century, however, attitudes to suicide seem to have changed significantly.

A famous philosopher who lived in the 18th century, when philosophers largely appeared to be questioning and doubting religious dogma with their emphasis on human reason and liberty, David Hume states in his study *Of Suicide*, published posthumously, that human being is gifted with “senses, passions, appetites, memory and judgement”, allowing him to be in the course of harmony and regulation of life, and universe (2017, p. 21). He claims that all beings exist in order to create benefit for their environment. Therefore, if an individual is not capable of providing benefit for the context in which he lives, he has a right to end his life for sure. Hume metaphorizes the act of killing oneself as “lawfully using the power that nature has conferred on man” (2017, p. 22). In this context, Hume argues that this natural right of individuals to decide whether to keep living or ending life is to be respected. On the other hand, Hume discusses the religious dimension of the act of killing oneself and he conducts a rational reasoning particularly about suicide as a rebellion against the will of God: “But in that case my death, even if I bring it about voluntarily, happens only with God’s consent” (Hume, 2017, p. 24). Hume argues that even when one attempts to end his own life voluntarily, he cannot manage to do so without God’s permission, implying paradoxically that even any rebellion against God’s will can be done within the limits of His will. He also objects to the religious dogmas, especially the Catholic beliefs and orders presenting suicide as a sin. He, in this regard, seems to be more liberal, secular and individual-centred in his treatment of suicide. As Kenneth Merrill also states in his detailed examination of Hume’s main arguments, Hume is of the opinion and belief that suicide is not, or need not be, a criminal act due to the fact that it is an offense against God or society or one’s own self (Merrill, 1999, p. 395). This is apparent in Hume’s statement: “If suicide be criminal, it must be a transgression of our duty to God, our neighbour, or ourselves” (Hume, 2017, p. 21).

Hume and Montesquieu, a French philosopher and historian of the 18th century,

are of almost the same mind about suicide. “When I am overcome by anguish, poverty, or humiliation, why must I be prevented from putting an end to my troubles, and harshly deprived of the remedy which lies in my power,” Montesquieu (Colt, 1991, p. 171) says in 1721. In a sense he seems to suggest that man is born to live for and with pleasure as life is a divine gift, for which one should be entitled or allowed to end his life if the life that he lives is laden not with pleasure but with pain, shame and unbearable disgrace at some point.

A similar attitude to suicide comes from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who discusses it with caution but considers suicide acceptable, but not absolutely, just in such cases as when human suffering is more than one can bear. In his novel *Nouvelle Héloïse*, Saint Preux is disillusioned with his love affair, under the influence of which he writes a letter to his English friend, saying that his act of killing himself is neither a crime nor a sin: “Every man has a right by nature to pursue what he thinks is good, and avoid what he thinks evil, in all matters which are not injurious to others,” (Colt, 1991, p. 172) he writes in Stoic manner. What Rousseau fuels in his best-known novel *Émile* of 1762 through the romantic valorisation of emotional life has also later come to be labelled as Romantic suicide. The best example of it appears in Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which Werther ends his own life as he is consumed by overwhelming emotions such as unrequited love, alienation, and disillusionment with his surroundings. As in this novel, Rousseau attributes suicide to the fact that social ties are loosened or broken and one is isolated and/or kept outside of the social circles in which he lives.

The growing sense of liberalism and rationalism in the Age of Enlightenment, as can be seen in Hume’s interpretation of critical and even dogmatic issues of the old strict Christian theology, goes on into the 19th century. Immanuel Kant strongly condemns suicide with his argument that it is in violation of one’s duty to self, while Arthur Schopenhauer argues in his essay *On Suicide* that suicide manifests itself as one’s ultimate assertion of will over suffering and he also views suicide as a reasonable escape from unbearable moments of existence: “...suicide thwarts the attainment of the highest moral aim by the fact that, for a real release from this world of misery, it substitutes one that is merely apparent” (1902, p. 402). John Stuart Mill, renowned for his piece of writing *On Liberty* in 1859, says hardly anything on suicide directly but, depending on his liberal worldview, he implies that one should have a sovereign

authority or sovereignty over his own life as long as he does not harm anyone else (2001, pp. 69-71).

Another famous philosopher and sociologist of the 19th century comes up with his striking views of suicide. It is Emile Durkheim in the late 19th and early 20th century. In spite of the correlation between suicidal act and psychological disorders, contemporary debates as to whether the causes of suicide are located within the individual or society are rooted in the early seminal works of Durkheim (1897) and Sigmund Freud (1917). Durkheim, one of the most famous sociologists known for his work *Suicide*, states that “suicide is not a distinct form of insanity,” (2002, p. 8) and that “no regular parallelism is found between the extent of mental alienation and that of suicide” (2002, p. 21). However, he adds that it is possible that only in a state of insanity may an act of suicide be realized or occur (2002, p. 8). In this context, he determines four types of suicide taking place due to insanity or psychological reasons: “Maniacal suicide, melancholy suicide, obsessive suicide and impulsive/automatic suicide”

The first form of suicide in the list, that is ‘maniacal suicide’, occurs when the patient commits suicide due to the hallucinatory or delirious conceptions, and kills himself in order to “escape from an imaginary danger or disgrace, or to obey a mysterious order from on high, etc” (Durkheim, 2005, p. 9). However, Durkheim warns readers:

These hallucinations must not be confused with those tending to deceive the patient as to the risks he runs; for example, to make him mistake a window for a door. In the latter case, there is no suicide as defined above, but accidental death. (Durkheim, 2005, p. 9)

Thus he categorizes this type of death as “accidental death” instead of maniacal suicide. Only when the person resorts to the act of killing himself as a way to escape the hallucinatory dangers can this type of suicide be called maniacal suicide. It takes its name from the disease *mania*, which causes a constant flow of feelings and conflicting ideas very rapidly, resulting in an extreme mobility in the consciousness of the patient. Durkheim calls such a painful flux a “whirlwind” as feelings and ideas are in an uninterrupted succession (Durkheim, 2005, p. 9).

‘Melancholy suicide’ is the second one in Durkheim’s categorization, in which

the patient kills himself because of his inability to develop an affiliation to *things* and *people* about him, causing a depression or sadness. In melancholic suicide, the patient sees everything as if “through a dark cloud” (Durkheim, 2005, p. 10), leading him into the recurrent thoughts that life is no more meaningful and that not only is life boring but it is painful to him under the existing circumstances, as well. With this thought in his mind, Durkheim relates melancholy suicide to “extreme depression” and “exaggerated sadness” (2005, p. 10). Though initiated by outer factors, melancholy suicide results primarily from the fact that the patient has a psychological shock and suffering due to specific crises such as being fired and falling into a financial crisis. Even though socio-economic and socio-psychologic factors seem to lie behind the melancholy suicide, it is largely based on the patient’s mental condition overturned, which causes him to experience an extreme form of irreversible melancholy.

Thirdly, there is ‘obsessive suicide’, in which the patient commits suicide because of a fixated idea of killing himself rather than a particular motive. It is relatively common in the modern age in the aftermath of Durkheim’s time. The patient’s fixation of killing himself means that he does not have an underlying reason behind the act and he does not have problems related to specific contexts such as his family, economic condition, or sanity. Despite this, he appears to have been highly possessed by a thought of killing himself for a long or short period. The patient tries to show a resistance to this motive and process, which causes a form of anxiety. That is why Durkheim also calls this type of suicidal act ‘anxiety-suicide’ because “a constantly increasing anxiety oppresses the pit of the patient’s stomach” (Durkheim, 2005, p. 11).

Finally, Durkheim describes ‘impulsive or automatic suicide’ as the one in which the patient commits suicide because of an abrupt or spontaneous impulse. This type of suicide shows a contradiction to maniacal suicide as the patient does not plan to kill himself for a certain time. In this type of suicide, the patient decides to kill himself abruptly and takes action, while there is a reason behind the act in maniacal suicide, be it reasonable or not (Durkheim, 2005, p. 12). The act of killing oneself in automatic suicide is so unreasonable that even the patient does not understand what he is doing and has done, and so he cannot base his action on a specific reason or factor. Durkheim exemplifies this situation with an explication of a patient that has attempted to kill himself, which was an automatic suicide: “‘The strange thing is,’ another says, ‘that I

can't remember how I climbed the casement and my controlling idea at the time; for I had no thought of killing myself, or, at least I have no memory of such a thought today.'" (Durkheim, 2005, p. 12).

Durkheim states that suicide does not always occur primarily due to psychological states of the patient; instead, desire for death lures him into suicide just when he is insane (Durkheim, 2005, p. 8). As a result, he comes up with three types of sociological suicide besides the abovementioned psychological ones: 'Egoistic Suicide', in which the patient commits suicide because of the absence of social integration, thus becoming a social outcast. There are times when the patient cannot develop an affiliation with the society to which he belongs as he does not have similar ideological or religious thoughts with the majority of the society's members, and the regime. This case can be observed in immigrants and refugees as well, for they leave home for a new country but have adaptation problems and cannot get used to the locational change because of some sociological, economic, or religious conditions to which they are not accustomed. The validity of this emphasis is noticeable in a recent study: A greater risk ratio (1.3). for attempts was discovered in Sweden a few years ago in relation to the native population, for both men and women of foreign-born minorities (Johansson, Sundquist, Qvist, & Bergman, 1997, p. 166). This illustrates and explains the difference between the suicide rate of the native people and that of the foreign ones in a country. Their choice to end their own lives in this gets closer to Durkheim's egoistic suicide.

On the other hand, 'Altruistic Suicide', in which the patient develops a social involvement in an excessive form and tends to sacrifice his own life to a particular group or society, shows a direct contradiction to egoistic suicide. The former is done for the protection of others, while the latter for the protection and/or salvation of the one who commits suicide. Durkheim defines ego as the being that obeys only itself while defining altruism as being dependent on the exterior entities and putting ego in the background:

Having given the name of egoism to the state of the ego living its own life and obeying itself alone, that of altruism adequately expresses the opposite state, where the ego is not its own property, where it is blended with something not itself, where the goal of conduct is exterior to itself, that is, in one of the groups in which it

participates. (Durkheim, 2005, pp. 179-180)

Durkheim states that there are some contexts in which one is obliged to kill oneself when the affiliated group's chief or a person whom he has obeyed for much or all of his life ceases to be:

Besides the old men, women are often required among the same peoples to kill themselves on their husbands' death. This barbarous practice is so ingrained in Hindu customs that the efforts of the English are futile against it. In 1817, 706 widows killed themselves in the one province of Bengal and in 1821, 2,366 were found in all India. Moreover, when a prince or chief dies, his followers are forced not to survive him. (Durkheim, 2005, p. 177)

Durkheim calls this type of suicide dictated by the society or the laws "obligatory altruistic suicide" as killing oneself in these contexts cannot be categorized as a voluntary act, rather it takes place upon the subordination of the person (2005, p. 180).

'Anomic Suicide', in which one commits suicide due to a high level of stress, is generally linked to economic crises, or unexpected changes in life. "So far is the increase in poverty from causing the increase in suicide that even fortunate crises, the effect of which is abruptly to enhance a country's prosperity, affect suicide like economic disasters" (Durkheim, 2005, p. 203). Minimalist ethics, often associated with Peter Singer's philosophy, focuses on the principles on decreasing suffering and increasing the well-being of the individuals in a community, and it suggests that all beings need to satisfy their needs in order to function properly. Otherwise, they will live painfully or will not stay alive. In parallel with minimalist ethics' principles, Durkheim also asserts that only when his needs are adequately satisfied can any living be happy or even exist (2005, p. 207).

Friedrich Nietzsche, a seminal figure and classical scholar in German philosophy and existential thought of the 19th century, also mentions suicide in his works, which is not an unexpected act from him as he probes into the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of life throughout. He suggests that one must leave the world if it is the right time for him to do so and death should not be perceived merely as an event that occurs beyond man's control by chance or unexpectedly, but rather as a choice made freely and intentionally: "Many die too late, and some die too early. Yet strange

sounds the precept: Die at the right time! ... And whoever wants to have fame, must take leave of honour betimes, and practise the difficult art of – going at the right time” (Nietzsche, 2010, p. 61). In this respect, Nietzsche presents the viewpoint that one should have the right to choose the right time of his own death, defending the sovereignty that individuals exercise on their own lives, or deaths. On the other hand, Nietzsche expounds upon the notion that “so-called natural death, ... is perfectly ‘unnatural’” as he accepts it as a kind of suicide (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 71). In Nietzschean sense, the living organism prepares its own dissolution from within. Death comes not only through external factors, but through the weakening of the organism itself. In this sense, every death is self-destruction. On the other hand, he embraces the right of individual to decide the timing of his own death and to kill himself without waiting for the organism itself: “... Natural death is just death under the most contemptible conditions, an unfree death, a death at the wrong time, the death of a coward” (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 71). In this regard, Nietzsche welcomes one’s ending his own life at the right time as an indicator of strength and courage, and he elevates the act of killing oneself to a praiseworthy decision. He even glorifies it in his *Twilight of the Idols*:

It is not up to us to prevent ourselves from being born, but we can make up for this mistake – for sometimes it is a mistake. When one does away with oneself, one does the most honorable thing there is: it almost earns one the right to live . . . Society – what am I saying! – life itself gains more advantage from suicide than from any “life” of renunciation, anemia and other virtues – one has freed the others from the sight of one, one has freed life from an objection . . . (2006, p. 71)

Albert Camus, another notable figure in Western philosophy of existentialism and absurdity of the 20th century, opens his “The Myth of Sisyphus” with a striking sentence: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide” (1955, p. 3). According to Camus’ philosophy of existentialism, that melancholic search for meaning in life is absurdity itself. He also discusses in his work the two options for mankind to decide between in this absurd world; one is to escape from the absurdity, which is to kill oneself, and the other is to confront with the absurdity, that is the meaninglessness of life, and live with it despite its torture. In this context, he

states that "... killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it" In other words, life "is not worth the trouble" (Camus, 1991, p. 5). In addition to his definition of suicide as a kind of "confessing" of the inability to cope with or make sense of life, Camus suggests that "what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying" (2023, p. 4). From this perspective, one can jump to the conclusion that people are liable to commit suicide because of the absence of what makes the life worth living for them. Briefly speaking, Camus treats suicide as a fundamentally philosophical question in that it confronts the meaning or meaninglessness of life and living. If life is absurd, he argues, it means that it lacks an inherent meaning and thus the reason for living; on the other side of the picture is the indifference of the whole universe to human concerns. To him, absurd is the conflict between man's search for meaning and the silence of the universe to his struggles. It is within this conflicting and absurd condition, Camus says, that man can think of killing himself. With this absurd context in hand, however, Camus encourages such a man into "metaphysical revolt," which he sums up as follows:

One of the only coherent positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency... Just as danger provided man with the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of experience. It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it. (1955, pp. 53-54)

It could be gathered from his argument that he stresses the revolt in terms of man's choice to remain alive while suicide is a form of surrender or resignation. It is true that suicide offers an answer to the problem of the absurd within the context Camus' philosophy, but what it offers as a solution is nothing more than the dismissal of existence. In this sense, says ..., "the equation is thus a choice between human existence and death, and suicide chooses death" (Sagi, p. 68). Although reasons behind these motives for living or dying may differ on a large scale, the loss of beloved ones for emotional reasons or death, willingness to sacrifice oneself for an ideology, group

or a community, or a society can be given as specific examples. Besides the loss of some possession, the motive behind killing oneself can also be based on an extreme depression due to not being able to achieve what is desired, which can be exemplified by the increased rates of suicide in the extreme materialism of the Victorian Age and later. However, the object of desire can change from one age to another, and so can the cause of suicide in relation to the inability to achieve and/or possess the desired object or target. In this situation, though reasons of suicide are open-ended in the light of Camus' definition of suicide, the essential point is the absence of what is desired, or the desire for maintaining what is present.

In parallel with Joiner's definition, Freud, who is an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis in the 20th century, suggests that internalized rage initially directed at a close family member or friend can lead to suicide. In his work *Mourning and Melancholia*, he explains how grief is prevented if ambivalence and anger toward the lost item predominate, leading to a state of melancholia. Following the loss of a loved one, the individual may experience a profound grief that gives rise to feelings of guilt and anger toward the lost object. Later on, the grief becomes complicated by ambivalent emotions, as unconscious anger toward the lost loved one – arising from feelings of abandonment and disappointment – is turned inward and directed at the self. Finally, the fact is that he cannot direct his rage to the lost object, thus leading him to experience an excessive form of pain results in a self-inflicted act, be it attempting or committing suicide (1917, pp. 251-252).

In his works, Freud introduces the term 'Eros', also known as 'life drive' or 'life instinct', which consists of a fundamental component to maintain life: "self-preserving". Therefore, Eros coincides and has a close relationship with libido, as Freud equals life instinct with it, thus with affection and emotional bonding, nurturing and caregiving, creativity and productivity, and life-preserving actions (Freud, 2018, pp. 46, 48). In this regard, Eros can be said to lie behind all the motivations and behaviours of human beings, as it includes the primary constituent for them to survive, reproduce and create. It would be enough for a kind of chaos to emerge if it had not been for Eros: continuation of the species, emotional bonds between people, and search for development would stop. More importantly, however, 'Thanatos', also known as 'death drive', the term that Freud uses not in that work but in his next ones, referring to the exact opposite of Eros and the motivation that causes the desire for returning to

inorganic state of being and an impulsion toward inertia and thus self-destroying acts, would dominate human life (Freud, 2018, p. 32). Viewed from this perspective, Freud states in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that “the aim of all life is death” (2018, p. 32).

On the other hand, in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud takes the first step in explaining ‘the pleasure principle’, which he would later elaborate on in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a concept suggesting that one’s life is based upon maximising pleasure and minimising pain. This means that any individual seeks for an object of pleasure or avoids a source of pain, and it operates as the primary motivation behind human behaviour (Freud, 2018, p. 1). Even though the act of suicide seems contradictory to the pleasure principle to some extent, the fact that the pain one suffers outweighs the pain of committing suicide which that person will potentially suffer may lead him to choose the death option because he foresees that this option causes less pain and it is a way to escape the dominant suffering. This situation reveals that the phenomenon of suicide can be considered a strategy suitable for the pleasure principle. Also, ability and/or freedom to make a decision between life and death may also be an object of temporary pleasure to the person in permanent pain in the eyes of the person, as the sudden action of individual autonomy gives the person a momentary pleasure.

The concept and issue of suicide has been frequently dealt with by psychologists, too, especially in the 20th century. According to Thomas Joiner, an American psychologist and expert on suicide, there are more plausible and consistent ways to understand the act of killing oneself although suicide is well-known as an act of “hostility turned inward” (2005, pp. 35-36). In his description of suicide as “hostility turned inward”, suicide is something to be called a result of intense aggression or hate towards *things*, which makes suicide a self-reflective act due to one’s inability to spew the hatred or aggression toward a specific ‘object’. However, according to Joiner, there are some conditions to converge, causing one to commit suicide:

I will argue that the acquired ability to enact lethal self-injury is crucial in serious suicidal behavior. People are not born with the developed capacity to seriously injure themselves (although they are born with factors, including certain genes, that may facilitate the future development of this capacity). In fact, if anything, they are born with the opposite – the knee-jerk tendency to avoid pain, injury,

and death. That is, people have strong tendencies toward self-preservation; evolution has seen to that. Through an array of means described later, some people develop the ability to beat back this pressing urge toward self-preservation. Once they do, according to the theory laid out in this book, they are at high risk for suicide, but only if certain other conditions apply – namely that they feel real disconnection from others and that they feel ineffective to the point of seeing themselves as a burden on others. (2005, pp. 22-23)

According to Professor Edwin Schneidman, who is a psychologist, suicidologist, and thanatologist in the 20th century, suicide is a result of *psychache*, in which case the patient has psychological pain that may be experienced due to an excessive form of sorrow, shame, humiliation, fear, dread, defeat, anxiety (1993, p. 51). Even if Schneidman's definition is laden with a number of specific reasons for the act, it suggests quite strongly that the act of killing oneself may be caused by sociological, psychological, cultural, or even religious motives in general, which fits in with Durkheim's diversification of suicide types. As societies' taboos and beliefs vary, the contexts in which one is guilty, ashamed or humiliated may congruently vary from one culture to another. "Culture has an important moral role in constructing the concept of the individual and in developing the mechanism of shame as a cultural value and as a deep structure," says Nir (2018, p. 37) in this context to reveal the varying nature of shame and/or guilt from one culture to another. This is tantamount, then, to admitting that just as the causes of shame undergo some changes in societies, so the cause of suicidal decisions and acts may change accordingly. Therefore, it purports to the fact that the reasons behind the feelings of shame, guilt, or humiliation, thus committing suicide, may also show variety *inter se*.

Since the drives and explanations for committing suicide differ on a large scale, as can be seen in the abovementioned theories and definitions related to the act, it is more appropriate to analyse the dynamics and causes of suicide by diving into and understanding the specific context in which it takes place. Furthermore, though the theories vary widely in terms of their approaches and contexts, they are to be held together while holding an examination of suicide as the components of the phenomenon, which may be the act itself, the decision-making phase, or the underlying motivation. "The most varied and even the most contradictory events of life may

equally serve as pretexts for suicide,” says Durkheim (2005, p. 262) to emphasize the diversity of the possible causes of suicide. Even though the underlying motivations are determined certainly, they are to be aligned with the cultural, social, religious, and ideological frameworks.

