

# SOUTHERN EUROPEANS AND ‘MOORS’ FROM THE EARLY MODERN ENGLISH PERSPECTIVE: THE STRANGER IN THE DRAMATIC PRODUCTION OF SHAKESPEARE AND DEKKER<sup>133</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

In the early modern literary and non-literary production, Catholics and Muslim ‘Moors’ are often strategically presented as having similar —mainly negative— features. The anxieties about the menacing presence of these *Others* can be perceived in dramatic works such as Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion* (ca. 1600) or *Othello* (1603-04) by William Shakespeare. While reflecting their cultural context, these works might be influential in a society characterized by its changing attitudes towards these strangers, and who could be, in turn, instrumental to (apparently) support or challenge the contemporary ideologies and the established principles.

KEYWORDS: ‘Moor,’ Spaniard, Other, identity, attraction and rejection, sedition and containment.

## RESUMEN

En la producción literaria y no literaria de la época pre-moderna, las figuras de católicos y ‘moros’ musulmanes a menudo se caracterizan por presentar rasgos similares, principalmente negativos. Las ansiedades inducidas por la amenazadora presencia de estos Otros se puede apreciar en obras dramáticas como la de Thomas Dekker, *Lust’s Dominion* (ca. 1600), o *Othello* (1603-04) por William Shakespeare. Tales trabajos se caracterizan por reflejar su contexto social y por su posible influencia en una comunidad que presenta actitudes cambiantes hacia estos extranjeros, quienes, a su vez, pudieron constituir un medio para (aparentemente) apoyar o desafiar las ideologías y los principios contemporáneos establecidos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: ‘moro’, español, Otro, identidad, atracción y rechazo, sedición y represión.

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... And for this Barbarous Moor, and his black train,  
Let all the Moors be banished from Spain.  
(Thomas Dekker, *Lust's Dominion* 5.6)

During the early modern period, the socio-political and economic changes developing within the European milieu initiated a movement towards the transformation of the prevalent conventions existing until then, an event that would eventually influence the relationships among different communities as well as the way certain cultures were perceived in the Western world. Culturally speaking, the differences between Protestants, Catholics and non-Christian communities, could be considered as instrumental in this process of change. Such conflicts are particularly noticeable in the discussions about the treatment and representations of Muslim 'Moors' and of Catholic societies, two different communities that, from an early modern English perspective, are strategically presented as having common—mainly negative—features. The anxieties about the menacing presence of these Others can be perceived in dramatic works such as Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion* (ca. 1600). However, the consequence of establishing contact with the stranger was by no means something uncommon in the early modern English literary production and was explored in several works such as the popular *Othello* (1603-04) by William Shakespeare, among others.

It may be argued that such documents—notably dramatic texts—not only constitute and reflect a given culture and its economic and political situation, but that they also exerted an important influence in society, and were used either to (apparently) support the established principles, or as a means to challenge such ideologies. Several Elizabethan and Jacobean texts provide an essential overview of the self-alien relations during this period, presenting an ambivalent attitude of approximation and rejection of these foreign Others that may be considered a simultaneous attempt at dissidence and containment of the social and ideological movements operating around the fashioning of strangers. As a result, these plays (re)produce a shifting and ambivalent figure of the Other, a movement presented by means of a process of cultural construction on the basis of religion, ethnicity, and ideology.

In 1596 and 1601, the deportations of some black slaves, or "blackamores," ordered by Elizabeth I, and the massive expulsions of around 300.000 Spanish Moriscos from Philip III's reign in 1609, corroborate a sustained rejection within Christianity towards the alleged otherness of these individuals. Yet, such situation was by no means a recent concern. Long before these events occurred, several early modern texts had already illustrated the tense circumstances operating in the Western world, perceiving in the figure of the extra-European foreigner (as in the case of the black sub-Saharan slaves), but also of the European Other (such as the Spanish Moriscos), a competing, menacing, or simply oddly different individual.

With these anxieties developing in the European milieu, the early modern period constituted the starting point of a movement towards the creation of an English national identity, a disposition that at this stage was still unfixed and changeable (Loomba, 2000: 201). Such identity is shaped in a situation where a series of transformations are taking place in England and where there is a shifting and ambivalent approach in the formation of the image of the stranger that could be considered a business partner or political ally, but also a competitor or a military opponent.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the way the two attitudes alternate