Not only are the causes of the feelings of shame, guilt and humiliation treated as the products of cultural value and judging systems, but literary products are also created by the members of cultures that seek to diagnose and introduce such causes in an attempt to prevent men from doing anything wrong and unacceptable to them and others. Literature is, therefore, such a device that mirrors a society in which it is created and whose main supplement is human, and as such, there are many literary works that focus on suicide as their topic, among many others. As a tool for seeking for the reasons behind any choice, decision, act, and so on, literature provides a better insight into the factors forcing the characters to judge whether life is ‘worth living.’ Authors use suicide, among others, as a literary theme and dénouement to draw a dramatic portrait of these factors such as despair, shame, sorrow and remorse that a character experiences in the work. However much the motives behind suicide in literature may vary by historical period, plot, and characterization, Jennifer Michael Hecht, who is an author, poet, historian, and philosopher, makes a distinction of the motives historically, from myths to modern literature. For instance, she states that since myths are regarded as echoes of ancient societies’ style of living in mythical stories, and thus in ancient times, there appear to be specific reasons behind any action, emotion, behaviour and ritual of those people as well as their choice to commit suicide in those myths: shame, altruism, great loss, and love that goes wrong (2013, p. 18). Parallel to Hecht’s categorisation of the ancient myths, characters in modern tragedies and novels commit suicide mostly because of their tragic love experiences as well, and “suicide has often provided the denouement for adulterous affairs that go drastically wrong” (Lilly, 1994, p. 401).

With suicide having come to be an oft-heard concept in the 20th century, a case which is largely attributed to the loss of what makes life worth living for many in the shadow of the two world wars on one hand and capitalist and destructively rivalling states on the other, this thesis is intended to provide a better insight into the suicidal act of the renowned Shakespearean characters, specifically focusing on the selected plays by William Shakespeare – *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Being the

product and glory of the Elizabethan Age from 1558 to 1603 in English history, Shakespeare and his plays as the acknowledged mirror of human nature in all its depths deserve to be examined with an eye on the philosophies and values of the age at first and from some contemporary perspectives then.

Now that the act of suicide is a result, after which there is nothing new and different in the life of the one who commits suicide, the theme of suicide deserves the examination, investigation and elaboration of the speeches, decisions, actions, interactions, events, emotions and/or thoughts of that one as the precursors of suicide. This, in turn, requires probing into the psychological, social, and cultural influences of the motives and drives behind suicide and examining the functionality of these acts and situations on the development of the self-murderer characters and the *dénouement* of the plays, so this study aims to uncover the complex and multifaceted relationships between the tragic flaws of the characters and how the development of these characters contributes to the portrayal of suicidal phenomenon. What makes this study different and significant is also the attempt to explain the purposes of the characters who commit suicide. Particularly with the impetus of free will gradually replacing the divine will in the Elizabethan Age, when Shakespeare lived and produced his plays, these characters' choice of suicide results from what they do in violation of the accepted social, traditional, moral, familial, religious and/or legal norms until that point. With an explanatory account of these causes of their suicide, the study is also intended to account for their act of killing themselves through their purposes as well as or rather than their causes. These purposes are claimed to be redemption, salvation and reunion for the characters who commit suicide. In this context, the study employs a thematic and textual analysis of the act of suicide and its formation as a literary theme in Shakespeare's tragedies in the light of above-mentioned theoretical and definitive frameworks, especially Durkheim's categorization.

2. ELIZABETHAN PERIOD AS THE AGE OF FREE WILL

What is called Elizabethan Age in English history coincides with the second half of the 16th century, while the exact date spans the forty-five years from 1558 to 1603. It is marked by a high number of innovations and developments in English literary history as well as political, social and individual life. With the transition from theocentric worldview of the medieval age to the anthropocentric worldview of the period under the impetus of humanism, classicism and reformation, all considered to be the hallmarks of the Renaissance in Europe, English world also underwent a remarkable number of changes in several walks of life. The changes proved to be so influential that the period came to be later called the beginning of the ‘early modern age’, in which the term ‘modern’ refers to the fact that the old way of life with its beliefs, practices and traditions is being replaced by a new one in which whatever comes from the past is challenged, questioned and changed by something new.

In many ways the Renaissance was always a fantasy, a dream. Even before it gained the name “renaissance,” intellectuals from the fourteenth century on dreamed that they were giving birth anew to the glories of ancient civilization and rediscovering lost worlds and peoples on the borders of their known world, even if they tended to call the age in which they lived, when they called it anything at all, “modern”. (Ruggiero, 2002, p. 1)

One of these changes manifested itself in field of literature and particularly in drama, especially following the introduction of such secular dramatic forms as tragedy, comedy and history play in place of the medieval drama dominated by miracle plays, mystery plays, morality plays and interludes, which were largely didactic and religious by their nature. The list of the changes begins with the secular and complex themes exploring politics, history, human nature and psychology instead of biblical allegories, and goes on with the offering of an insight into the internal conflicts of man; the list also contains erection of theatre halls as a permanent place for stage performances from 1576 onwards and the use of blank verse in literary works, in plays in particular, due to its proximity to the daily speech rhythms. In addition to dramatic field, poetry also saw the rise of lyrical forms such as sonnet, pastoral and song instead of the didactic hymns, heroic epics and folk ballads of the preceding age. In philosophical

context, too, a man-centred scene was dominant, which was marked by the emergence of empiricism and empirical, namely individual-centred, way of learning, as well as political secularism and Renaissance individualism. This list could as well be extended. More important than the list itself is, however, the impetus or driving force behind all these shifts, which was the placement of man in the centre of the world and worldly life instead of God, Christ and Christianity. Man is no longer in educational, psychological, physical and social chains and control of the Church, which declared itself to be responsible for shaping and guiding him in line with God's decrees as conveyed in the Bible through Jesus Christ for almost 1000 years. He is, however, now free, though not totally but partly in the beginning, to make himself the way he likes to be. What makes the period unique in this sense is best explained by Florentino Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration of the Dignity of Man* in 1486. In his book, God addresses Adam as follows:

We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honour, as though the maker and moulder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. (as cited in Greenblatt, et al., 2012, p. 535)

This quote from a late fifteenth-century thinker could as well be taken as an indication of a new era when man was given the responsibility of making himself in worldly terms at his will and with reliance on his free will. The phrase in the above quote "fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer" is quite obviously related to the free will of man as decreed by God Himself. God just gifts man with a life, only to set him free to live in the way he likes to. It is largely because of the growing belief in those days that if God directed man to do and not to do something without leaving any space to him to decide and act, then it would be indirectly God to blame for any fault, mistake, crime, or sin that man could commit. On the contrary, for man to be free in his choices and actions in the world within the knowledge of divine laws would be the criteria for him to be awarded the heaven after death or punished with the hell. With this in mind, it would be illuminating to trace the process of the shift from the banned will of man in the Middle Ages to his free will in the Renaissance.

Considering that Renaissance in Europe and England could be accepted to be the changed face of whatever traditions, beliefs and practices there were in the preceding

age, commonly defined as the Middle Ages, a brief account of this old period would be useful for a better understanding of the Renaissance as the initiation of the modern world with William Shakespeare as its crowned writer in England. In this context, early modern age, signalled by the Renaissance, is preceded by the Middle Ages spanning almost 1000 years roughly from the 5th to the 15th century.

During and after the period in which Western Rome fell in the 5th century, Christianity played a central role in people's way of living in Medieval Europe. The Church, which was a dominating power throughout the Middle Ages, not only regulated the social and individual lives but also appeared as a political power in Europe and Britain so much so that it was seen as the representative of God on Earth. Therefore, it was both the ordinary people and the King himself that had to obey God Himself, thus His accepted representative on the Earth. This caused the Church to be admitted as and indeed to be the supreme authority in the societal landscapes in the Middle Ages.

As the mechanism of life in Europe was largely dependent on the Church and people's way of living was bounded with Scholasticism, which was a medieval intellectual tradition and a theological system combining both Aristotelian and Christian tenets, there was an inherent conflict between the notions of spirit and body in the Middle Ages because people who were obliged to obey the religious doctrines for centuries were in the belief that the only happiness was the one to be obtained hereafter, which directed them to avoid the material pleasures through earthly affairs and engagements. The Earth was accepted as where one was destined to suffer in line with the suffering of Christ as the founder of Christianity, and this act of suffering in worldly terms could be alleviated or comforted with the promise of eternal and higher pleasures and/or happiness in the afterlife. "The promise of redemption through suffering – and the promise of a happiness greater than could ever be imagined on Earth – animated the tradition from the outset," says McMahon (2004, p. 9) in his comprehensive study on the history of happiness in the Western world. Man, whose only and main purpose was not to please himself but God with the guidance of the Church, was held a kind of captive in a sort of cell by the complete domination of the Church. In this context, the Church did not play the role of a repressive authority but rather a spiritual guide in their holy way to gain God's approval in medieval people's perspective.

While the Church played a key role especially in the fields of education, justice, and social cooperation, it was also a great restrictive power when it comes to people's right of free thought and action. The Inquisition, established by the Catholic Church in the 13th century in order to overcome heresy and dictate the orthodoxy of Catholic belief, had the right to interrogate and even exert torture, including physical, verbal and psychological violence, on the people it accused of being heretical. According to the Church and the Inquisition, any small deviation from the doctrines of the Church would lead to a threat not only towards Christianity and Bible but also the social order due to the fact that the Church was on top of the hierarchical order and it operated as a regulator of the hierarchy in the society. Even the royal and noble men and women adopted the religious life and went into monasteries while continuing to possess their previous status and even property, says Orme in his study of the medieval church in England (2021, p. 7). With such a great power and authority in the hands of the Church then, those accused were generally labelled as heretical, sentenced to imprisonment, and/or even executed as they committed a crime not against the institution but God Himself. In this context, anyone who intended to express any opinion on any subject, be it closely or remotely related to Christianity or the social system that the Church and the institution established through the doctrines of the religion, would generally have to be careful, because the way the Inquisition discovered people who were heretical was investigation of those surrounding the person under suspicion. This caused not only an environment of distrust and conflict among the folk, thus a hostility towards one another, but also a ruthless repression on the intellectual thoughts and debates on the Continent.

While it is true the Church focused on regulating and defining an individual's life in the Middle Ages, even if one rejected its teachings, and the clergy were often not the most qualified, it was still recognized as the manifestation of God's will and presence on earth. The dictates of the Church were not to be questioned, even when it seemed apparent that many of the clergy were working more in their own interests than those of God because, even if God's instruments were flawed, it was understood that the Creator of the universe was still in control. (https://www.worldhistory.org/Medieval_Church/)

All such accounts point to the fact that man was hardly ever or never free in his daily life, which was largely dictated by the Church in accordance with the declared need for man to serve God, not his self, in the world. St. Augustine, a prominent medieval philosopher, for example explained his thought that “the human will was incapable of good without God’s prevenient grace” and came up with “the central thesis between freedom and servitude to sin, represented by the two poles of grace and free will” (as cited in Leff, 2002, p. 210). In other words, grace is the divine aid of God to human and “restores to free will the liberty which, in Adam, it lost to sin, namely the liberty to do good and not to sin; without that aid, free will has now only the freedom to sin... free will without grace is in servitude to sin” (Leff, 2002, p. 227). Thus, it could be said that free will itself was not something allowed to man in the Middle Ages if he could not seek for God’s approval and grace in whatever he would think of doing freely. Man was free in his actions and speeches as long as he would do and say it for the sake of winning God’s grace. That is, man was not free to satisfy or please himself in worldly terms, which was accepted as a violation of the sanctity of human body and soul as gifts from God.

On the other hand, not only did the Church have a crucial role in social and religious walks of life, but it also affected the economic aspects of life in Medieval Europe. As it held a great deal of land property, most of the agricultural practices and incomes undertaken by villagers were typically under the control of the Church, which caused it to be the centre of the economic activities. The villagers were obliged to pay back the certain portion of the income from the land to the Church as taxes, which caused the Church to increase its prosperity day by day. In addition, complex dynamics of the Church’s relationship with feudal lords and vassals also enabled it to concentrate the majority of land ownership and incomes from these lands in a single entity. Lords who were managing the lands they owned were in need of the support of the Church since the spiritual authority of it helped them legitimize their rule. For this very reason, by donating lands to the church, the lords could find an opportunity to reinforce their religious authority by gaining the support of the church at the same time. These mutual relations between the Church and Lords were of great importance in terms of the preservation of the social order and legitimize governments. Hunt considers the age to be a period when “the religious teaching of the church has a very strong and pervasive influence throughout western Europe. These factors combined to make the church the

closest thing to a strong central government throughout this period” (2003, p. 7).

Thus coloured by the Church’s rituals and clergy in all areas of life, the Middle Ages in Europe could be said to have entered a new path upon the conquest of Istanbul by Turks in the second half of the 15th century. It was after this epoch-making event that Greek scholars and philosophers escaped Ottoman Empire and settled in today’s Italy. Availability of several sources and opportunities there for them to conduct and develop their studies and the freedom to illuminate the folk are often accepted to be among the primary causes of the emergence of the Renaissance. Some other causes can be listed as the start of the discoveries, especially discovery of America, modern trade, printing press, and so on.

With such a background and past, the Renaissance means “rebirth”, since it is accepted as a historical period that freed people in Europe and Britain from the oppressive and restrictive power of the Church and enabled them to, in a sense, be born again and arrange their lives from a bright new perspective of man-centred universe. The fact that Renaissance is marked by humanism, secularism and individualism, among some others, reflects this anthropocentric aspect of the Renaissance. “The Renaissance had a flourishing tradition of ‘empathic visualizing’, shaped by medieval religion and extended to secular literature,” says Quiviger (2019, p. 119) to imply that religious texts of the past were gradually replaced by secular literature throughout the Renaissance, thus placing the man in the centre of these works as a protagonist. To set such a world that was shaped by Humanism² treating man superior to any entity on Earth, Renaissance people turned their face to Ancient Greece and Rome, which were once civilisations that made comments on life from the perspective of man rather than the gods and goddesses. This caused European scholars to accelerate their studies to comprehend and interpret Greek language, thus their literature with the aim of taking inspiration from the man-centred social system of the Greeks in particular.

While the Classicism of Renaissance was about to reach its climax especially in the fields of literature, fine arts, and education, Martin Luther, a theologian, priest and a seminal figure of Protestant Reformation, ignited a revolutionary movement by

² The humanism of the sixteenth century was not akin to modern humanism, which easily embraces atheism, but was a Christian humanism, a fusion of classical and Christian thought. Its main achievement may have been the revival of an elegant Latin style that, along with the development of printing, helped create a republic of letters across Europe (Hattaway, 2006, p. 5)

posting his *95 Theses* on the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517, which was a pivotal incident for the history of Reformation in Europe. In his work, Luther not only proposed that people had the capacity to directly develop bonds with God by using their own spiritual strength without any external influence such as the Church and/or the Pope but also criticized the sale of indulgence by the Church, and the corruption in it. According to him, only when an individual had God's grace by doing good could he attain the salvation, and this suggested eliminating or diminishing the oppressive role of the Church on man's earthly practices as a spiritual guide. Furthermore, in his ground-breaking *95 Theses*, Luther defends the idea that the Bible should be translated into several languages and extended to every stratum of the social system in order for people to read it on their own and understand it without needing any guidance from the Church, because for Luther and reformers, the understanding of religion was a product of the principle of *sola scriptura*, which emphasizes that the Bible is the only and ultimate source for man to reach God's faith.

One of the ideas that is often claimed to be central to the Reformation and the subsequent Reformed tradition is *sola scriptura* ("scripture alone"), usually placed in conjunction with *sola fide* ("through faith alone"), *sola gratia* ("through grace alone"), and *solus Christ* ("Christ alone"). (Nurger, Hujgen & Peels, 2018, p. 1)

Why God's faith was of great importance for Luther was that he believed that "After the Fall, free will is something in name only and when it does what is in it, it sins mortally" (Ozment, 1980, p. 294). It was not free will but God's faith that was the absolute authority and guide to dispose of the tendency towards sinfulness that had been predestined to man by Adam and Eve. For him, free will had been under the yoke of evil since the Fall. He claimed that the only way for salvation, which is God's grace, could be attained through the individual practices not under the guidance of the Church but through the proper understanding of the Bible, which called people to question the role of the Church on Christianity and man. Why he objected to the role of the church was that he thought of it as an agent between God and man and it could as well abuse its agency to mislead man, so he considered it better for man to read the Bible on his own and arrange his life depending on what and how he understands from his reading. This could as well be taken as an example of free will, as man was no longer bound to the possibly dogmatic and partial remarks of the clergy from then on.

On the other hand, Desiderius Erasmus, known and accepted as the prince of humanism who is the contemporary of Luther in the second half of the 15th century and first half of the 16th, was in favour of taking a moderate attitude towards Luther's cause at first. While he welcomed Luther's thought that the Church should step aside the relationship between man and God, he criticized Luther's dogmatism resulting from his concept of salvation through faith, also known as *sola fida*, because he stood against zealotry and embraced latitudinarianism, as he was in the belief that one should be open-minded to different thoughts and beliefs. Unlike Luther who assigned free will to divine things and believed that it is only faith that sets us free (p. 6), Erasmus considered the essence of Christianity to be morality and defined free will as follows: "By freedom of the will we understand in this connection the power of the human will whereby man can apply to or turn away from that which leads unto eternal salvation" (Winter, 2013, p. 5). Erasmus also added to this debate:

And, in fact, so far am I from delighting in "assertions" that I would readily take refuge in the opinion of the Skeptics, wherever this is allowed by the inviolable authority of the Holy Scriptures and by the decrees of the Church, to which I everywhere willingly submit my personal feelings, whether I grasp what it prescribes or not. (See Rupp & Watson, 1969, p. 37)

As this was the case, Erasmus accused Luther of eliminating and despising the free will of man because he proposed that free will still existed, albeit wounded by sin, and it could still operate and direct man to goodness contrary to the belief that the man was inherently evil and wrongdoer. Referring to the statement in Ecclesiasticus, "Stretch out your hand to whatever you wish" (v. 16), Erasmus associates between the free will left to the choice of man and the quality of a wrong action being sin:

Although this quotation from Ecclesiasticus seems peculiarly suited to our first parents, yet in a certain sense it is relevant to all the posterity of Adam, but it would be irrelevant if there were no strength of free choice at all in us. For although free choice is damaged by sin, it is nevertheless not extinguished by it. And although it has become so lame in the process that before we receive grace we are more readily inclined toward evil than good, yet it is not altogether cut out, except that the enormity of crimes which have

become a kind of second nature so clouds the judgment and overwhelms the freedom of the will that the one seems to be destroyed and the other utterly lost. (See Rupp & Watson, 1969, pp. 50-51)

Erasmus also argued that the question at issue proved to be an exposition of Luther's fatalism and antinomianism, with their disastrous effect upon the behaviour of masses.

For Luther, "free choice" touched the nerve of the gospel – the promises, the glory and the grace of God – whereas for Erasmus, the questions whether God foreknows anything contingently; whether our will accomplishes anything in things pertaining to eternal salvation; whether it simply suffers the action of grace," belong as he explicitly says among "hidden, not to say superfluous" questions which men investigate with "irreverent inquisitiveness". (Rupp & Watson, 1969, p. 9)

While the Reformation ignited by Luther's 95 *Theses* made an overwhelming impression in Europe, influential figures of Humanism all over Europe such as the English Thomas More, the Dutch Erasmus, the French Guillaume Budé and many more started not only to translate the Ancient Greek and Roman sources into their vernacular language but also to implement what they learned from these ancient classical sources to their mother tongue.

Scholars have argued that without humanism the Reformation could not have succeeded, and it is certainly difficult to imagine the Reformation occurring without the knowledge of languages, the critical handling of sources, the satirical attacks on clerics and scholastics, and the new national feeling that a generation of humanists promoted. (Ozment, 1980, p. 316).

Moreover, "it remains true that neither the Catholic nor the Lutheran nor the Reformed renewals of Church piety, praxis and doctrine are conceivable without the input and impact of humanist tools, skills and perspectives". (Goodman & MacKay, 2013, p. 36). At Oxford, humanist scholars such as Thomas Linacre, William Grocyn, and William Latimer managed to establish a solid ground for the education of Greek

language. In Cambridge as well, while Erasmus educated many students by teaching Greek language, another humanist figure, John Colet, gave the lectures of Greek at the same university. This broke the ground for the development and flourishing of French and English, which enabled the writers in both France and England to benefit from the prosperity of their own language³ (Urgan, 2007, pp. 109-110). In this context, it can be said for sure that the transition from the Medieval Age to the Renaissance and Elizabethan Periods in England refers not only to the religious and social shifts but also to the radical changes in literary and artistic fields in a wide range.

With the increase in people's interrogation of religion and the authority of the Church after Luther's ignition of Reformation and the thirst for boundless knowledge thanks to the Renaissance, the conflict between the physical, namely body, and the spiritual, namely soul, started to decrease as the time passed on the Continent. This could be attributed to the fact that Renaissance man considered that "the planets and outer world, the macrocosm, were simply a reflection of what was inside of him, referred to as the microcosm" (Barrick, 2003, p. 202). In the Renaissance, the increasingly embraced belief, which dated back to the ancient times, was that man's spiritual world was mirrored in his material world and physical body (Barrick, 2003, p. 203). This and similar views of man gradually could be said to have shifted the focus of man in searching for beauty and happiness from the invisible soul to the visible body. People of the Middle Ages who were in the belief that the only happiness that they could attain was hereafter were slowly replaced by the Renaissance men who came to feel and believe that happiness was already on the Earth as well and they could find it by the use of their potential and free will.

While all such important developments were taking in philosophical and religious field, another significant event was finding way for itself in the court of England. In 1534, Henry VIII, the second of the five Tudor Monarchs who was married to Katherine Aragon, the widow of his elder brother, decided to divorce his wife due to her inability to give him an heir and then to marry Anne Boleyn, who would be the mother of Queen Elizabeth I and who would later be executed by her husband later on the grounds of infidelity. Because divorce was forbidden in accordance with the Catholic Church's laws, the Pope rejected the King's request of divorce. This caused

³ Translation by the author of the thesis; original source in Turkish.

Henry VIII, who had already longed for possession of the assets and revenues of the Church, to diminish its authority and to establish the Anglican Church, which was the announcement of his independence from the Catholic Church, and England's transition to Protestantism. Even this act of Henry VIII could be evaluated within the context of free will in that he rebelled the single authority of the age in several fields, insisting on his own decision and choice at the expense of losing the support of that authority. Instead, he himself chose to be the authority in his own lands. After Henry VIII became head of the English church in 1534, he received in excess of £40,000 annually from his spiritual subjects, ten times what they had previously paid to Rome in annates and church fees. It is appropriate to note that this was a revolutionary development in terms of social identity of Britain due to the fact that before Reformation, people identified themselves not as English, but as Christian. After the decreasing impact of the Church on people's way of living with the support of Henry VIII's elimination of the supreme authority of the Catholic Church in England, man of England was re-identified as English, which gave rise to the formation of 'Englishness' in the 16th century, succeeded by the rise of Renaissance individualism and nationalism.

This turn to Englishness was also echoed in the attempts to translate the Bible into English. Though there were many attempts at translating the Bible into English until the 16th century in order to enable people to read it individually, the earliest of which is accepted to have been made by John Wycliffe, an eminent Oxford theologian "called the morning star of the Reformation because of the religious convictions that he developed and propagated" (Metzger, 2006, p. 56). Before his translation of the Bible in 1382, there were significant barriers including the dominance of Latin as the liturgical language and most importantly, the church's opposition against the individual understanding of the Bible, which would cause it to lose its identity as the sole guide for its interpretation. As the translation by Wycliffe was based on Latin Vulgate rather than the original Hebrew or Greek texts, it caused a confusion related to the exegesis as it might have lost its true meaning or even if it had not lost it, there was a strong possibility that it might have been altered. In addition, it was known that Wycliffe's thoughts on the Church were controversial; therefore, he was accused of heresy after his attempt at presenting the translated version of the Bible as it was seen as a challenge to the authority of the Catholic Church. On the contrary, through the invention of printing press and Caxton's introduction of it to the island in the late 15th

century, people were provided with an easier and cheaper way to read a source individually especially in the early 16th century and so on. In 1611, King James' translation of the Bible, widely known as Great Bible or King James Version (KJV), people who lived on the island started to read the Bible by themselves instead of consulting the Church in order to understand and interpret it truly, which was a considerable and pivotal step towards the achievement of the principle of *sola scriptura* as suggested by Luther. Even this development itself could be interpreted as an opportunity for the laity's exercise of free will in that they were no longer dependent on the clergy's readings, explanations and interpretations of the Scriptures and they were free to read and interpret it on their own. This should not mean that they stopped reading the Scriptures, but rather they read them and adapted their lives to what they themselves understood from reading them. This chance to read the Scriptures on his own could thus be said to have paved the way for man's release from the hegemonies of the clergy that used to shape him the way the Scriptures required – at least they said so. This process, therefore, could be taken as one of the underlying steps to the gradual creation of man with free will.

Preceded and accompanied by the above events and some more similar ones, Elizabethan Period is predominantly shaped by the Renaissance, whose impact is seen in three separate fields: education, religion, and fine arts. Queen Elizabeth I brought in the Act of Uniformity shortly after the Act of Supremacy of 1559 to restore Protestantism in England. This was an attempt by her to decrease the practices implemented by the Catholic Church, and to end the conflict between Protestants and Catholics on the island, which gave freedom to Protestants and allowed citizens to adopt a middle-of-the-road approach towards religion. The motivation behind Elizabeth's regulations was primarily to demonstrate the coexistence of both Protestantism and Catholicism within the national Church, while also instilling the idea of a national identity that transcended religion.

Henry's daughter, Elizabeth, who came to rule England during the last half of the 1500s, conducted something of a delicate balancing act so as to retain the loyalties of both English Catholics and English Protestants. She had no desire to split her realm into warring factions. (Hodges, 2020, p. 33)

Along with the developments in field of religion, the reforms in field of

education were about to reach their apex in Europe thanks to Classicism largely as a result of the invention of printing press and William Caxton's introduction of it to England in 1476. This was because it resulted in any written material being within easy reach of ordinary people when compared to the Medieval Age, in which nearly all the sources were written in Latin, making it available just to a limited number of the clergy who knew Latin then in the absence of Latin taught to the laity. The increased desire for knowledge and experience especially in sixteenth-century Europe and Britain brought brand-new developments and geographical discoveries, as well as an increased keenness on positive sciences. At colleges and universities of fifteenth-century England, reading Ancient Greek texts and analysis of history acquired great importance due to Renaissance Classicism. In the 16th century, philosophical studies and teachings were included in the curriculum of the universities and colleges where students were taught ethics and politics. Thereafter, England witnessed an upheaval in education due to the huge emphasis attached to fine arts and rhetoric under the title of "humanities". For Reformation, *studia humanitatis* was a more applicable medium when compared to scholastic dialectic as it provided a more correct rhetoric and a linguistic groundwork that enabled new Protestant clergies to deal with the original text of Scripture in a more authoritative way (Ozment, 1980, p. 302).

Unlike their imposed practices in the Middle Ages, the laity started from the mid-16th century on to read the Bible to interpret it individually without needing the guidance of the Church when they were granted freedom from both the political and religious institution: It was through this new practice that they began to understand that there was happiness on the Earth, as well. That people were in the capability to do so laid the ground for an emphasis on individual experience and emotion, which required them to have an individual autonomy on their life and decisions, as well. Furthermore, while man's only concern was to deal with ethereal engagements rather than worldly pleasures before, there emerged a shift from these religious and/or ethereal devotions to individual fulfilments, achievement, knowledge, and the search for the beauty of the natural world, resulting in a specific form of individualism.

While the shift in the understanding of self and personal agency in Renaissance Europe generated an individual authority that redefined man's identity, there emerged the principle of self-determination – the right and capacity to make one's own choices and govern one's own life. While philosophers such as Francis Bacon, who is known

for his contributions to philosophy and science in sixteenth-century England, laid the emphasis primarily on the importance of experiment and individuals' right to have access to information, people's interest in achieving personal fulfilment and earthly happiness began to grow through personal experience. Given that man was placed into the centre of the world, and he sought for the boundless knowledge through his potential and knowledge without the guidance of the Church, he began to be the ruler of his own life by making his own decisions. This necessarily meant that the Church as God's representative on the Earth, which was a great power on human life as it was the only authority to take an action on man's life, lost its strength on man and was dethroned by his individual autonomy. Then the decisions to be made especially on life were left up to the discretion of man, including being alive or dead during Renaissance Humanism, which also validates Durkheim's emphasis on the fact that Protestants showed far more suicide rate when compared to Catholics. Therefore, thirst for freedom and experience, or simply the feeling of being free from the fifteenth century on, called people to the biggest freedom throughout life, which is the decision between life and death, or living and dying, as can be clearly seen in Hamlet's famous soliloquy starting with "to be or not to be", which holds a mirror to his psychological inquiries into the meaning of living when there is certainly death at the end.

On the other hand, it could be said that the concept of freedom and free will, the abundance of which can lead to intellectual crises just as its absence constitutes a major problem, may have led to an existential vacuum and hopelessness from the Renaissance onwards. With the emergence of the Renaissance, man began to interpret himself and life with his own values rather than ethereal and spiritual matters under God's providence. This enabled him to gain more value based on reason and free will, which, however, brought about not only freedom but also a confrontation with inner conflicts and crisis as well because man who was looking just at God would then turn his eyes onto himself. Previously seeking for solace through religion and religious figures, man turned to himself for such search, but this brought about an increase in the mental crisis and awareness of personal problems, thus suicidal ideation, when he failed to find it on his own. In this sense, the iconic characters of Shakespeare as the greatest literary figure of the English Renaissance could be given as examples for man's choice to kill himself for a variety of reasons and purposes: Othello, Lady Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet are, among others, examined here from this angle.

3. SUICIDE AS A WAY OF REDEMPTION: OTHELLO

Tragedy, as a long-rooted genre of dramatic literature since the earliest Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides and *Poetics*, the acknowledged earliest critical work of tragedy by Aristotle in the mid-4th century B.C., has remained almost the same throughout the centuries with the same classical ending, which is the death of the protagonist for the purpose of catharsis. This event of death has been interpreted as a sort of divine, or poetic, justice so that the audiences who witness the immoral, inhuman, illegal or irreligious rise of the protagonist through the play are taught a sort of lesson at the end of the play that whoever follows an evil path for glory is sure to lose that glory as well as his life in return. What is intended by the playwright, or poet as it is referred to in *Poetics*, is a sort of moral or religious lesson to the audience. Writing of the Greek tragedies, Hadas describes it as follows:

The themes, broadly speaking, had to do with the precarious situation of man vis-à-vis external forces, whether these derive from the society of which he is a part or, more usually, from the unintelligible supernatural Powers which impinge upon his life. The poet was in fact a religious teacher as well as artist, with a status somewhat analogous to that of a prophet in Israel. (1984, p. 4)

This lesson is largely ensured through the death of the tragic hero in the end, for which there are three primary ways; he either dies naturally or is killed by someone else or commits suicide. Besides what can be accepted as natural death in Greek tragedies, there are some examples of suicide committed for a variety of reasons and/or purposes. In Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, the titular character Antigone hangs herself to death in the grave-like cell where she is imprisoned by the authority on the ground that she has buried her brother, Polyneices, in spite of King Kreon's ban against it. In *Ajax* by Sophocles, the protagonist Ajax cannot swallow his honour because Achilles' weapons are given to Odysseus, and so he wants to take revenge, only to be driven mad by the gods. When he comes to himself, he realises that he has slaughtered the animals round. As he feels he cannot bear this shame, he commits suicide by throwing himself on his sword. Another example can be given from the play *Women of Trachis* by Sophocles, in which Deianeira, the wife of Heracles, gives him a poisoned shirt that he mistakes for a love potion so that she wins him back in love, but

Heracles dies in great pain. Feeling great and unbearable pain and grief upon her husband's death in her hands, she also kills herself.

The genre of tragedy, after a long pause due to the ban on Greek-based, namely paganistic, dramatic activities during the Christian medieval age, is revived in the Renaissance largely in imitation of the classical tragedies of Ancient Greece. Shakespeare is not an exception in this sense. Roughly speaking, his tragedies span almost a fifteen-year period between 1595 and 1610. Inspired not only by his Greek predecessors but also by the secular and man-centred tendencies of his age, Shakespeare produces successful tragedies beginning with *Rome and Juliet* and including *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and/or *Timon of Athens* chronologically. In all these plays, there are tragic heroes and heroines who die, are killed or commit suicide, with the death as their inevitable end in classical fashion. There are several reasons for their death, and not surprisingly, as far as suicide is concerned, their motives also vary, depending on what they do, cause or pass through within the plot story. It is, however, not a coincidence that there are a number of characters who choose to die voluntarily by resorting to their free will. It is the age of man after so long years with God and His divine authority as practised by the clergy on him. Margaret Higonnet also points to this fact:

To take out one's life is to force others to read one's death. For when we categorize a death we do not record a pure fact (if any such exist). Rather, we produce a reading that depends upon the physical and subjective context: natural or unnatural death, homicide or suicide. As with all human actions, we ask questions about free will and determinism. (1985, p. 103)

Othello, being one of the most important and famous tragedies written by Shakespeare in the years 1602-1604, is a play dominated first by the theme of uxoricide and then suicide. What is striking about the play is not just the killing of Desdemona by her husband who then kills himself, but also the deep observation and analysis of human nature especially in terms of emotional and mental conditions such as jealousy, infidelity, love, and distrust. It is largely for this reason that it still maintains its importance with its emphasis on those themes that still keep their universality and timelessness. Though written in the late Elizabethan and/or early Jacobean England during the Renaissance Period of the early 17th century, the play

clearly has significant characteristics similar to those of baroque style popular from the early 17th to mid-18th century. It, for example, describes the good and evil in an extremely exuberant style, culminating in the sharp conflicts between the characters and their grandeur speech.

The main character, named Othello and often called “the Moor” as he is black and therefore not an English man, appears with his great accomplishments as a general in military forces. Shakespeare does not clearly state where Othello is exactly from but as it can be understood from the name Moor, his ethnic root can be originated from Sudan to Turkiye as the name is used for those who are from North Africa during Shakespeare’s age. What makes him different from Shakespeare’s other characters is, among others, his black skin which, however, does not overshadow or darken his bright achievements in military field. With his shining qualifications in this field, he is entitled to promote whomever he likes to the position of lieutenant. His choice is for Cassio, a choice which pushes Iago, the villain of the play, to the extremities of jealousy as can be deduced in his soliloquy on it:

One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damn’d in a fair wife;
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster; unless the bookish theoretic... (Shakespeare,
2012, p. 7)

Considered to be the “initial incident” of the entire play, this motive of Iago shows a great difference from those of all the antagonist characters created by Shakespeare, as he is purely evil and devilish at his finest. He is the exact opposite of Othello, in that, as much as Othello is what he seems, Iago is far away from how, what and who he appears to be, as can be clearly seen in his statement:

In following him, I follow but myself;
Heaven is my judge, not for I love and duty,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end:
For when my outward action doth demonstrate
...
I am not what I am. (p. 9)

Although Iago shows his potential of doing evil in the very first act of the play, he does not plan what he will or can do to avenge himself on Othello and Cassio; instead, he develops his devious plot spontaneously by making use of the opportunities throughout the play, which could be considered to be an example of opportunistic Machiavellianism, whereby one pursues and utilizes every advantage, however immoral or illegal it may be, to win in the end by any means necessary. Moreover, besides his characteristics related to opportunistic Machiavellianism, there are some scholars that call him a “psychopath” as well (West, 1978, p. 31). This is largely attributable to his evil deeds triggered by his untamed, unhindered and uncurbed emotions and thoughts largely due to the darkness of his psychological depths.

As a black man who has already achieved an eminent status in the army of white man’s world, Othello’s secret marriage to Desdemona, a Venetian white girl and the daughter of Brabantio, a Venetian Senator, is another trigger of the plot of the play. This interracial marriage is taken abhorrently and offensively both by Desdemona’s father and Roderigo, a nobleman who is platonically in love with her. This nobleman, manipulated by Iago and his love for her, seems to exacerbate Brabantio’s anger at his daughter:

Your daughter, if you have not given her leave,
I say again, hath made a gross revolt;
Tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger
Of here and every where. (p. 12)

It is crystal-clear that Roderigo, in the words of Greg Maillet, “intends to play on Venetian prejudice against foreigners”. It is also possible, says Maillet, that the audience of the play in its own time would seize in Roderigo’s scornful speech about Desdemona “an allusion to St. Augustine’s conception, based on *The City of God*, of ‘strangers and sojourners.’” (p. 3). Though the main reason for her father’s objection to and harsh critique of this marriage is his feeling that he has been betrayed and violated by his daughter, there is an underlying reason for it, which is Othello’s race: “Othello, who has been a welcome guest at Brabantio’s manor house in his capacity as legendary general, becomes pariah as a husband for Desdemona” (Hamilton, 2003, p. 53). Not surprisingly, Brabantio feels betrayed by her daughter, but he goes so far as to insist that the Moor must have stolen his daughter’s heart by using witchcraft:

Ay, to me;
She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so preposterously to err,
Sans witchcraft could not. (p. 21)

Being a rationalist man, Brabantio attributes this claim of his to the fact that his daughter has rejected all “the wealthy curled darlings” of her nation till then. This rationalist attitude disregards and ignores the empirical behaviours of the young in particular as in the case of Desdemona, who marries Othello at the expense of violating her filial loyalty to her father. She does not give a second thought to the future of her marriage to a foreigner essentially unfavourable to her father, but instead she behaves and decides on her own, which is an example of free will developing gradually and gaining importance in those days. This is indeed an example of her breaking the norms of the society out of love (Kemp, 2010, p. 88). However, as miscegenation was not something acceptable in Elizabethan Age, both Othello and Desdemona are otherized by those around them in the play:

Women depend for their class status on their affiliation with men – fathers, husbands, sons – and Desdemona forfeits that status and the protection it affords when she marries outside the categories her culture allows. For her transgression, her desire of difference, she is punished not only by a loss of status but even of life. (Newman, 2003, p. 76)

Othello, being a Moor, has married well above his rank, which seems to make him virtuous as a Venetian, but “the very fact that Desdemona was open to him endangers her status as his spiritual enclosure, the impermeable container of his honour,” says Peter Stallybrass (1986, p. 136). On the other hand, Richard P. Wheeler adopts an ironic attitude to their marriage, saying that to become Othello’s partner in his marriage bed, Desdemona must “unwittingly undermine the very heroic identity he has invested in her” (as cited in Kolin, 2002, p. 22). Climacus’ consideration of this love as “basically unhappy” is based on the fact that “they are very unequal” He goes on to explain the doomed unhappiness in their marriage: “The unhappiness is the result not of the lovers’ being unable to have each other but of their being unable to understand each other” (as cited in Leite, 2016, p. 127). This interpretation is in

absolute line with the patriarchal order of the early 17th century, when the play was written, and so whoever would see this play on stage then could tend to think that theirs is an unfortunate marriage as can be judged in its initial days.

Convinced by Desdemona that it is at her own will that she has chosen him as her husband and master, her father is compelled to approve of the marriage though unwillingly. However, as depicted by his father and many other characters, Desdemona is a chaste, well-meaning and ideal daughter, thus an ideal wife that a man would want in those times. In harmony with the patriarchal view of that century that women should be under the control of their fathers until marriage and their husbands after marriage, Brabantio does not sound surprising in his reaction towards his daughter's secret marriage. Othello, on the other hand, responds to Brabantio's claim with the statement "my life upon her faith!" (p. 29). The emphasis in it signifies the indispensability of Desdemona's loyalty for him, presenting it as equal to his life. "Though working in a culture positively obsessed with notions of female chastity and the danger of cuckoldry, Shakespeare repeatedly dramatized the consequences of wrongfully accusing an innocent wife" (Josephs, 2019, p. 1). In a sense, it serves to underline the patriarchal attitude to female chastity in Shakespeare's time while it also seems to emphasize the male-centred obsession of the Moor, or the other in those years.

On the other hand, Desdemona's elopement with Othello without the consent of her father represents the emergence of one's individual authority on one's own life, and people's engagement with earthly pleasure in the Renaissance Period. It can also be interpreted as a kind of rebellion against the patriarchal and societal norms of the period. In the Early Modern Period, the emergence of such self-motivated women characters in literary texts and social circles, though sporadically, who follow their own will and desire instead of bowing to their fathers' or elders' demands and instructions, can be accepted as almost synonymous with man's rebel against the clergy in worldly matters largely through his reliance on his own ability to read and follow the Bible on his own. It is, therefore, not surprising that, once obliged by her father to decide between him and Othello, Desdemona likens herself to her mother to rationalize her decision towards the societal norms rather than her father, which proves her to be astute:

... How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;

I am hitherto your daughter: but here's my husband,
And so much duty as my mother show'd,
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord. (p. 25)

It is important to point here that Desdemona calls the Moor "my lord" at the end of her statement, which demonstrates that she replaces her loyalty towards her father with the one towards her husband. This is almost the choice which also echoes in Cordelia's moderate praise of her father and reference to her future husband as the owner of much, not all, of the love within her. Desdemona leaves her father's authority and control behind when she marries Othello and she enters the realm of her husband's control and power from then on (Pashabhai, 2016, p. 3). Representative of a father's unfamiliarity and resentment with his daughter's challenge to him in those days, Desdemona's father's complaint to Othello about her implies that a daughter who betrays her father is sure to betray her husband, thus warning her to be careful with her: "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. / She has deceived her father, and may thee" (p. 29). This mordant utterance of the father creates a binary comparison that puts the love for father and the love for husband into question, sowing in Othello's mind the earliest seed of distrust of her, only to be revealed at a moment of crisis towards the end of the play. This may even be taken as the first step to Othello's murder first of Desdemona out of jealousy and then of himself out of quest for redemption.

On the other hand, Desdemona's individualist choice of the man to love and marry, manifested in her own decision rather than her father's dictation on her, is reflective of the free will, promulgated with the humanist tendencies of the age. She gets infatuated with Othello's heroic qualities that she hears and learns from his stories about the hardships, dangers and threats he has faced in battlefields. The manly attributes of Othello, such as courage, strength, belligerence, and such bodily qualities, are what arouses love and sympathy in Desdemona for him, he says to defend himself against the accusation that he has used witchcraft to make her love him. Unlike the physical qualities that drive Desdemona into loving Othello, spiritual qualities pave the way for his love for her: He loves her for the pity she has for the dangers Othello has undergone till then (p. 24). It would, therefore, not be wrong to say that Desdemona falls in love with the Moor for his heroic qualities on the grounds that he is not as

successful in human relations as in military, which he himself is aware of as well:

... Rude am I in my speech,
And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace:
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used
Their dearest action in the tented field,
And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle. (p. 22)

Desdemona, then, can be said to romanticize and idealize Othello's heroic characteristics, making him a shelter for a woman. This becomes a representation of an ideal love for her as well since women are typically viewed as something to be protected by man in patriarchal societies as well as the Elizabethan England of Shakespeare. Hamilton argues in this context that her devotion to Othello at the expense of losing her parental, social and familial bonds and identity forces her "to cling to her absolute concept of his worth" as she "has no one to shield her" (2003, p. 58). In addition, Desdemona states she "saw Othello's visage in his mind" This means that Othello is a man of his word, and he is what he appears to be, which is the most obvious and sharp difference between Othello and Iago. Unlike Othello, Iago is not what, who and how he seems to be, which is the most ironical situation of the play that sets the basis for his whole plot and tricks. Rosenberg, in his deep exploration of Iago and Othello, develops the image of an "inner" Iago and an "outer" Iago (1961, p. 172). In other words, he is as good on the outside as bad on the inside, so much so that when Othello learns that he will be sent to Cyprus to defend the island from a potent Turkish invasion, he intends to entrust his wife to Iago. Considering that a wife is the most important possession for a husband and that chastity is the most important treasure for a woman, Othello's intention is an indication of the extent to which he trusts Iago with peace of mind. This decision of his proves, however, his inability to conduct human relations in a self-conscious manner. Smidt approaches this issue from a similar perspective:

... in some ways it is more rewarding to see Othello as a soldier than as a Moor. It is as a soldier that he plays his public part, that he antagonises Iago, and that he finally dispatches himself as he once dispatched 'a turban'd Turk who 'Beat a Venetian, and traduc'd the

state. (1990, p. 112)

This is the very reason for his openness to manipulations by those around him, especially Iago, already overflowing with ambition for revenge on both Othello and Cassio.

With the realization that there is nothing to do for Desdemona to return to her father and that Brabantio is convinced that Othello is not to blame for this marriage, Roderigo is consumed by fury on one hand and jealousy on the other as he is also in pursuit of marriage to her. He even tells Iago that he will “incontinently drown” himself, adding “It is silliness to live when to live is torment; and then have we a prescription to die when death is our physician” (p. 29, 30). Through this speech of Roderigo, Shakespeare, as he does so in minor characters in his plays, especially in fools, provides an insight for the reader about the act of committing suicide, and its ethical and philosophical dimensions. At this point, he prepares audience for the possible ending of the end of the main character, the Moor. As Seneca states in his *Moral Letters to Lucilius*, “If one is death with torture, and the other easy and uncomplicated, why not put your hand and take the latter?” (2015, p. 211). This does not necessarily mean that one should commit suicide if he has insoluble issues related to his life; instead, Seneca claims that only if the fact that one’s experience of problems that are insoluble creates a kind of intolerable pain in him can he commit suicide, as can be understood from his comparison between the difficulty in dying and living. To him, it is not the quantity of life but its quality that is of importance for human life. In a study on the ethics of suicide with reference to historical sources, Battin writes of Seneca’s view and account of suicide as follows:

Seneca argues against thinking of suicide as an act that inappropriately cuts a life short. Unlike a journey cut short, which is incomplete, life cut short can still be complete if it has been lived well. Freedom and self-determination are of primary importance; suicide is the way for one to retain control and freedom over one’s life, and in accordance with Stoic thinking, it is the act par excellence of the wise man. (Battin, 2015, p. 108)

In this context, Seneca is known to have claimed that one’s life should be based on virtue, and so he gives a famous utterance in *Letter 70*: “The wise man will live as

long as he ought, not as long as he can” Therefore, the act of committing suicide, when considered from Stoic perspective, depends on one’s reaction to the problem itself, as it is an issue of judging whether the problem is an unbearable pain or a phenomenon that should be ignored. At this point one can reach in his own consciousness, as Iago states: “Ere I would say, I would frown myself for the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon” (p. 30). In this context, Shakespeare signals that Othello’s suicide will result from the unbearable pain of remorse which he causes for himself by murdering Desdemona. Othello’s tragedy lies in the fact that he himself is the one who causes all the pains in his life, which emphasizes reason as an agent that determines the quality of one’s life when it is used. This is successfully conveyed in Iago’s words: “’Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners...” (p. 30), giving the message that the Moor should not act with his emotions, but with reason. It turns out in the course of the play that Othello’s rush to his emotional side rather than reason and logic appears to be his tragic flaw which will destruct him. Smidt justifies F.R. Leavis’s perception of Othello “as a man of action, a man with a machismo image of himself ... who has an absolute trust in his ‘honest’ subaltern” (1990, p. 113).

It is well-known that the whole play of *Othello* is built and centred around the feeling of jealousy, one of the seven deadly sins according to the Catholic Church, but what matters for the present study is more the act of suicide than the feeling or sin of jealousy. However, these two issues are intertwined through the play as Othello’s jealousy is deliberately enhanced by Iago to such an extent that his jealousy turns, for him, into a reason for his murder of his dear wife and himself. The chain of events is, therefore, linked to each other from jealousy through murder to suicide. It is in the process of plotting this chain of events that Iago appears to be quite a villainous or devious man who repudiates to himself in his genuine thoughts and feelings what he presents and introduces to others in appearance.

Briefly talking of Iago’s insidious and, to many, Machiavellian plot, it could be said that he builds his plot on pushing Othello into a fit of jealousy through Desdemona’s so-called affair, falsely invented by him, with Cassio. In Shakespeare’s age, a man’s kissing his own hand instead of kissing that of a noble woman is considered a symbol of kindness. Accordingly, Iago, upon witnessing Cassio kissing his own hand, realizes that he is kind to Desdemona and he wants to kiss her hand

indeed. This throws the first sparks of the evil thing that Iago has been planning for a long time: “Yet again your fingers to your lips? Would they were clyster-pipes for your sake!” (p. 40).

A possible relationship between Desdemona and Cassio is a double chance for Iago because it means he can take his revenge on both Othello and Cassio at the same time, which is what distinguishes him from the other evil characters of Shakespeare. On the other hand, “he sees the control that people who are in love have over each other” and anticipates what the seeds of doubt in Othello’s mind will cause at the end (Alkoli & Ji, 2018, p. 419). He is almost always accepted as the embodiment of a villain, a character that is typically defined as “a man who, for a selfish end, wilfully and deliberately violates standards of morality sanctioned by the audience or ordinary reader” (Boyer, 1914, p. 8). He is extremely successful in turning even unlikely situations to his advantage and gaining maximum benefit from them. “He is not the kind of character who blocks the protagonist’s purpose; he creates a purpose for Othello,” says Boyer (1914, p. 117) for his action, but this purpose serves Iago’s benefit, not Othello’s. On the other hand, it is clearly seen that Iago has a superior ability to analyse human nature, which plays a major role in his success in his plans without any single failure:

It [jealousy] is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
That meat it feeds on; that cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
But, O, what damned minutes tells he o’er
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves! (p. 70)

Iago is aware that he should be able to provide the right environment for his claim that Desdemona cheats on Othello, and to do so, he is supposed to take Cassio and Desdemona’s relationship from one between a soldier and lady to a more intimate and private one. His words to Cassio “A soldier’s a man; / A life’s but a span; / Why, then, let a soldier drink” (p. 48) are intended to persuade Cassio into drinking with him, also manifesting his understanding of hedonism and “carpe diem” This plan ends up with Cassio beating Roderigo under the effect of drink, which raises Iago in Othello’s eyes while lowering Cassio. Being a dedicated soldier, Cassio believes that reputation is the most important thing that, in a sense, separates him from the animals (p. 53), and the loss of his reputation, especially in such a scandalous incident, shakes

him deeply. By leaving Cassio helpless in this way, Iago sets up the appropriate conditions and environment for himself to take advantage of Cassio's emotional void and to use him by taking advantage of his weaknesses under the guise of a sincere friend to him. It would be more appropriate to say that instead of taking advantage of those he is close to, Iago gets close with those he can take advantage of. This is the very reason why he hates the Moor, that is, he cannot benefit from his friendship with the Moor to be promoted as a lieutenant. Parallel to this, Othello's trust in Iago is that which causes all the troubles he will go into throughout the work. Especially in the scene of fight, instead of listening to Cassio, he prefers to rely on Iago's explanation related to the incident, and he falls into the trap of the manipulations by Iago in such an easy way.

This helplessness and despair of Cassio is exactly what Iago wants for his plan. Accordingly, he encourages Cassio to seek help from Desdemona as she is, in Iago's opinion, "...framed as fruitful / As the free elements. And then for her / to win the Moor-were't to renounce his baptism," (p. 57). Having been a Muslim before his conversion into Christian, Othello, Iago explains to Cassio, can be made to deny his baptism under the effect of Desdemona. This claim of Iago both illustrates Desdemona's persuasive effect on Othello, which is Iago's tool for his trick on Cassio, and clearly signifies the otherness of Othello in the Christian society as it means that he can never be assimilated entirely and his barbaric past can never be civilised by the society in which he lives and works. It also implies that he will never belong to the place where he wants to have merit. Iago is proud to liken himself to the devil in pretending to be sincere and virtuous in his devilish plans: "when devils will the blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows, / As I do now: ..." (p. 58). At this point, it would not be wrong to say that Iago is not an inherent but a calculated or conscious evil as he embraces evil and sees it, in a sense, as an art. On the other hand, in the Middle Ages and Renaissance Period, the devil was thought of as a figure leading people to sin and feeding on their weaknesses especially "by searching out the longings to which men are most subject" just as Iago does (Kramer & Springer, as cited in Esposito Frank, 2021, p. 59). It is also a widely known fact that disguising oneself to be unidentifiable or to hinder one's real intentions is one of the best strategies of the devil as it disguises itself as a snake while tempting Eve and Adam to commit the sin of eating the forbidden fruit and to rebel against God.

Considering that Iago disguises himself, too, as a friend to many characters with the purpose of betraying or using them for his own benefit, it can be judged as an apt metaphor he uses in his speech.

If Iago is on one side of the story as a typical devil with sly intentions, Desdemona is on the other side with her perfect purity, sincerity and honesty. In agreeing to help Cassio, she stands out with her loyalty and devotion not only to her husband but to her friends as well. To assure Cassio that she will restore his lost dignity by getting into her husband's head, she says "If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it" (p. 64) in a way that demonstrates her naivety and loyalty to those around her. However, this is also what lays the ground for her destruction in the work ironically. Her talk and plea to Othello to let Cassio express himself and clarify a misunderstanding is quickly succeeded by Iago's steps to implement his plans over Othello. He first makes Othello question the virtuousness of Cassio, which he cannot make sense of, and then tempts him into the bosom of jealousy while advising him to avoid jealousy in his treatment of Desdemona and Cassio:

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on; that cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
But O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves! (p. 70)

As he is a calculating villain, he prefers to hide his hideous intention through seeming sceptical, not assured, to Othello about what he informs him of Desdemona's attitude to Cassio instead of making direct and precise accusations against her. Thus, he prefers to cloud his mind with doubt, which is the poisonous seed of jealousy. Even though he shows his own grounds for Desdemona's betrayal, he emphasizes to Othello that he himself is not certainly sure with expressions such as "I am pray you not to strain my speech / To grosser issues nor to larger reach / Than to suspicion" (p. 72). Hasan states that "The repetition of loaded phrases, syntactic ambiguity, and metonymic associations amplifies his ability to shape Othello's emotional response, a hallmark of manipulative discourse" and he determines five types of linguistic strategies Iago develops to manipulate Othello: rhetorical questions, irony & ambiguity, gaslighting techniques, false certainty, and deliberate pauses and ellipses

(2024, p. 601).

As Kenneth Burke states, Iago adopts the persona of someone who assists Othello in clarifying the situation and would be happy if his suspicions were disproved (1951, p. 194). Here he applies a dark strategy by feeding on scepticism because human mind is exhausted, confused and blurred more in the presence of uncertainty, little knowledge and incessant doubt than in the absence of any knowledge, a case which can be seen in Othello's saying: "I swear 'tis better to be much abused / Than but to know't a little" (p. 77). What makes this strategy work is also Iago's awareness that Othello might not accept an accusation that he would make with a certain and self-assured attitude and might even become defensive and offensive against him. However, Othello is rather vulnerable to suspicion-based and indirect manipulations. He is now doomed to be trapped between this suspicion created in his mind by Iago and his own reason and emotions over time, because scepticism disrupts one's mental balance and pushes that one to believe the wrong more quickly, which makes him more vulnerable to manipulation by Iago throughout the work. Indeed, "Othello was a mere marionette in the hands of Iago, who was tweaking and twitching upon his motivational strings to direct him to perform the actions that he, Iago, wanted him to perform" (Taylor, 2009, p. 41). Even though Othello loses his control over himself and acts upon his emotions as he is manipulated by Iago, he desperately begs him to give him a proof that Desdemona cheats on him. This aligns with his rationality as a soldier not as a lover, because war requires one to refer to his mind and reason; to kill an enemy, he should first see and target him.

By the world,
I think my wife be honest and think she is not;
I think that thou art just and think thou art not.
I'll have some proof ...
Give me a living reason she's disloyal. (p. 79-80)

These lines clearly demonstrate how effective Iago's manipulations are on Othello and reflect his perplexed and manipulated mind related to his wife's loyalty to him. The doubt that gnaws at him owing to Iago's manipulations causing him to lose his power of reasoning and judgement as well leads to a kind of chaos in his conscious. Thus, Mitova states, "Othello is so focused on resolving this implanted doubt that he fails to doubt the source of his doubt" (2016, p. 54). At this point, he has an internal

feud, but he cannot obtain any rational solution for it; instead, he accepts coincidences as proofs in the later scenes, already predicted and planned by Iago: “Trifles light as air / Are to jealous confirmations strong / As proofs of holy writ...” (p. 76). Considering that killing someone is legal only in a war contrary to the fact that it is illegal to do so due to the problems in one’s personal relationships according to Venetian justice in that time⁴, Othello can be said to have lost not only his mental balance but his ethical principles as well since the lack of sense of proportion causes a thirst for blood in him: “O, that the slave [Cassio] had forty thousand lives! / One is too poor, too weak for my revenge ... O, blood, blood, blood” (p. 81). These lines clearly show the frenzy of vengeance in the Moor and the corruption in his understanding of justice as a soldier, and as such they foreshadow the possibility that he will murder someone in the end, and most probably his wife. “Othello’s sensual and passionate nature is borne forcibly in upon us along with his towering black presence and inseparably from it” (Smidt, 1990, p. 111).

What Othello asks Iago for some proof for the disloyalty of Desdemona to him is soon obtained by Iago through his manipulation of Emilia, his wife, into getting the handkerchief presented to Desdemona by Othello as a token of her loyalty. To Othello, that handkerchief is of great importance in that it was inherited by his mother, thus symbolizing the loyalty between husband and wife since it was given to his mother by an Egyptian sybil with the following words: “... While she kept it, / ‘Twould make her amiable and subdue my father / Entirely to her love, but if she lost it / Or made gift of it, / my father’s eye / Should hold her loathed and spirits should hunt / After new fancies...” (p. 86). The story of the handkerchief then makes Othello follow a fatalist understanding towards life as he believes that if the handkerchief is not with Desdemona and she does not take care of it, the loyalty between them will be lost as well, since he sees the handkerchief not only as a symbol for loyalty but also for a kind of talisman. Othello attaches so much importance and weight to this prophecy that he keeps Desdemona’s loss of the handkerchief tantamount to her physical infidelity to him. The moment he notices that she has really lost it, he seeks not for an answer to whether Desdemona cheats on him really, but for a proof that she really does so. It means that he, from then on, finds it almost unlikely that Desdemona does not cheat

⁴ “While for the most part the church adjudicated marital disputes, a Venetian tribunal, the *Giudici al Procurator*, handled the related issue of dividing property” (Ferraro, 1995, p.495)

on him.

Listening to Iago's report about Cassio's wiping his beard with Desdemona's handkerchief, Othello is now assured that he has been cheated on. This is why he uses the adjective "moist" for her hand while talking to her: "Give me your hand: this hand is moist, my lady" (p. 84). In Shakespeare's times, a moist hand was a symbol of one's lustfulness. At this point, Desdemona becomes a subject to the distinction between a pure woman, whose sexuality is assigned to one man only, and a whore, whose sexuality belongs to more than one man (Berkday, 2011, p. 81). Especially in Shakespeare's time, a woman was seen as property of a man, who was her father before marriage, and her husband after it. Thus, at that time, just as protecting property was a sacred duty for a man, so protecting his daughter or wife was also considered as an equally sacred duty. Ruggerio explains this approach to adultery committed by women in Renaissance Venice:

The crime [adultery] was defined from a patriarchal perspective. Beyond this general vision we find an equally strong emphasis on the wife as a piece of property. Thus, the stealing of a wife with her consent for a moment of passion or a long liaison was perceived as a serious loss of property for a husband and his household. (1985, p. 45)

Parallel to the explanation by Berkday and Ruggerio, when Iago tells Othello that his wife is sleeping with his lieutenant, Cassio, Othello labels his wife as a "public commoner" and "strumpet" (p. 109). under the illusion that he is a man cheated on by his wife. He also starts to see himself as "a monster and a beast" (p. 96). This shows that he otherizes not only his wife but also himself. He even dehumanises himself for being a horned man, which shows that he moves away from human qualities in his point of view. With all these points taken into consideration, it can be said that his turning into a monster signifies his loss of human qualities, which also foreshadows his capacity for evil in the rest of the play.

What is a dramatic coincidence here is that just as it is through the words poured by Othello through Desdemona's ears into her mind and heart that he makes her fall in love with him, so it is through the words of Iago into Othello's mind that the former assures the latter that Desdemona is in a constant process of betrayal to him. It is

equally dramatic and tragic that Othello has always told true stories with no lies, while Iago has always told false stories with so many lies and deceptive news. This may be accepted to testify Othello's naivety in social encounters, depending on his mission which is to kill or captivate the enemy without any hesitation or talk to him. Stanislavski, staging *Othello* for the Moscow Art Theatre in 1930, refers to the naïve eastern mentality of Othello in a way supportive of the preceding argument: "The story now told by Othello always made me feel how very naïve, besides being sincere and frank, was Othello's eastern mentality... And yet, it was this naivety that conquered" (Gillies, 2005, p. 273). Thus, it could be said that Othello's pathologic jealousy results largely from his immediate trust based on not having much experience and results in his attribution of all coincidences to Desdemona's betrayal in the rest of the play.

The final stroke at Othello is blown by Iago in his prearranged talk to Cassio about Bianca, the mistress to Cassio, under the impression that they are talking about Desdemona. At least this is what Othello is made to believe by Iago's manipulative instructions. His manipulations are based on Othello's ignorance and/or unawareness of the reality, and so is this one. Listening to them with the false thought that Cassio is happy to be talking about Desdemona in big laughter, Othello is driven mad and loses the control of his mind as already planned by Iago: "And his [Othello's] unbookish jealousy must construe / Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviour" (p. 97). The fact that all these deceptions play such a strong role in Othello's psychology clearly shows how vulnerable Othello is to Iago's manipulations.

From then on Othello grows out of his acclaimed identity and recognition as a celebrated commander into an uncivilized man due to his origin as can be seen in the words of Lodovico, a nobleman of Venice and kinsman of Brabantio, at the sight of Othello insulting and belittling Desdemona in public: "...This would not be believed in Venice" (p. 104). He implies that Venice is a city of civilisation and order, of which Othello has to be a part too. However, in Cyprus, the city of war and chaos in the play, it is clearly seen that Othello loses his civilized identity as a result of his blind jealousy. Johanyak explains this case with the shift in Othello's identity from Venice to Cyprus:

As the military leader of Cyprus, it makes sense that the legal jurisprudence he had learned doctrinally would be the guiding response to Desdemona's crime. Othello in Cyprus lacks either a contemporary Christian spiritual authority or a Sharia court venue

through which to process Desdemona's perceived adultery. Lacking these means, as the military leader of Cyprus, he assumes the role of judge, jury and the executioner. (2020, p. 126)

Othello can be said to be trying to regain the honour and dignity he thinks he has lost through a show of power with his insults and violence against Desdemona in front of others. Although men are accepted to symbolize logic, rationality, and control, and women to symbolize emotions, irrationality, and mood swings especially from the Middle Ages onwards, Othello, who is expected to act with the logic of a soldier as well, acts with a sense of jealousy, thus his emotions throughout the play, which contradicts with his masculine identity. At this very point, Lodovico puts emotion and passion into question:

Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,
Could neither graze nor pierce? (p. 105)

Another conflict Othello shows throughout the play is that he aggrandizes Desdemona in his conscious so much that he cannot accept what he thinks she has done to him though he certainly believes in the reality of Desdemona's infidelity. In Othello's opinion, "the world hath not a sweeter creature" than Desdemona and he thinks "she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks" (p. 101). He is terribly torn between the ideal of Desdemona as a faithful wife in his soul and the rejection of such a wife in his mind. While he loves and admires her in a genuine manner, his disregard to her appeal related to her innocence is his hamartia in Aristotelian sense, which leads to his destruction in the end. In this context, there appears a sharp difference between both lovers, that is, while Othello misunderstands and misinterprets all the coincidences that makes him question Desdemona's loyalty to him, she, even when humiliated, cannot let her husband down, and she relates her husband's aggression towards her to something concerning a state matter (p. 89). This illustrates the difference between the personality of Desdemona and that of the Moor as she has a passionate belief in the Moor as a traditional marriage of the time requires naturally, while her husband does not. Desdemona, somehow, is aware of the fact that her love for the Moor and the Moor's jealousy will be coupled to cost her life one day.

Especially in the last two stages, Shakespeare uses foreshadowing about Desdemona's tragic ending in the play specifically by making Desdemona talk. The audience understands what will happen in the rest of the play while listening to Desdemona's appeals and cries: "Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may do much / And his unkindness may defeat my life" (p. 113). Shakespeare's use of foreshadowing especially in the tirades of Desdemona symbolizes her purity of heart, thus functioning in not only technical but also literary terms.

After making sure, though under a false illusion, that Desdemona cheats on him, Othello can be said to have gone mad, as can be understood from his unexpectedly irrational and unnatural thoughts and behaviours. His growing jealousy, coupled with uncontrolled rage and sense of not having deserved such an attitude from her, fuels his desire to kill her no later than tomorrow. Othello's desire for killing his wife is often associated with his personal thoughts and emotions. Byles states that "Othello fears public ridicule and hates himself as a cuckold and Desdemona for making him one; his idealizing superego demands murder of Desdemona, then suicide" (1979, p. 81). However, it is worth pointing out that he justifies his decision to kill his wife not with the fact that she has cheated on him with Cassio, but the fact that "she'll betray more men" (p. 129). At this point, Desdemona appears not as a cheater but as a threat for society from Othello's perspective, which means that he sees himself as a protector of the order and peace of society rather than a killer. Boose also establishes a connection between Othello's murder of Desdemona with the fifth book, Deuteronomy, in the Old Testament that commands man whose wife is realized not to be virgin to take her back to her father's house and to be stoned dead in order to "put away evil from Israel" (1975, pp. 372-373) (Deut. 22). Thus, Othello becomes not only the protector of society, but also the protector of divine regulations.

It is now time for his realization of his uninhibited plan of killing her. He puts out the lights, which is most probably because of his fear that he may be impressed by her beauty when their eyes meet, and that he may not be able to bear killing her. Thus, putting out the lights and killing her in the dark is, for Othello, a way of avoiding emotional impact during the murder, which can be connected to the act of blindfolding death row inmates. However, to him, Desdemona's existence *per se* is enough to destroy sense of justice: "Ah, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade / Justice to break her sword!..." (p. 129). Othello, needing to feed his frustration at Desdemona to ease

his murderous act, tells her to confess her betrayal, a confession by which he probably hopes to be relieved of his guilty conscience, or pangs of remorse upon his completion of the murder. However, Desdemona's denial of his claim makes him more frustrated instead. At this point, he states that she makes him call his act murder rather than a sacrifice (p. 132). The fact that Othello sees the act of killing Desdemona as a kind of sacrifice shows his desire to legitimize the murder of Desdemona in fact and demonstrates that he accepts his sense of justice as that of a judge and God's. It is at his own will that he commits this murder not just for personal satisfaction resulting from revenge but for the recovery of the society from such a heinous and poisonous woman as his wife. Correspondingly, Wertheim describes Othello as a "decision-maker" and his condemnation as "trial": "Othello becomes an instance where the decision-maker projects his own criminal predilections and feelings of guilt upon the accused so the trial is not so much a search for justice for the accused, but a means of denial or expiation for the judge" (1996, p. 1025). Harry Frankfurt also contributes to the argument that Othello has committed this murder at his own free will: "Othello did what he wanted to do ... he did it because he wanted to do it, and ... the will by which he was moved when he did it was his will because it was the will he wanted" (1988, p. 24). In arguing that Othello would never do otherwise, Frankfurt claims that he would not stop himself killing Desdemona, and attributes this to his conviction that "Othello would not have wanted his will to differ from what it was" (p. 24).

In the murder scene, Desdemona begs the Moor not to kill her, at least for that night or for half an hour, a plea which is rejected by Othello who does not even allow her to pray for the last time though this is her last wish. The scene carries the characteristics of pathos, in which audiences feel the highest level of pity for a character, as her appeal represents her despair and purity deeply. Despite her wholehearted pleas, Othello stifles her dead. Just afterwards, he is startled at the knocking on the door, only to think "it should be now a huge eclipse / Of sun and moon,..." (p. 134). This can be interpreted as the imminence of a scene of catastrophe following the scene of murder. He is attacked by Emilia, who comes in to see and serve Desdemona but finds her dead. Responding to her with his insistent and loud claims that she is a whore who deserves to die, he is more than shocked to hear from her that Desdemona is innocent of his accusations. She, in spite of the attempts of Iago, her husband, to prevent her from telling the truth, confesses to him and all the others in the room the

mystery over the handkerchief that has proved Othello's jealousy at least to him (pp. 149-150). This is the scene of *anagnorisis*, or recognition, in which there appears "a change from ignorance to knowledge, tending to establish either friendship or animosity, between the persons destined to happiness or misery" (Aristotle, 1819, p. 28). Proving disobedient to her husband for his insidious lies and plots but obedient to the truth, she is killed by Iago with a sword after she reveals the innocence of Desdemona.

The successive murders of two women, wives to two friends, help Othello regain his conscience and discover the fact that his wife is indeed innocent. In contrast to his preconceived justification of the murder as a means of protecting the justice and social order, he now realizes to his horror and regret that he is just a base killer or murderer. This scene of reversal, also known as *peripeteia*, "the change of actions to their very opposites; ... either according to probable, or necessary consequence" (Aristotle, 1819, p. 27), pushes him to the verge of nervous breakdown out of regret and remorse. He is now replaced by an Othello overwhelmed by guilt, causing him to suffer in pain. It is an expected and inevitable result that Othello, who has punished his wife by killing her due to her infidelity, will punish himself too on account of his infidelity to their vows to each other in their marriage.

Throughout the work, Othello is a decision-maker in the judgment of the problems he constantly experiences on social and personal levels. He acts at his free will, equipped by his thoughts and emotions in defiance of the social, legal, divine and moral codes, according to the situation. Whenever there appears a problem to solve, Othello is the one to evaluate the problem with his own conscience and value judgment, and whenever there is someone to punish, he is the one who determines the way of punishment as well. Therefore, when the context of the conflicts throughout the play is compared to a legal trial process, Othello seems to be in the position of a judge while those who commit crimes and make mistakes are in the position of criminals. To him, the sins committed and the mistakes made always have a price that must be paid, either by one's life or one's honour, which can be called redemption. This is the very reason for his dismissal of Cassio as a lieutenant due to his lack of self-control and his murder of Desdemona due to her lack of loyalty. After learning Desdemona's innocence and realizing the injustice and heinousness of his killing her, he now becomes both the judge and the criminal in his own court. Therefore, his

punishment of himself is not just a result but a necessity for him as well, as can be understood from his tirade in act V, scene II:

...O cursed slave!
Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire! (p. 142)

Feeling a huge remorse and pain at his cruel act, Othello listens to Lodovico who is reading the letters found in the pockets of Roderigo, already killed by Iago during the affray he has planned. Anagnorisis continues when Othello realizes from the correspondence between Iago and Roderigo that even the incident in which Cassio is dismissed as a lieutenant has been plotted by Iago as a matter of fact. This testifies to the moment Othello realizes his own tragic flaw: "... Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely ... / ... Being wrought / Perplex'd in the extreme;" (p. 145).

As mentioned above, Othello takes on the role of judge for his own crimes and sins, too, as his remorse grows. In his tirade in the last scene, he talks about "a malignant and a turban'd Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state," (p. 145) and he talks about how he has punished the man by killing him. From the anecdote he gives and his act of killing Desdemona and his intention to kill Cassio, and Iago in the end, it would not be wrong to say that only life can atone for the crime of betraying the person or institution that benefits him, in Othello's mind. Thus, he continues "And [I] smote him, thus" (p. 145) and he commits suicide by stabbing himself. In this context, the fact that Othello likens his act of killing himself to the act of killing the malignant and turbaned man who beats a Venetian and blaspheme against the state leads the readers to consider that Othello believes the mistake and sin he has committed to be not only against his wife but also against the state because he sees himself, not the state, as the arbiter of what the punishment for his wife's wrongdoing should be, and kills her illegally:

...the most frightening element of Othello's last speech is the perception contained in the realization that he himself is a traitor, both to Desdemona and the white world and to the black world in which he grew up. The 'circumcised dog' is both the malignant Turk

slain by Othello and Othello himself who traduced the state...
(Cohen, 1993, p. 12)

Othello's real intention of suicide, therefore, is to do penance for his sin. While he is dying, he talks to Desdemona: "I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee: no way but this; / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" (pp. 145-146). His is no more than a pursuit of redeeming himself from the burden and pain of having slaughtered a woman indeed as innocent as a drop of dew untainted by the brightness of the sun. Here Shakespeare does not inform the reader about whether Othello kisses Desdemona really for the last time while he is dying; however, the lines imply strongly that he does. The kiss during death symbolizes his belief in the desire and need to be forgiven, a belief which is tantamount to admitting that only when his prayer or desire is accepted by God will his soul reach salvation. "In writing his tragedies, Shakespeare became deeply interested in the effects of sin on the psyche of his heroes. With his Christian background, it was only natural that he should want to show the redemption of a sinful hero," says Velie (1972, p. 121). Velie's comment is applicable to the play *Othello*, too, with the exception that as a tragedy it has no happy ending and so it could be thought that the reader is left in vogue over whether he has been redeemed or not even though his purpose is to be gifted with redemption. It may be said that not only is he regretful about killing his dear wife, but he is also remorseful about assuming the divine role of ending one's life at his own will, depending on what he believes to be true. Though it is open to controversy whether Othello reaches the redemption he aims at while committing suicide or his suicide remains as a tragic ending for him because it is also open to debate whether Othello's death is equal to what he has done to Desdemona, Othello's suicide, or his tragic end, seems to be enough, according to Shakespeare, to compensate for Desdemona's death. This is because he uses Othello's suicide to arouse catharsis, in which audience feels a deep sense of pity for the tragic character at the end of the play. Therefore, if Othello's suicide were not considered to be a redemption for Desdemona's death, audience would not experience the cathartic relief, which means the play would not achieve its goal and not be considered a tragedy as well since catharsis is one of the indispensable parts of a tragedy when viewed from Aristotle's perspective.

Othello's suicide can be read, therefore, as a tragic manifestation of his excessive devotion to the values of love, purity and faith that Desdemona represents. As soon as

he realizes Desdemona's innocence, he finds it morally impossible to survive her death. Thus, his suicide becomes not only an expression of personal regret, but also the ultimate expression of his sense of devotion to a figure, Desdemona, to whom he transcends his own self. With this act, Othello recognizes that Desdemona is a symbol of purity that deserves to die for, and by ending his own life, he tries to make sense of Desdemona's death and place himself on the same context with her. At this point, Othello's individual self is erased and replaced by a self-sacrificing subject who submits to the values of love and conscience. This makes him, in line with Durkheim's definition, a profound example of altruistic suicide as an individual who surrenders his life to a sacred value he has internalized.



4. SUICIDE AS A WAY OF SALVATION: LADY MACBETH

Macbeth, which is the shortest tragedy written by Shakespeare, is one of the most famous of dramatic history. The play consists of five acts, treating the themes of power, ambition, order, fate, and free will. Though these seem to be the central themes, the play *Macbeth* also tackles the issues of gender roles and masculinity, as well. The work can be considered as a separate one when compared to the other tragedies because unlike Othello and King Lear, the other tragic characters of Shakespeare, Macbeth, the titular tragic hero of the play, is well aware that what he is thinking of doing is wrong; in spite of his awareness of the evil aspect of his plan, he embraces evil and does it deliberately with the encouragement and urging of his wife, Lady Macbeth. In addition, anagnorisis, which is one of the main aspects of Aristotelian tragedy as the backbone of tragedy in Shakespeare's time, is not undergone by Macbeth in the typical way prompted by Aristotle. This is because he would, otherwise, be required to realize his mistakes and feel remorseful. However, the fact that both Macbeth and his wife experience a destruction at the end of the work makes it similar to Aristotelian understanding of tragedy. The play is full of deaths, especially due to the blind ambition of Macbeth, who is afraid of being dethroned as a result of regicide; among the homicides in the play committed or commanded by Macbeth himself, there is also one that is separated from them in that it is the suicide committed by Lady Macbeth.

At the beginning of the play, Macbeth is introduced as a successful general who demonstrates an outstanding success on behalf of Scotland in the rebellion and attack initiated by the Norwegians. In scene II, a sergeant reports to the King about the revolt, describing Macbeth's bravery: "For brave Macbeth ... / Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel, / Which smoked with bloody execution..." (Shakespeare, 2021, p. 8). The bravery Macbeth has displayed during the revolt by Norwegians eventually enables him to be awarded the title of Thane of Cawdor by the King Duncan, to whom Macbeth is related by blood as well, as he is the son of Duncan's uncle, thus his cousin. The description of the bravery of Macbeth by the sergeant is significant in that it indicates Macbeth's personality, specifically his attitude towards whomever he sees as a threat.

As a wife to Macbeth, Lady Macbeth plays a role of mentor for him especially

throughout the first half of the play. Having received the letter from Macbeth that mentions the witches' prophecies one of which has already taken place, Lady Macbeth overflows with a blind ambition. While it is a well-known fact that ambition results from one's desire for the power or something else, it should be noted here that Lady Macbeth's ambition is not frustrated by the desire to be a queen, which can be understood from the fact that there is no aside or speech attesting to her political desires; instead, she serves to induce and/or seduce her husband into her grave plans for his ascension, not hers, which will finally lead her husband to the throne. It is a widely-known fact that in societies dominated by patriarchal system, women were supposed to "be kind, docile, fragile and always focused on the family" (Cen, p. 887). However, contrary to her husband and in defiance of gender roles of the Elizabethan Period imposing the characteristics of passiveness, submission and innocence onto women, Lady Macbeth seems to follow the understanding of Machiavellianism, believing that ambition itself is not enough to accede the throne; instead, she states that her husband's ambition should be accompanied by "the illness", a term uttered by her in a way to mean that he should cheat his way through the throne:

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win... (p. 19)

Lady Macbeth wants not only to encourage her husband but also to expedite the fulfilment of the prophecy through her words to Macbeth. Thus, besides her role as a driving force, she also serves as a function of an expeditor:

...Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round... (p. 19)

Lady Macbeth's personification of her tongue with the word "valour" signifies

the insane courage that lies in her spirit. However, as a woman that cannot actualize her courage with her physical power during the Elizabethan Period, which limited women's area of freedom and power and directed them to think strategically and use their tongue as a weapon instead of using physical power as a key element on the way to those they desired, she prefers to convey her courage through her words to her husband. Tock states "...women were seen as more "tongue-ripe" – more likely to use words as weapons" in Early Modern England (2004, p. 23). In this context, while Lady Macbeth appears as a brain that functions constantly and makes critical decisions, Macbeth appears as a power that performs the decisions that are made by the brain itself. On the other hand, "valour" is an adjective that qualifies mostly men when viewed especially from the context of Elizabethan Period, dominated by patriarchal system, as it means "great bravery, especially in war" (www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). Thus, Lady Macbeth appears as a woman that goes beyond the roles of women imposed on her during the period; she grows into a decision maker that imposes herself and her decision(s) on the man who is naturally expected and even required in those days to command and rule her. "Men are portrayed as strong willed and courageous, but female character like Lady Macbeth is also given a ruthless, power-hungry personality, which is typically, in the period, more associated with masculinity" (Mohammed, 2016, p. 479). Thus, she can be said to go beyond the gender roles imposed on her in that age. It is unnatural of a woman to behave the way Lady Macbeth does in the play, a choice which can be accounted for by her free will or desire in an age of free will accepted to have been initiated by the rise of Humanism.

In parallel with this, Lady Macbeth calls for spirits to take her femininity from herself, which takes place in the most striking tirade spoken by her in the scene V in act I: "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here" (p. 20). She wants to get rid of her womanhood to have the characteristics of cruelty, remorselessness and determination. Greene defines Macbeth's desire for defeminization as an attempt to masculinize:

These lines leave no doubt that, for Lady Macbeth, masculinity is equated with cruelty, violence and murder, and femininity with their opposites. The recurrence of the milk image is an important metaphorical link connecting her attack on her mate's effeminacy ("too full o' th' milk of human kindness"). and her own efforts to

play the role of the male. (p. 158)

Wilder also states that “Lady Macbeth’s ‘unsex[ing]’ refits her body not only for masculine and evil deeds but for a masculine control over her memory” (2010, p. 160). Though her desire for being unsexed here is interpreted by many scholars as her desire for having masculinity, she can be said to want to get rid of the passivity, softness and/or humaneness that would prevent her from committing that sort of devious act usually, thus disposing herself of whatever makes one good and divine in one’s soul. In other words, she seeks for a soul that has no emotional motivation related to any sex. Asp states in this context that “Macbeth has an inchoate grasp of the idea that being human means accepting the limits imposed by social interconnectedness, by one’s rank and role” (p. 156). In other words, she wants to get rid of humaneness through a kind of gender nullification. To do so, what she should eliminate in her soul is the femaleness, which is misinterpreted as a desire for having a masculine nature. In this context, when it comes to her ambition, Lady Macbeth can be said to have conflicts not with her femaleness *per se*, but with humanness, thus human nature itself, which is proven by the fact that to lose her humanity, she wants spirits to thicken her blood, which will cause poor blood circulation and disrupt the proper functionality of heart, believed to be the main source of emotions, and she wants them to take her milk in her breasts “for gall”, instead of taking her breasts themselves:

And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of dirtiest cruelty! make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers... (p. 20)

The fact that she asks for her milk to be replaced with “gall” again points to Macbeth’s desire to become not a man, but more than that, a superhuman or non-human being, which means she will have no human emotion and judgment:

In asking for her milk to be exchanged for gall, while she is asking for her maternal nurturing instinct to be replaced with cruelty, she is really intending for her humanity to be replaced with inhumanity as

opposed to her femininity being replaced by masculinity. (Reaves, 2014, p. 12)

By eliminating the potential compassion in her soul, Lady Macbeth wants to get away from the identity of a being, whether a man or woman, controlled, dictated and ruled by the restrictions, rules, taboos, etc. of her time in religious, moral, traditional and legal terms. She frees herself of whatever may hinder her on the way to the fulfilment of her devious intention and thus she embraces the determination that she wants and indeed needs, as can be understood from her words when she hears Duncan will spend the night with them and he will leave tomorrow: “O, never / Shall sun that morrow see! ... This night’s great business into my dispatch; / Which shall to all our nights and days to come / Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom” (p. 21). This is also the signifier of her blind ambition and Machiavellian pragmatism, a success and result-oriented approach ignoring the ethical dimensions of the means that enable one to obtain his goal. What is meant by the term Machiavellian pragmatism is best explained by Buchanan and Badham, among others: “Power is a means to an end: Achievement and recognition are what counts” (2020, p. 190). This is the very reason why she focuses on the night of Duncan’s death, which will give them “sovereign” and “masterdom”. Therefore, the fact that they kill Duncan is, for Lady Macbeth, a means to an end rather than a wrongful act. On the other hand, she sees the act of killing Duncan not as her husband’s burden, but as her mission. It can be understood from her use of the possessive pronoun in “*my dispatch*”, which makes her not only the organizer but also an active and direct agent of the murder. The fact that she shares the responsibility of the murder is the very reason why she fails to cope with both the emotional outcomes and responsibilities of the murder at the end of the play even though she is not the one who commits it *de facto*. In addition, she warns Macbeth that he should not tip his mitt in order that nobody could understand their intentions and crime:

Your face, my thane, is a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under’t. (p. 21)

To keep their secret from those around them, she presents hypocrisy as a strategy

on their way to killing Duncan and reaching the throne since to her, as can be understood from her metaphorization of it as a book, a face is transparent and readable by others. It is important to point out that her metaphor of serpent in her speech can be attributed to the serpent that tempts Adam and Eve into sin in the Bible. In this context, she appears to be one who encourages sin with her strong words and this is the clear reflection of her diabolic nature as well.

No matter how much Lady Macbeth makes hard efforts to convey her courage to her husband, Macbeth feels hesitant about killing the king. Contrary to his wife and Aristotelian description of a tragic character, from the beginning, Macbeth is aware of the fact that killing King Duncan to accede to the throne is more than a flaw and so he fights with himself in his mind about the moral dimensions of the murder. He believes in the poetic justice, that is, he supposes that what he does will find him in return in the final end:

We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips... (p. 23)

Besides the moral concerns, Macbeth knows he should show devotion to his duty as the subject and kinsman of Duncan, which creates a conflict between his desires and devotion to both his blood relation with and duty to protect him: "Strong both against the deed; then, as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself..." (p. 23). On the other hand, he also has a sense of gratitude to Duncan, as he has recently appointed him the Thane of Cawdor and glorified him upon his success in the battle: "He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought / Golden opinions from all sorts of people..." (p. 24). Even though all such thoughts arising from the idea of killing the king dissuade Macbeth from the murder in his conscious, Lady Macbeth starts to question his masculine identity by equating the act of murder with maleness:

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale

At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
Like the poor cat i' the adage?
[...]
What beast was't then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And, to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man... (p. 24)

It is worth noting that Lady Macbeth has an outstanding talent for psychological and emotional manipulation. In a male-dominated society like Elizabethan England, by questioning her husband's male identity because of his reservation and indecisiveness, she pushes him to prove his masculinity and instils in him the ambition to commit the murder in order to fulfil the expectations that the society imposes on him. "With these insults, Lady Macbeth manipulates Macbeth into killing Duncan" (Kesur, 2014, p. 5566). Therefore, Lady Macbeth transforms killing the king from a political issue into an issue of gender identity through manipulation. Thus, "Macbeth is impelled toward murder by Lady Macbeth's equation of masculinity and murder" (Adelman, 2010, p. 36). On the other hand, by offering two options in the direction of becoming king, "just wanting it" and "doing whatever it takes to get what he wants", she also disables the option of "giving up" through manipulation. In this case, instead of leaving her husband the decisions between killing Duncan and giving up, she manipulates his decision-making ability by leaving him the decisions between desperately wanting to be king and killing the king. Lady Macbeth's manipulations are proven to work when Macbeth asks "If we should fail?" (p. 25), the moment in which his concern for the moral dimensions of killing Duncan turns into the concern of failure to do so. Lady Macbeth shares her plans on killing Duncan and putting the blame on his officers who would already have passed out during the moment of murder because

of the “wine and wassail” given to them by Lady Macbeth. Eventually, seeing all the plans arranged by his wife, Macbeth finds the determination his wife demands of him: “I am settled, and bend up / Each corporal agent to this terrible feat” and he disguises himself as Lady Macbeth wants him to do: “Away, and mock the time with fairest show: / False face must hide what the false heart doth know” (p. 25).

Lady Macbeth’s phlegm as a result of her moral corruption is also clearly seen in the lines “...The attempt and not the deed / Confounds us...” (p. 30) when she thinks someone may have been awake or woken up during the murder. What scares her that much is not that they commit a murder but that it remains unfinished. Thus, she evaluates the act of murder in terms of its operational success rather than its moral dimensions. It is just after Macbeth kills Duncan that he starts to get stressful, upon which his wife advises him to “consider it not so deeply” on the grounds that it will cause madness (p. 31). In this context, she can be said to keep her phlegm with focusing on the worldly success rather than the moral downfall, which will ironically prepare her destruction in the end. In parallel, she does not hesitate to go into the room where Duncan is dead and smear his blood on the officers who are supposed to protect him. In the Elizabethan Age in particular, war, blood, and murder were mostly associated with men instead of women as the latter were accepted to be more fragile, vulnerable, sensible and emotional than the former to such an extent that when Macduff comes to deliver the news of Duncan’s death, he has difficulty doing so when he encounters Lady Macbeth there. This is because he thinks that telling a woman about such a bloody murder would be a “murder” (p. 36). In other words, as can be seen in Macduff’s depiction of his announcement of the news of a murder to her, a woman is believed to have to be kept away from such deeds which are traditionally the games and toys of men in that age. However, while Macduff thinks that it would be murder to tell Lady Macbeth about Duncan’s death because she is a woman, she is actually the designer and active perpetrator of the murder beyond the knowledge of people around. In this context, Lady Macbeth’s touching the blood and involvement in the crime of murder is the crucial signifier of how she has distorted the gender roles and hierarchical orders by performing manly actions. While Macbeth questions whether “all great Neptune’s ocean” can wash the blood to clean it from his hand, Lady Macbeth says the blood on their hands can be washed by a little amount of water: “a little water clears us of this deed: / How easy is it, then” (p. 32). This also demonstrates

that she underestimates the act of murder, seeing it as a negligible and trivial incident. She becomes irritated to see that Macbeth gets shocked after what he has done, and she, in a sense, humiliates him by implying that she is, too, involved in the crime, but not as cowardly as he is: “My hands are of your colour; but I shame / To wear a heart so white” (p. 32).

Though Macbeth and Lady Macbeth achieve their goal by killing Duncan, Macbeth is captured by the fear of losing the throne he has just got especially in harmony with the third witch’s prophecy, because he happens to believe that just as their prophecies have come true, so this one’s prophecy that Banquo will not be a king but beget kings will come true, too (p. 13). Given that Macbeth does not have an heir to the throne, this foresight makes him think that his throne will be taken by either Banquo or his son, Fleance: “To be thus is nothing; / But to be safely thus. – Our fears in Banquo / Stick deep...” (p. 45). Unlike his wife, who sees the murder as an unimportant event, Macbeth, who is aware of the importance and degree of his mistake, thinks that even a vast ocean cannot wash the blood off his hands, thus assuming the probability that he has made such a great mistake in defiance of any law, rule, order, etc. just for Banquo’s lineage. That Macbeth does not have a son who could be heir to the throne is shown in Act I, Scene VII when he asks Lady Macbeth to bear him a son (p. 25). In this case, it is understood that the reason why Macbeth is so disturbed by Banquo’s presence is that he does not want to lose his ownership of the throne at least for the rest of his life. Therefore, his motivation for killing Banquo and his son is not the continuation of the throne through his own lineage, but his fear of being dethroned. Sukic, accordingly, states that “the hero [Macbeth] undergoes a change, from an absence of fear that characterises an obsolete kind of heroism, to anxiety expressed about a world that is unknowable, illusory, and impalpable” (2018, p. 8). This anxiety becomes the sole motivation behind Macbeth’s actions, after the murder of Duncan and his subsequent rise to the throne. Therefore, Macbeth, naturally, wants and seeks to dispose of all those who pose a threat to his throne one by one. As a man, who is in fear of being killed and dethroned, acts in accordance with the fight-or-flight response, a psychological reaction first coined by the American physiologist Walter B. Cannon, that makes body fight or flee in case of a life-threatening event. Cannon associates the emotion of fear with the instinct of flight and the emotion of anger with the instinct for fighting or attack (1915, p. 187).

Playing a very active and bold role in the inciting action of the play up to this point, Lady Macbeth does not appear in the scenes from Act II scene IV to Act III scene II. Moreover, Macbeth does not even mention his plan to kill Banquo and his son, let alone get an idea from his wife, who once organizes and executes the plan to kill the king. When Lady Macbeth asks him what he plans at the night when he orders three killers to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance, Macbeth refuses to talk about his plans and tells her to “be innocent of the knowledge” and just applaud when it is done (p. 50).

They are not together when they begin; Lady Macbeth cannot see the ghost; and she no longer knows what is on her husband’s mind. Macbeth having metaphorically taken birth from her womb, has gone so far in the world of crime that he did not even feel the need of telling his wife, his partner in crime, that he had commissioned the murder of Banquo. (Mazumder, Sameem, & Biswas, 2021, p. 2709)

In this context, Lady Macbeth’s dominant character suddenly appears in the background from Act III onwards. As a matter of fact, in Act III Scene II, it is seen that Lady Macbeth has lost her determination and composure before her words and that she no longer enjoys the operational success of her plan:

Nought’s had, all’s spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
‘Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (p. 48)

These lines can be considered as a confession by Lady Macbeth and they can be considered as the first signs of her regret and the destruction she will undergo later. It is also a dramatic breaking point that she wishes to be in the place of Duncan whom she and her husband have killed. This results from the fact that she cannot find the sense of satisfaction upon her successfully-implemented plan, and is in a constant state of doubtful happiness. For this very reason, she thinks that a dead person is liberated and purified, free from all disturbing thoughts and emotions. At the same time, her husband shares the same feelings and thoughts with her as well:

But let the frame of things disjoint, both the

worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly: better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst: nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further. (p. 49)

In this context, for the Macbeth couple, death becomes an instrument of peace rather than a biological phenomenon. However, there are fundamental differences that distinguish Macbeth and his wife at this point. Macbeth, as a man and, above all, as a king, first tries to achieve the inner peace he seeks through worldly means by killing Banquo and his son Fleance, Macduff's family and Macduff himself. However Amussen states "given the importance of violence as a form of power, women's more restricted access to it limited their access to power or even control over their own fate ... People were more comfortable with women as victims than aggressors" (1976, p. 66, 67). In this context, Lady Macbeth, as a character who has already faded into the background after the king's death and who is in a sense alone with the female identity she has rejected before killing the king, Lady Macbeth, who cannot use physical strength, will inevitably want to find the inner peace she seeks through death.

Though she feels a sense of remorse even without feeling happy due to their success after the murder, Lady Macbeth still tries to keep their image and reputation when her husband Macbeth goes mad and starts to see Banquo's ghost during the banquet they hold in their palace. While she is trying to give explanations to the guests about the situation consisting of noblemen and lords, she asks her husband, "*Are you a man?*" (p. 54). In this context, it can be said that Lady Macbeth tries to keep her husband in control by attacking his male identity while criticizing what she sees as deficient or excessive in him. This is already the most powerful method Lady Macbeth uses to convince her husband to kill Duncan before as well. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that in Lady Macbeth's perspective, being a man means at least being

able to hide weakness, if not to be strong. “Lady Macbeth explicitly parallels sexual action with murderous action ... Lady Macbeth scornfully equates Macbeth’s quailing from regicide with sexual nonperformance” (Biggins, 1976, p. 6). Lady Macbeth, unable to get to the bottom of the matter, simply expels the guests at the end of the banquet.

On the other hand, to “sleep” becomes the only and best advice she could give her husband when he is going mad and falling in a deadlock because of the murders he has committed (p. 57). It is important to remember at this point that in Act II Scene II, she equates death with sleep “as pictures” (p. 32) by associating the state of inertia with both of the occasions. Chalk states that in Shakespeare and elsewhere during the Early Modern period, literary figurations commonly position sleeping and/or dreaming as a conduit of prophecy, a simulacrum of death, or a window into the troubled psyche of a lover” (2020, p. 66). It is crucial at this point to consider that the state of inertia during sleep, in Lady Macbeth’s mind, refers to not only the verbal but also emotional inactivity. Thus, most probably, in the scenes and acts till she goes mad literally, her worldly efforts to obtain that inner peace result in her sleeping unlike her husband who kills everyone he sees as a threat.

Lady Macbeth does not appear in a total of five scenes from Act III, where the banquet takes place, until Act V. In Act V, a gentlewoman who is an attendant of Lady Macbeth calls a doctor for her as she is visibly unhealthy. When she tells the doctor that Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking, the physician says that “A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once / the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of / watching! ...” (p. 83). From the observation of the doctor, it can be understood that for Lady Macbeth, to sleep is not a means of salvation from the anguish and pricks of conscience as she only gets the relief of sleep in body and is still awake in spirit. A little later, Lady Macbeth comes out rubbing her hand as if she is mad. Though she has once suggested her husband not to think about the murder and its ethical dimensions with reference to the possibility of the blood on their hands being washed easily, it is clearly seen in her speech that Macbeth is not the only one who cannot forget the murder:

Out, damned spot! out, I say! – One: two: why,
then, ‘tis time to do’t. – Hell is murky! – Fie, my
lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? What need we
fear who knows it, when none can call our power to

account? – Yet who would have thought the old man
to have had so much blood in him. (p. 84)

Lady Macbeth's claim that no one can call their power to account is also ironic in that the compassion and compunction which she tries to suppress at the expense of losing her identity as a woman before and during the murder will be the one to do so. Whereas Macbeth tells her that even an ocean would not be enough to clean the blood in his hand, Lady Macbeth says it can be done with little water, but she is now aware of the bitter fact that "all the / perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little / hand" (p. 84). These lines are almost the reflection of Macbeth's line "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?" (p. 32). Besides Duncan, Lady Macbeth remembers Macduff's family and Banquo who have been killed by Macbeth as well. Though she is not involved in these crimes committed by Macbeth later, it can be said that she also takes responsibility for the murder of Macduff's family and Banquo since the whole series of murders committed by her husband starts and continues with her convincing him to kill Duncan first, which is echoed in Macbeth's saying "It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood" (p. 65). She always pushes her husband into relentless acts on the way to his ultimate power:

The Thane of Fife [Macduff] had a wife: where is she now?

...

I will tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he
cannot come out on's grave (pp. 84-85)

Lady Macbeth is now aware of the bitter truth that there is no way back from whatever they have done. The last words before she leaves her last scene are "What's / done cannot be undone" (p. 85). Upon seeing all these confessional words from her, the doctor tells the gentlewoman that "more needs she the divine than the physician" (p. 85). This is because he concludes that her suffering is not the result of an illness in her body, but of the sins in her soul, which fits in Schneidman's representation of *psychache*, in which the patient has psychological pain that may be experienced due to an excessive form of sorrow, shame, humiliation, fear, dread, defeat, anxiety (1993, p. 51). The impossibility for her to undo what she has done or contributed to what her husband has done seems to have left an indelible mark of regret, shame, and even sinfulness in her mind and soul. Her psyche is filled with unrelenting torture of her soul and mind, the revelation of which the doctor finds in her unconscious talks during

her sleep. What she feels obliged to conceal from others when awake and conscious finds a way for itself from her soul to her body only when she is asleep and unconscious, because she is so much burdened with the feelings of shame, crime and sinfulness that she can no longer carry that burden, namely their secret that they have murdered the king. Her confession at this stage may as well be taken as the embodiment of her search for salvation as if she were before a priest at a church in quest of absolution through it out of her penance. However, Shakespeare gives no indication in the play that she repents in the Christian sense of the word and embraces redemption. Discussing her suicide from this angle, Rowland Wymer argues that “her anguish and her suicide are not finally redemptive because there is no real repentance in them” (as cited in Tronicke, 2017, p. 165).

In Dunsinane, when Macbeth asks the doctor about his wife’s health, the doctor says that it is “the fancies, / that keep her from rest” (p. 89), by implying that what makes Lady Macbeth suffer is not a physical illness but a mental one. It is this invisible illness that leads Macbeth to question whether the doctor cannot cure the diseases in mind as well:

Cure her of that
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart? (p. 89)

However, the physician states that in such cases, it is not in his hands to cure the illness, but in the person’s. This suggestion offered by the physician can be considered as the key argument for the analysis of Lady Macbeth’s choice of death over life. Her salvation from the sin she has committed and the compunction she now experiences can only be attained by her will, not by a physician’s drugs. Here Shakespeare seems to imply that what the Macbeth couple have done at their free will for worldly pleasures and power is sure to be punished in return sooner or later. Thus, Lady Macbeth, who sees sleeping as a way of salvation from all the morbid thoughts and fancies and now cannot benefit from the inertia of it in her spirit, attains the salvation she seeks in an uninterrupted sleep from which she will never wake up; death. It is, however, not

surprising at this point that Lady Macbeth chooses life over death because when she speaks of Duncan's death, she implies how comfortable and peaceful he is now as the morbid thoughts or worldly problems cannot harm him.

On the other hand, the death of Lady Macbeth does not take place on the stage, but it is reported by off-stage characters as can be seen in their report to Macbeth: "The queen, my lord, is dead" (p. 91). When Malcolm talks about her death, he implies the cause of her death: "... 'tis thought, by self and violent hands / Took off her life;" (p. 98). It seems that Shakespeare intends to focus the attention of his audience and/or readers on the internal decay and spiritual despair within her as the cause of her death, or suicide. Her words "What's / done cannot be undone" suggest in this sense that her moral corruption can never be undone or mended or cleansed by any act, whether human or divine. Her suicide then can be read not just as an attempt to escape from herself overwhelmed by guilt and repentance but as an attempt, though seemingly desperate, to relive her soul of this guilt.

In the early 17th century, when the play was written and performed, suicide was considered in Christian belief to be a mortal sin as it was believed to be a rebellion against God's authority. It was also accepted that whoever would die unconfessed and despairing would have a condemned soul in the afterlife. It could therefore be deduced that anyone who would think of Lady Macbeth's death in the play as a suicide due to the implications could interpret it as the final act of a damned soul. Irving Ribner, in this sense, deduces a dubious moral: "In her death by suicide there is further emphasis upon the theme which dominates the play: that evil inevitably must breed its destruction" (1960, p. 155). In spite of this assumption, Shakespeare seems to have diminished the responsibility of Lady Macbeth as a self-murderer through her madness because any action done when no longer in control of her faculties such as thinking, rationalizing and judging could be judged with mercy. Even her madness itself could be read as a search of salvation from her sins and feeling of guilt or damnation, which is because a sensible mind constantly attacks its owner in the presence of soul-tormenting or mind-paralyzing acts by him or her. In parallel, Sandra Clark and Pamela Malson find "the symptoms of psychic distress, the torture of the mind, the sleeplessness, the guilt and fear, that had previously been Macbeth's" in Lady Macbeth's madness (as cited in Tronicke, 2017, p. 167).

In this context, Lady Macbeth's path to salvation seems to have been clear from

the beginning, but as Durkheim points out, although not every suicide is the result of madness, every suicide is committed at the moment of madness. Lady Macbeth's act of killing herself, thus, is a good example of how suicide can become a means of salvation though it can also be interpreted as an unconscious and desperate act to seek for relief. Lady Macbeth's suicide can also be categorised as 'maniacal suicide', a term developed by Durkheim again, due to her hallucinations and delirious conceptions, in an attempt to "escape from an imaginary danger or disgrace, or to obey a mysterious order from on high, etc" (Durkheim, 2005, p. 9). However, hers could as well be considered more as a means of ridding herself from her incessant nightmares and pangs of consciousness which find a way for themselves into her sleep as well as her daytime activities than as a means of obeying a mysterious order or escaping from an imaginary danger. Even when this is the case, her search of relief represents her passion for an escape from her past laden with the memories that she seems ready and utterly willing to do anything possible to erase from her mind. If she manages to leave all those reminiscences behind, this would be sort of salvation for her. However, her failure to do so through her rational faculty, which seems shattered and broken when compared to her pre-regicide cunning and calculated mind, seems to bring about a spiritual failure out of despair. It is at such a moment that she ends her life physically in order to save herself from those devastating emotions, thoughts and memories.

5. SUICIDE AS A WAY OF REUNION: ROMEO AND JULIET

Shakespeare is the creator not only of ambitious, jealous or greedy characters but also of devoted lovers. *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the most famous love tragedies by Shakespeare in the years between 1595-1596, but despite more than four centuries since then, it still keeps its popularity in today's world. The first quarto of the play was published in 1597; however, the complete text available to today's reader is mostly based on the second quarto, often called "good quarto", which was published two years after the first quarto and is relatively more comprehensive. The play, consisting of 5 Acts in total, is set in Verona and deals with how two lovers from hostile families, Romeo and Juliet, fall victim to social rules, embellishing them with powerful tirades of youthful passion and ambition. The play reflects not only the restrictions imposed on two lovers by the societal norms but the understanding of free will and fate during the Renaissance, as well.

At the very beginning of the play, the tension and enmity between the Capulets, to whom Juliet belongs, and the Montague family, to whom Romeo belongs, is presented to the reader. These two families are so hostile to each other that even the servants of the families have internalised the situation and become sides:

Sampson: A dog of that house [Montagues' house] shall move me to
stand: I will
Take the wall of any man or maid of Montague's (p. 9)

In such an inimical atmosphere, the hostility between the families runs as a mechanism of a relational and emotional restriction not only imposed on the noble members of these families but also extending to servants. Amidst all this hatred, it becomes an inevitable consequence of Shakespeare's dramatic genius in creating a tragic structure that Romeo and Juliet, the young members of these two families, fall in love with each other. In parallel with this, Juliet says as a lover:

My only love sprung from my only hate!
Too early seen unknown, and known too late!
Prodigious birth of love it is to me,
That I must love a loathed enemy. (p. 34)

Considering that marriage in the Elizabethan England was seen as a contract between not only the groom and bride but also their families, Romeo and Juliet's love for each

other can be considered as a rebellion against the societal norms and rules as well because it is a known fact that neither Montagues nor Capulets would approve of their partnership as wife and husband:

Marriages were often “arranged” in another sense: that is, the parents normally were involved in the process that culminated in the marriage of their children. Parents were involved because it was recognized that the interests of two families, not simply of two individuals, were at stake. Furthermore, it was felt that, in undertaking something as momentous as marriage, young people needed the counsel that wise and loving parents would give. Therefore, though parents’ approval was not required for a valid marriage, there was a strong expectation that a prospective bride or groom would seek and obtain such approval. (Young, 2009, pp. 35-36)

On the other hand, disobedience to parents in the Elizabethan era was also frowned upon religiously as Ephesians 6:1-3 reads: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” In this context, besides being a rebellion against the societal norms, the romantic relationship between Romeo and Juliet bears the traces of Renaissance free will within itself. “Romantic love takes young women from childhood to adulthood,” says and Diana Dreher (1986, p. 96) as if to explain the case for Juliet, as well. She behaves as if she were no longer the little daughter under the control of her parents, but an adult woman desired by and desirous of a man. The fact that the motivation behind the actions of man during the Middle Ages dramatically shifted from the ethereal one to the Earthly one and the Church’s subjection of man is replaced by the free will brought about an emphasis on the individual agency with the Renaissance. This is clearly manifested in Act II Scene VI, in which Juliet marries Romeo secretly in Friar Laurence’s cell without the (impossible) permission of her parents.

Another consequence of the Renaissance man’s freedom from religious oppression and his ability to make decisions with his free will is that he pursues actual worldly beauties rather than acting according to the promised beauties of the spiritual world. At this point, there is a kind of transition from the world of the soul to the world of the body. Therefore, the focus of the individual is not on the beauty that he will

experience in the afterlife, but on the beauty that he can experience physically on the earth. Accordingly, Romeo sanctifies Juliet's hand while dancing with her at the very beginning of the play, describing her hand as a "holy shrine" and his lips as "two blushing pilgrims":

Romeo: [To Juliet] If I profane with my unworhiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss. (p. 32)

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the audience witnesses the body-centred function of love rather than its spirituality through Romeo, sanctifying earthly love rather than godly love. Therefore, not only does love become a feeling of emotional attachment, but it is also placed in a metaphysical framework. This is entirely in keeping with the characterization of Romeo as he is a young lad who experiences his emotions at their peak – there is a great excess in his anger, sorrow, and love:

Romeo exhibits high emotionality in the play, which dominates his decision-making process, and these personality flaws run through the entire plot, ultimately leading to the tragedy. Before meeting Juliet, he had just fallen into a deep depression because Rosalind rejected him, but he immediately fell into passionate love after meeting Juliet. This emotional fluctuation from extreme loss to extreme happiness reflects his lack of emotional regulation ability. (Duczek, 2024, p. 139)

This turmoil and extremity in Romeo's emotional state is not only his tragic flaw but also the reflection of the transition from divine regulation to human passion during the Renaissance. It was inevitable that the individual, freed from the pressure of religion and the church, would no longer experience the world within the scope and context of religious restrictions, but with worldly feelings. Thus, the impulsiveness and excessive emotionality of Romeo can be likened to the excessive consumption of what was lacking before by the individual who has come out of poverty, or famine. Accordingly, the individual autonomy and subjective emotional experience brought about by the Renaissance can be said to have resulted in the overindulgence of them. This shows great resemblance to the psychology of scarcity, which can be seen in the

report of an experiment on people given food on the edge of starvation:

The men became impatient waiting in line if the service was slow. They were possessive about their food. Some hunched over their trays using their arms to protect their meal. Mostly they were silent, with the concentration that eating deserved.... Dislikes for certain foods, such as rutabagas, disappeared. All food was eaten to the last bite. Then they licked their plates. (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013, p. 121)

Thus, Romeo can be seen as an embodiment of the Renaissance man due to his thirst for emotion and experience, culminating in a carnal desire as well, which is an ultimate manifestation of Renaissance secularism. This is clearly seen in Romeo's plea to Juliet in which he sees the virginity as a morbid state and elevates the physical intimacy, a great example of the celebration of earthly love rather than divine love: "Her vestal livery is sick and green / And none but fools do wear it; cast it off" (p. 39).

Romeo's description of virginity as "sick and green" accordingly leads the reader to the interpretation that sexual experience is healthy and alive in him. This primarily stems from the Renaissance man's orientation towards body-centred experience and satisfaction rather than soul-centred experience and satisfaction. For all these reasons, Romeo's love for Juliet displays an incredible excess in terms of visceral resonance and bodily desire. That is why Romeo's tirades, especially to Juliet, are characterised by great passionate fervour and poetic brilliance, which can be clearly seen in the 'balcony scene' in Act II, in which Romeo gets closer to the window through which Juliet looks out at night:

But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
[...]
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek! (p. 39)

Romeo's desire to be Juliet's glove and to touch her now and here is a clear

manifestation of the fact that the platonic love felt with the soul and mind in the absence of physical contact is now accompanied by carnal desire and bodily contact. Paster states that Romeo and Juliet discover a new discourse of romantic individualism whereby the reciprocal avowal of sexual desire and Petrarchan idealization coexist (2011, p. 268). However, they are aware that the main obstacle for their union is their identities imposed on them by the hatred between their families as the name was not only a signifier of the individual but also his identity. Reflecting this identity crisis, Juliet laments:

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

Deny thy father and refuse thy name;

Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,

And I'll no longer be a Capulet. (p. 39)

Juliet's desire to reject the name, thus purify identity, expresses both the destructive and constructive power of love, since the identity bestowed by the family or God is reconstructed in line with individual desires. In parallel with this, Romeo says "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized; / Henceforth I never will be Romeo" (p. 40). Considering that baptism is a religious ritual that symbolizes purity and belonging to Christianity, love can be said to become a divine force for Romeo that purifies him of the burden of his familial identity and makes him belong to Juliet. In his book about baptism, W. W. Colpitts offers a dialogue between two ministers, one Baptist and the other Methodist, in which the Methodist describes baptism as "immersion and the door to the Church," also stating that baptism is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" (1896, p. 9). Viewed from this perspective, Romeo can be said to have immersed himself into the depth of Juliet's inward and spiritual grace which, in Neoplatonism, finds its expression in outward and facial beauty. Thus, when he loves Juliet for what he sees on her body as a whole, he seems to love what he cannot see in her soul which belongs to God in Christian belief. Romeo's baptism when Juliet calls him "my darling" marks the replacement of Romeo's name, and thus the identity imposed on him by the feudal order of the Christian world, with a new identity built by individual and worldly love, which could as well be said to be a new religion constructed by love. This is explicable by the very fact that familial name bestowed on one on baptism serves the interests and benefits of the family as a whole, while the name attributed to that one by the lover serves only

the love of the beloved one, who is Juliet in this case.

Romeo's impulsiveness, however, causes him to ignore the consequences of his actions resulting from it, which can be considered as both constructive and destructive aspects of free will as Friar Laurence states:

But to earth some special good doth give,
Nor aught so good but strain'd from that fair use
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;
And vice sometimes by action dignified (p. 46)

Friar Laurence implies in his speech that in the utilisation of all the beauties in nature and what is endowed to human beings, moderate use of them is that which should be taken into consideration rather than good use. This approach is attributed to Aristotelian "golden mean", which refers to the avoidance of extremes and finding the middle ground:

There are, as we said, three classes of disposition, viz. two kinds of vice, one marked by excess, the other by deficiency, and one kind of virtue, the observance of the mean. Now, each is in a way opposed to each other, for the extreme dispositions are opposed both the mean or moderate disposition and to one another, while the moderate disposition is opposed to both the extremes. Just as a quantity which is equal to a given quantity is also greater when compared with a less, and less when compared with a greater quantity, so the mean or moderate dispositions exceed as compared with the defective dispositions, both in feeling and in action; e.g. the courageous man seems foolhardy as compared with the coward, and cowardly as compared with foolhardy ; and similarly the temperate man appears profligate in comparison with the insensible, and insensible in comparison with the profligate man; and the liberal man appears prodigal by the side of the illiberal man, and illiberal by the side of the prodigal man. (Aristotle, 1893, pp. 52-53)

Aristotle's middle ground approach is important to take into account when it comes to the analysis of the Renaissance man because the Renaissance itself is a rebirth

through the Ancient Greek philosophy and literature. However, as mentioned before, Romeo is a man of emotions, and thus he cannot grasp the essence of what Aristotle exactly advocates. This becomes evident in Act III Scene I, in which Mercutio is killed during a duel by Tybalt, the cousin of Juliet with a penchant for fighting and a reputation for his exceptional duelling skills in Verona. In the scene, it is clearly seen that Romeo is well aware that Tybalt is a relative of his, depending on his secret marriage to Juliet beyond the knowledge of her family. At this point, it can be said for sure that there appears a conflict between Romeo's moral and emotional conscience. Upon the killing of Mercutio by Tybalt, however, Romeo proves to be a man of uncontrolled and uncurbed emotions like impulse in killing Tybalt. Besides, whether or not to respond to Tybalt's murder and humiliations becomes a matter of male honour for Romeo as he says when he hesitates to do so: "... O sweet Juliet, / Thy beauty hath made me effeminate / And in my temper soften'd valour's steel!" (p. 65). It is important to note that Mercutio dies cursing the two families, the Capulets and Montagues, as their hatred of each other spreads like a disease and causes more and more people to be poisoned by it, and even to die (p. 64). It can even be said that it is not Romeo's love for Juliet that makes him a tragic character, but the impulsiveness he shows throughout the play.

The murder committed by Romeo, however, makes him both a killer and a lover in the eyes of Juliet. When she learns from her nurse that Romeo has killed Tybalt, she has a traumatic reaction:

O serpent heart, hid with a flowering face!
Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?
Beautiful tyrant! Fiend angelical!
Dove-feather'd raven! wolvish-ravens lamb! (p. 70)

Juliet's oxymoronic lament on the beauty in Romeo's appearance and the evil in his soul reflects the societal norms of the period, which manifests that Juliet is not only a lover, but a member of the society who is experiencing ethical crises as well. Soon, yet, she quickly changes her mind and seems to regret what she has thought and said about Romeo: "O, what a beast was I to chide at him!" (p. 71). While the anger she feels against Romeo is a projection of her reason, the regret she feels later is a reflection of her heart, which is a clear example of the inner conflict and spiritual duality caused by the moral struggles of Renaissance people.

Romeo's embrace of carnal contact rather than an ideal love is echoed in Juliet in the same way as well. Upon learning that Romeo has been banished from Verona because of the murder he has committed, Juliet says "Is father, mother, Tybalt, Romeo, Juliet, / All slain, all dead. / 'Romeo is banished!' / There is no end, no limit, no measure, bound, / In that word's death..." (p. 71). By equating the banishment with the death of her family, and herself, Juliet removes Romeo from being the ideal object of love and emphasizes physical union. Reading the lines in reverse, the physical union of Romeo and Juliet means life for Juliet. Not surprisingly, she metaphorizes death as a groom: "And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead!" (p. 72). In this context, she sees death as an active choice rather than a passive phenomenon. As might be anticipated, in the same vein, Romeo describes the banishment as death indirectly: "Hence-banished is banish'd from the world, / And world's exile is death: then banished, / Is death mis-term'd..." He is jealous of even every cat and dog / And little mouse" as they live where Juliet lives and they have the opportunity to see her. He puts "carrion-flies" in a more honourable state as they may seize / On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand / And steal immortal blessing from her lips..." (p. 73). In this context, even though he is sure of Juliet's love for him, the thought of being deprived of sensual contact such as touching her hands and kissing her lips is an indication that for Romeo, the banishment has become a corporeal deprivation rather than a social punishment. Predictably, Romeo loses his temper towards the end of the conversation between him and Friar Laurence, and draws his sword saying "in what vile part of this anatomy / Doth my name lodge? ..." (p. 76). These lines clearly demonstrate that he has suicidal thoughts and his drawing his sword signifies that he is ready to put his suicidal thoughts into action. This fits in with both Durkheim's egoistic and anomic suicide besides Camus' definition of suicide as he tries to commit suicide because he both loses affiliation with the societal norms and does so during a sudden crisis. Durkheim categorizes the suicide committed as a result of a sudden crisis, as in Romeo's case, as anomic suicide (2005, p. 203).

Romeo's tendency to commit suicide also indirectly results from the fact that he loses the affiliation with both the hierarchical and societal norms of the period, which makes him an outcast and prevents him from uniting with his beloved. Camus's explanation of how what can be an excellent reason for living can also be an excellent reason for dying (2023, p. 4) is greatly exemplified in the scene as Romeo wants to

commit suicide indirectly for the sake of Juliet. Thus, the excellent reason, Juliet, becomes a great reason for him to die. If Juliet's eyes are the reason for Romeo's determination to live, then eternal closure of her eyes would be the reason for his choice to die. At this point, Friar Laurence furiously condemns Romeo for not using his emotions in a true way. He, in fact, symbolizes Aristotelian middle ground approach throughout the play, telling him after his attempt at suicide that "Fie, fie, thou shamest thy shape, thy love, thy wit; which, like a usurer, abound'st in all, / and usest none in that true use indeed..." (p. 76). Friar Laurence calls into question Romeo's nature of impulsiveness and the excesses it causes, leading up to suicide.

As a matter of fact, in the scene where Romeo sneaks into Juliet's room, it appears manifest that Romeo risks death for the sake of Juliet's love and the physical union he will establish with her. When Juliet wants him to stay a little longer, Romeo says "Come, death, and welcome! Juliet willst it so" (p. 80). At this point, Juliet's love is so absolute and sacred for Romeo that Shakespeare reveals the superiority of love, represented by Freudian Eros as a token for the will to live, over death, represented by Freudian Thanatos as a sign of the will to die, in the scene, and death and life happen to serve for love at the same time. This play is ordered by anti-theses on many levels, and "the all-embracing opposition of Eros and Thanatos seems to drive the plot along" (Andrews, 2015). For both Juliet and Romeo, the warmth and pleasure of physical union is more palpable than the coldness and horror of death. When it is finally time to part, Juliet says that by the time she sees Romeo again, days will have passed in a minute and she will be old by then (p. 80). At this point, Juliet appears as a young girl stuck between her past and the future where she will see Romeo. In this context, temporal reality becomes an internal experience rather than an external measurement for her, which reflects the personal experience emphasized by the Renaissance philosophy. Juliet's parting words to Romeo that "I shall be much in years / Ere I again behold my Romeo!" (p. 81) are not only a sincere plea of a young girl, but also a striking example of the perceptual nature of time. Here, Shakespeare presents an experience of time that is not a linear progression of time, but rather an experience of time that is mixed with subjective consciousness. For Juliet, time is no longer a ticking clock, but a field of affect that stretches out in Romeo's absence. At this point, Edmund Husserl's philosophy of time offers a meaningful conceptual framework. According to him, time is not an objective world time, but a subjective time that corresponds to

the experience of the individual:

We can only say that this flux [stream of inner time-consciousness] is something which we name in conformity with what is constituted, but is nothing temporally “Objective” It is absolute subjectivity and has the absolute properties of something to be denoted metaphorically as “flux,” as a point of actuality, primal source-point, that from which springs the “now,” and so on. In the lived experience of actuality, we have the primal source-point and a continuity of moments of reverberation [*Nachhallmomenten*]. For all this, names are lacking. (Husserl, 1991, p. 100).

Juliet’s feeling that a minute in the absence of Romeo is equivalent to a lifetime reflects Husserl’s emphasis on time lived, not measured. In this inner flow, the “now” is lived together with the traces of the past and the anticipation of the future (Husserl, 1991, p. 38). Juliet’s intuitive deduction that “many days fit in a minute” expresses this philosophical structure with a literary intuition. Shakespeare’s representation of subjective time also points to a new understanding of time that centres on the emotional and cognitive depths of the Renaissance individual. In this context, time no longer happens to be the absolute order of a divine plan, but becomes an experience flowing in the inner world of the individual.

Although it is possible to say that the individual subject was freed from the pressure of religion with the Renaissance, it is an undeniable fact that the hierarchical family order continued. Though Romeo’s inability to tell his own family about his love for Juliet shows that the male individual is also under family pressure, Juliet’s forced marriage to Paris, who is a young nobleman and kinsman to the prince, at the behest of her father clearly reveals how the female individual is more affected by this hierarchy and patriarchy in the Elizabethan period. When Juliet hears that her father is going to marry her off to Paris, she tells her mother that “Now, by saint Peter’s Church and Peter too, / He [Paris] shall not make me there a joyful bride” (p. 84). Capulet is furious when he hears that Juliet has refused this marriage:

But fettle your fine joints ‘gainst Thursday next,
To go with Paris to Saint Peter’s Church,
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.

Out, you green-sickness carrion! out, you baggage!

You tallow-face!

...

Hang thee, young baggage! disobedient wretch!

I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,

Or never after look me in the face:

Speak not, reply not, do not answer me... (p. 85)

This violent argument between Juliet and her father is not just a simple conflict between father and daughter, but a manifestation of individual desire and individual agency colliding with traditional authority. In this context, Juliet's open rejection of this marriage in front of her parents' faces is in line with Renaissance individualism, whereby the process of becoming an active subject with social norms develops into a great dramatic material in Shakespearean theatre. While Juliet represents personal desire in her rejection of parental enforcement, her father represents public honour with the role assigned to him as a father to a daughter by the long-centuries-old traditional practices. As Capulet's words suggest, daughter is a property and a burden to be protected in the patriarchal system and for this very reason, Capulet insults Juliet as "baggage". Therefore, the father expects his daughter to be grateful to him when he finds a suitor whom he thinks her daughter is not even worthy of. But above all, considering that a daughter's obedience to her parents, especially to the father, is obligatory within the framework of the ethical values of the period, Capulet's reaction to Juliet does not stem from the fact that he thinks Juliet is ungrateful, but that his expectation of obedience is not met by Juliet. Juliet's refusal to marry Paris, on the other hand, is not only a rebellion against the traditional and patriarchal norm of the period but also a process of "self-fashioning", a term coined by Stephen Greenblatt in his work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* and referring to the process of the construction of identity:

Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other – heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist – must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed ... we may say that self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien, that what is produced in this encounter partakes of both the

authority and the alien that is marked for attack, and hence that any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss. (1980, p. 9)

Juliet's process of being an active agent coincides with Greenblatt's statement. Throughout the play, the "alienated" element Juliet faces is paternal authority, traditional family structure and gender roles. These structures suppress her identity and force her to be a passive figure in a critical issue such as her own marriage. However, the moment Juliet refuses to marry Paris, she challenges the authority to define and construct her individuality. At this point, in Greenblattian sense, the *self* that emerges at the end of this process is not only a rebellion, but also an identity that bears the traces of the "alienated" authority and is in constant conflict with it. Juliet's words "If all else fail, myself have power to die" (p. 88) can be considered as the ultimate expression of the self-fashioning, or construction as the statement is both a rebellion against the social order and the sharpest and irreversible form of subjectivation: the authority to decide on one's own life and death. In Greenblatt's words, the identity that Juliet constructs also holds the potential for her own destruction, because it is shaped by individual will, outside of familial and social ties and is also directly related to the Renaissance's rising understanding of the individual.

The extreme point of this subjectivation is seen in Act 4, Scene 1, where Juliet goes to Friar Laurence and asks him to find a way to prevent a marriage with Paris. In the scene, Juliet tells the friar to find a remedy for her situation and if he cannot, she will kill herself: "If, in thy wisdom, thou canst give no help, / Do thou but call my resolution wise, / And with this knife I'll help it presently" (p. 91). In this context, Juliet becomes a free-willed individual who can take action against events with her own mind and become the authority of her own life, rather than a passive young girl who obeys whoever the authority is and who is doomed to her fate. Her will is important here, and as St. Augustine commented, "all movement of the soul is prompted by the Will, and that which moves the Will is Love" (as cited in Andrews, 1994, p. 373). He also refers to two different types of love; "the sacred love, or charity, which urges the will in the direction of eternal life, and profane love, or cupidity), which pulls the will in the direction of temporal life (as cited in Andrews, 1994, p. 373). As there is no meaning and joy of living in the absence of her beloved Romeo, she is prepared to die instead of living against her own will and choice, which echoes

Stoics' view of suicide. For she is forced not to live and act virtuously in her forced marriage due to her loss of agency and rejection of her suitor. In this way, while becoming the other in the eyes of society, she also constructs a self for herself, such that the greatest luxury of an individual as a decision-maker over his own life is to choose between life and death.

Juliet's refusal to marry Paris, accompanied by her desperation to kill herself, forces Friar Laurence to devise a radical plan to save her. The priest gives Juliet a special potion that will put her into a death-like sleep. The potion will make Juliet appear lifeless, with no breathing or pulse for forty-two hours. Her family, thinking that she is really dead, will organize a funeral and put her in a grave. The priest will also send a letter to Romeo to inform him of this plan and when Juliet wakes up in her grave, Romeo will greet her. Thus, the two will be able to escape to a life of their own at their will but against their parents', which they hope to lead away from social pressures and the coercive authority of their families (pp. 92-93). However, this plan carries a great risk as it depends on elements such as timing and communication, and ultimately leads to a chain of mistakes that prepare the ground for the tragic ending.

Probably for fear of dying eternally, Juliet embraces the plan to die or to pretend to be dead temporarily. She is quick to drink the syrup given by the priest even though she thinks of all the negative possibilities that the priest may give a real poison in case it is revealed that he has secretly married Romeo and Juliet, that Romeo will not come in due time, and that she will not be able to cope with the psychology of the terrible environment and go mad if she wakes up in the grave (pp. 96-97). Therefore, it can be said that Juliet's inability to meet Romeo and reluctant obligation to marry one but Romeo is more terrible than all these possibilities in her eyes. In this context, Shakespeare reveals the constructive power of love over the self as well as its destructive power in the vital sense. After Juliet drinks the syrup and falls into a false death sleep, she is buried in accordance with the traditions of the time, but Friar Laurence's letter to Romeo does not reach him. Instead, Balthasar, a servant to Romeo, brings him the news that Juliet is dead. In despair, Romeo buys poison from an apothecary to commit suicide in his exile. Romeo describes the poison as "cordial and not poison" because the actual death for him is to be bodily separated from Juliet and the thing that will bring him back to Juliet is death, thus the poison in his hand. In this context, for him, poison becomes an antidote rather than a poison as it will enable him

to reunite with his beloved, which can be seen in his speech before drinking the poison one night next to Juliet's grave: "Come, bitter conduct, come, unsavoury guide! / Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on / The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark! / Here's to my love!" (pp. 112-113). "To be exiled from Juliet's presence is, for Romeo, to be condemned to outer darkness," says Andrews for Romeo's decision of suicide (1994, p. 376). When Juliet wakes up and sees Romeo's lifeless body, there is no way but to die for her to reunite with Romeo as well, as can be seen in her words after seeing that there is no poison left in the bottle: "O Churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop / To help me after? ..." (p. 115). Juliet wants to follow Romeo and share the same path of death with him. The word "help" actually implies finding help through death, that is, suicide as a way of reunion. In these words of Juliet, the reason for suicide is not only pain and despair, but also an active desire for union and the will to be reunited through death. She acts in the hope of realizing in the eternal world of souls upon death the love she cannot experience with Romeo in the temporary world of bodies. Given the context, it is only natural that she, who has already told the priest that she longs to die unless a way to unite with Romeo is found, chooses to commit suicide with Romeo's dagger. Death after Romeo is life to her indeed because living without him is already nothing less than death itself, so she finds the chance of living with her beloved Romeo in the reunion of their souls, just in the same way as Romeo has just done. Robert N. Watson, therefore, names Juliet's suicide as "ecstatic" in that she proves to "follow him even beyond this world" (2016, p. 110).

Romeo and Juliet's suicide is not a passive phenomenon born out of despair, but rather it should be taken as an active choice in which the free will of these two young people in the service of their own emotions and experiences is embodied in the extreme through suicide. The humanism brought by the Renaissance and the prominence of individual feelings, experiences and worldly desires cause Romeo and Juliet's emphasis on physical union to be emphasized throughout the work, unlike the medieval people under the pressure of religion. For this reason, the ideal understanding of love in the Middle Ages was replaced by physical passion during the Renaissance. On the other hand, Romeo and Juliet, who are unable to achieve physical union on the earth due to the pressure arising from social norms and the hierarchical family order, find the solution in death to achieve spiritual reunion in the afterlife through their individual authority over their own lives to make a choice between life and death. This

otherworldly reunion, therefore, should not be considered as the consolation of a failed relationship in the physical world, but as the last and sharpest expression of individual autonomy against social and cultural pressures. These two lovers seem to have started with a profane love in St. Augustine's word for their worldly and temporal life, but they seem to have chosen a sort of sacred love for the otherworldly and eternal life. In parallel, Andrews describes their love as

a form of pseudo-worship in which one's deity is a creature rather than the Creator. Each lover views the other as the Supreme Good. Each accords the other a degree of adoration that Augustine (and innumerable later theologians) had defined as properly directed only to God. Their love becomes a universe unto itself, and when they are deprived of it each of the protagonists concludes that there is nothing left to live for. (1994, p. 376)

Death, beyond being a tragic outcome, becomes the only space where Romeo and Juliet could exercise absolute control over their own bodies and destinies. Suicide is therefore not only an act of desperation, but also a conscious rebellion against the familial, religious and social authorities that try to shape them. The grave, in this context, becomes the site of both physical death and free love; a space of existence free from external authorities. What matters at this point is, however, that their deaths are not natural but unnatural as it is their own choice to die at such an early age. This choice is representative of their turn to and embrace of their will, accepted for long centuries by then to be the medium for service to God in order to win His grace and forgiveness. This sort of death is praised by Nietzsche, who argues that if one chooses to die at the right time, it points to his or her strength and courage (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 71). Here both Romeo and Juliet choose to die at the right time because they, who have already proven to be courageous and daring enough to break the social and familial roles and norms given to them by the traditional social structures, display themselves with enough determination to die for each other, not for a predetermined plan or course. They find the eternity in their love and soul that hosts their love, so they depart from their bodies for their souls in the afterlife.

Moreover, the idea of love that comes with death redefines love not as an experience limited to the body, but as a power that can continue beyond physical existence. The language and imagery used in the final scenes of the work nourish this

romanticized understanding of death and reflect the new world of the Renaissance individual who prefers passion, intensity and subjective truth to traditional obedience. Thus, Romeo and Juliet's suicides can be explained not only by the impulsiveness of youth, but also by the idealization of individual desires that are made absolute for the lovers through their wilful choices. In this respect, the work moves away from the medieval dogmatic understanding of love and repositions love as a form of subjectivation and liberation.



6. CONCLUSION

As one of the most complex and multidimensional acts in human history, suicide is a powerful indicator that reflects not only one's relationship with life, but also the cultural, philosophical and theological context in which he or she is situated. This thesis examines the transformation of the meaning of suicide over time, starting from Ancient Greece, through the religious codifications of the Middle Ages, and finally to the individual-centred intellectual revolution of the Renaissance, and examines the individual's attitude towards death and its reflection on the performing arts. In this context, suicide is not only an individual moment of crisis, but also an expression of a historical way of thinking, the human understanding of the period and the subject's experience of self. Suicide, characterized as a desire to die with dignity in the ancient Stoics and as a sinful rebellion in the Middle Ages, becomes a dramatic breaking point in Renaissance tragedies by placing itself at the centre of the discussion on individual autonomy in the modern sense.

It is clear that the Renaissance played a central role in this transformation. Throughout the Middle Ages, the individual was seen as a servant under the absolute sovereignty of God, who had to abstract himself from worldly pleasures for the sake of spiritual salvation. However, with the Renaissance, there was a significant break in this understanding, and especially humanist thinkers and the pioneers of the Reformation movement began to redefine the inner world, conscience and moral judgment of the individual. Desiderius Erasmus' emphasis on knowledge, individual morality and education, and Martin Luther's defence of freedom of conscience against church authority paved the way for the reconstruction of man's relationship with God. In this intellectual atmosphere, man is no longer conceived merely as a created being, but as a thinking and questioning subject, capable of making decisions about his own life. In this very context, death is no longer solely God's providence, but a possibility shaped by the will of the individual. This new intellectual paradigm is concretely realized in Shakespeare's tragic universe, for his characters are no longer passive parts of the divine plan, but individuals acting on their own desires, mistakes and consciences. It is often their challenge of the social norms and roles assigned to them by social, traditional, familial, religious, moral and legal authorities that brings about their tragic end at the end of the plays. It can also be categorised as their turn to their own free will at the expense of denying these established roles and duties and in quest

of establishing their own agency.

It is within this man-centred and free will-based atmosphere of the Renaissance, spanning almost 150 years from the 1480s to the 1650s in England that Shakespeare produces his protagonist-centred plays, especially tragedies, from the mid-1590s to 1610. In this individual and intellectual framework, Othello is one of such protagonists that explicitly refer to suicide as a form of redemption. Othello's murder of Desdemona leads him into an inextricable crisis of conscience. However, this crisis is not limited to a passive state of guilt; on the contrary, the character realizes his own mistake and voices it on stage, performing a kind of inner judgment in front of the audience. Othello personally carries out the punishment he has imposed on himself. In this respect, his suicide is a unique ethical gesture that blends Stoic self-discipline and Christian repentance. Positioning himself both as an executioner and victim, Othello tries to re-establish not only his love for Desdemona but also his honour through this act. Suicide here is neither a collapse born of despair nor a dramatic escape; on the contrary, it is the desire of an individual confronting himself and facing up to his fatal mistake to pay the price by bearing the burden of sin. Thus, through suicide, Othello not only speaks his last word as an individual, but also becomes a powerful example of the subject typology that combines action and redemption in Shakespeare's tragic tradition. Though it is not certain in the play whether he achieves redemption as a result of his suicide, it seems true that he is in quest of redeeming himself by punishing himself with death in return for the sin he has committed by killing an innocent woman.

In *Macbeth*, however, suicide appears in a very different context. Lady Macbeth's transformation symbolizes the individual paying the price of the power she desires with her spiritual integrity. Lady Macbeth, who initially wants to become a symbol of masculine power by transcending gender roles, demands to be stripped of her femininity and social roles with the prayer "unsex me here" However, this demand also opens the door to violating an ancient moral order. The remorse of conscience that begins after the murder of King Duncan creates a kind of division in Lady Macbeth's soul. The fact that she sleepwalks at night and tries to wash her clean hands much after the murder shows that her crime continues to exist at her unconscious level. In this context, her suicide is not only a reaction born out of guilt, but also the result of an exhaustion based on the limits of reason. Lady Macbeth's death is a dramatic consequence of the subject's inability to recognize his own limits in his quest for power

and to shoulder a burden that his conscience cannot bear. Suicide here brings neither purification nor a kind of meaningful end; on the contrary, it is a tragic point at which the individual's spiritual collapse inevitably manifests itself. It is for this very reason that her suicide is largely taken as a means of salvation from the incessant but growing burden of a devious murder that she herself has planned on a large scale. Her mind and/or soul can no longer carry the physically invisible but spiritually indelible traces of that murder, but unlike Othello, who is claimed in this study to have killed himself to atone for his crime and sin in religious and moral perspective, Lady Macbeth seems to have done so for salvation or escape from her psyche overburdened with remorse, guilt and sinfulness as there seems to be nothing she can do to salve her conscience.

Romeo and Juliet is the last play under analysis in this study, and it also constructs suicide on a completely different plane. In this love tragedy, death becomes a means for love to break free from worldly boundaries. Young lovers cannot experience physical and emotional union under the restrictions imposed by the social order and family structure. However, with the individualism and secularization brought by the Renaissance, love is no longer an emotion defined solely by the glory of God; it becomes a relationship based on the uniqueness of earthly desires and individual feelings. The fact that Romeo and Juliet commit suicide one after another, sealing their love with death, shows that this individual love becomes a rebellion against the social order. Their grave is also the sacred place of their love. The moment when Romeo says "Now take me and make me drunk with death" reveals that for him, death is not a bitter end but the only way to reunion. Both of them seem to decide on the choice of self-killing partly owing to their grief and sorrow resulting from the loss and absence of their beloved and largely owing to their attempt to compensate for this loss and absence through a reunion with each other though not in this physical and worldly life but in the afterlife. In this respect, Romeo and Juliet's suicide is a reflection on the stage of a new ethical order, an understanding in which love and loyalty to individual desire are prioritized, even though it goes against the moral codes prescribed by the Christian tradition.

The analysis of these three plays reveals that suicide carries a multi-layered symbolism in Shakespeare's tragedy universe. Suicide is sometimes treated as part of a punishment, sometimes as a salvation, sometimes as the culmination of a passion. In all cases, however, there is one thing in common: the individual ponders, questions

and finally decides on his or her own life and death. Although this decision has tragic consequences, the individual who makes it is no longer just a character, but the concrete representation of a historical subject, a philosophical quest and an emotional intensity. Shakespeare's characters define themselves through suicide; sometimes they are liberated, sometimes lost, sometimes purified. In every case, suicide becomes a critical turning point in the meaning map of these characters' life journey. In this context, the suicides in these tragedies are not only cathartic scenes that purify the audience in the Aristotelian sense, but also function as a means by which the characters construct their individual subjectivities and dramatically declare that they have a say over their own fate.

As a result, this thesis has analysed suicide not only as an individual mental breakdown or a dramatic ending, but also as an intellectual attitude, an ethical stance and a form of literary narrative shaped by historical conditions. The suicide scenes in Shakespeare's tragedies reveal not only the inner world of the character, but also the spirit, belief system and human understanding of an age. Characters such as Othello, Lady Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet reveal the inner conflicts of the age they live in through their own deaths. In this respect, suicide is not only a final act; it is a crossroads laden with meaning, a final word in which the individual both questions and completes his or her own existence.

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Shakespeare'in Seçili Trajedilerinde Kefaret, Kurtuluş ve Kavuşma Yolu Olarak İntihar: *Othello*, *Macbeth* ve *Romeo ve Juliet*

Bu tez, Shakespeare'in üç büyük trajedisindeki – Othello, Macbeth ve Romeo ve Juliet – intihar temasını, edebi analizi sosyolojik, psikolojik ve felsefi teorilerle harmanlayan multidisipliner bir mercekten inceler. Çalışma özellikle, bu oyunlarda intiharın nasıl basit bir anlatı sonucu değil de Rönesans öznesinin ahlaki, varoluşsal ve duygusal çalkantılarını yansıtan, bireyi pasif bir nesne konumundan aktif bir fail haline getiren ve derin sembolik anlamlar taşıyan bir eylem olduğunu savunur. İntiharı umutsuzluğa pasif bir teslimiyet olarak ele almak yerine, oyunlar onu eylemlilik, kefarete arayışı, kavuşma arzusu ve toplumsal kısıtlamalara karşı isyanla şekillenen karmaşık bir jest haline getirir. Émile Durkheim, Albert Camus ve Edwin S. Schneidman'ın kuramsal görüşlerinden yararlanan tez, Shakespeare'in bu üç oyunundaki farklı intihar türlerini tanımlar ve bunların Orta Çağ'dan erken modern İngiltere'ye uzanan tarihsel ve düşünsel dönüşüm bağlamındaki dramatik işlevini ve etik sonuçlarını analiz eder.

Tezin giriş kısmı Antik Yunan'dan çağdaş döneme kadar intihara yönelik sosyolojik, psikolojik ve felsefi yaklaşımları kronolojik bir şekilde incelerken ikinci bölümü, Elizabeth dönemi İngiltere'sinde Rönesans ve beraberinde getirdiği özgür iradenin temsil edildiği entelektüel ve kültürel arka planın ana hatlarını çizmektedir. Orta Çağ Hristiyan doktrini, intiharı ölümcül bir günah olarak görülürken, hümanizm, bireycilik ve seküler düşüncenin yükselişiyle damgalanan Rönesans dönemi daha ılımlı yorumlar üretmiştir. İlahi yasa ile kişisel özerklik, dini yükümlülük ile duygusal özgünlük arasındaki iç çatışma, Rönesans trajedisinin merkezi halindedir. Tam da bu tarihsel dönüşüm sırasında yazan ve insan doğasını tahlil etmekte usta bir oyun yazarı olan William Shakespeare, bu gerilimleri derin bir duyarlılıkla dramatize eder. Onun yarattığı karakterlerin intiharları yalnızca fiziksel sonlar değil, günah ve erdem, kader ve özgür irade, yaşam ve ölüm ikiliklerine meydan okuyan psikolojik ve metafizik olaylardır.

Othello'da başkahramanın intiharı, anagnorisis anında, yani masum Desdemona'yı öldürdüğüünün trajik bir şekilde farkına vardığı anda gerçekleşir. Othello, dışsal yollarla bağışlanma aramak yerine, kendi yargısını ve infazını gerçekleştirir. Dolayısıyla eserde onun intiharı bir kefarete eylemi olarak sunulur, ki bu da Durkheim'in özgeci intihar olarak sınıflandırabileceği, bireyin kendini daha yüksek bir ideal, Othello'nun durumunda Desdemona, için feda ettiği bir eylemdir. Shakespeare, Othello'nun son konuşması ve ritüelistik ölümü aracılığıyla, onun ahlaki çatışmasını nasıl içselleştirdiğini ve geri dönüşü olmayan bir hata karşısında her zaman olduğu gibi yargıçlık rolünü üstlenip kendi cezasını kendi vermek suretiyle nasıl kefarete aradığını dramatize eder.

Tez, *Macbeth*'te özellikle, intiharla sonuçlanan çarpıcı bir psikolojik bozulma sergileyen Lady Macbeth'e odaklanmaktadır. Başlangıçta hırs ve iradenin itici gücü olan Lady Macbeth'in kendini "cinsiyetsizleştirme" ve vicdanını bastırma çağrısı, onu bir nevi şiddet bir aracına dönüştürür. Ancak oyun ilerledikçe, uyurgezerlik, halüsinasyonlar ve takıntılı el yıkama şeklinde kendini gösteren bastırılmış suçluluk duygusunun sahnesi haline gelir. İntiharı, sahne dışında olsa da çok güçlü bir şekilde inşa ettiği kişiliğinin çöküşüne işaret eder. Bu eylem kahramanca bir kararlılık ya da kefarete değil, bir kurtuluştur. Bu bağlamda Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth'in ölümü

aracılığıyla hırsla karşı teşvik edici bir tonlama kullanmaz, aksine insan bilincinin kırılganlığı ve iradenin sınırları üzerine akıldan çıkmayacak bir sorgulama sunar.

Üçüncü bölümde ele alınan *Romeo ve Juliet* ise hem ton hem de tematik yönelim açısından diğer ikisinden keskin bir şekilde ayrılır. Burada intihar suçluluk ya da çaresizlikten değil, tutku ve meydan okumadan kaynaklanır. Romeo ve Juliet'in yaşamlarına son verme kararı, aşk hikâyelerinin doruk noktası olarak sunulur – toplumsal, ailevi ve hatta dini sınırları aşan duygusal ve fiziksel birliğin bir iddiasıdır. İntiharları, kan davalı ailelerinin ve Verona'nın katı sosyal hiyerarşilerinin dayattığı zorunlu ayrılığa adeta bir direniştir. Romeo, Juliet'in öldüğüne inanarak kendi isteğiyle zehir içer; uyandığında Romeo'yu ölü bulan Juliet ise onun hançerini kendine saplar. Bu çifte intihar, Orta Çağ'da dünyevi tüm deneyimlerin, dolayısıyla aşkın, ilahi iradeye tabi olduğu görüşüne meydan okur ve onu bütünleştirici, öznel bir deneyim olarak yeniden tasavvur eder. Ölümle trajik olsa da aynı zamanda kurtarıcıdır, onları dünyevi adaletsizliğin erişemeyeceği bir alanda birleştirir. Durkheim'ın tipolojisi aracılığıyla, intiharlarının egoist nitelik taşıdığı görülür. Sonuç olarak, Romeo ve Juliet hayattan kaçmak için değil, feodal ve hiyerarşik düzenden dolayı fani alemde elde edemedikleri kavuşmayı ruhlar aleminde yakalayabilmek için intihara başvurur.

Bu intiharları birbirine bağlayan şey, ortak trajik sonları değil, anlatsal ve sembolik zenginlikleridir. Shakespeare için intihar, yoğun bir ahlaki sorgulama ve duygusal ifşa alanı haline gelir. Her bir kendini öldürme eylemi karakterin dış dünyaya verdiği içsel tepkiyi ortaya koyar: Othello'da kefareti, Lady Macbeth'te kurtuluş, Romeo ve Juliet'te kavuşma. Her üç durumda da intihar, zayıflık ya da delilik olarak değil, öznenin doruktaki bir iddiası olarak dramatik bir materyal haline gelir. Bu ölümler yok oluşla ilgili olduğu kadar anlam yaratmayla da ilgilidir. Bu nedenle tez, intiharı başlı başına bir “dramatik konuşma” biçimi olarak ele alır. Bu bağlamda intihar, Aristotelesçi bakış açısıyla katartik bir eylem olmasının yanı sıra karakterlerin öznelliklerini inşa ettikleri bir araç haline gelir.

Çalışmanın teorik dayanağı üç yönlüdür. Durkheim'ın sosyolojik yaklaşımı, intihar türlerinin sınıflandırılmasına ve bunların sosyal bütünleşme ve düzenleme ile ilişkisine olanak tanımaktadır. Schneidman'ın psikolojik modeli, intiharın ardındaki zihinsel ızdırabı hem semptomatik hem de dışavurumcu olarak açıklayan “psychache” kavramını ortaya koyar. Camus, özellikle *Sisifos Söyleni*'nde, yaşamak için iyi bir sebebin ölmek için de iyi bir sebep olduğunu savunur. Bu çerçeveler doğrultusunda Shakespeare'in trajik karakterlerinin kendini yok etme eylemi aracılığıyla kişisel kayıp, toplumsal yerinden edilme ve ahlaki belirsizlikle nasıl boğuştukları aydınlatılır.

Ek olarak tez, Orta Çağ'dan Rönesans'a bu temsilleri tiyatro geleneklerinin dönüşümü içinde konumlandırmaktadır. Orta Çağ gizem ve ahlak oyunlarında ölüm açık teolojik terimlerle tasvir edilirdi: günah lanetlenmeye, erdem ise kurtuluşa götürürdü. Buna karşın Shakespeare trajedisi belirsizliği benimser. Karakterleri katı bir teolojik sistem içinde erdemliler ya da günahkârlar olarak değil, güdülerini kolay sınıflandırmaya meydan okuyan karmaşık bireyler olarak ölürler. Buna karşın, Shakespeare'in eserlerinde intihar eylemi çaresizlikten doğan pasif bir eylem olmaktan ziyade karakterlerin öznenliğine vurgu yapan dramatik bir olgudur. Bu bağlamda intihar, Shakespeare'in Rönesans hümanizminin krizini; içsel vicdan ile dışsal düzen arasındaki çatışmayı, eylemlilik arzusu ile kaderin kaçınılmazlığı arasındaki gerilimi sahnelediği bir araç haline gelir.

Son olarak, çalışma bu oyunlarda intiharın hem tema hem de yapı olarak işlediğini iddia etmektedir. İntihar yalnızca oyunun Katarsis kısmında gerçekleşen bir

yıkım aracı deęil, karakterlerin özneleşmesine hizmet eden bir araçtır. Üç oyun içerisinde de karakterleri kadercilikten bireycilięe götürüp kadere boyun eğmek yerine kendi kaderini çizen özerk bireyler haline getirir. Shakespeare bu bağlamda hem okuyucuları hem de izleyicileri şu soruyu sormaya zorlar: Daha yüce bir şey adına – kefare, kurtuluş ya da kavuşma – kişinin hayatına son vermesi ne anlama gelir?





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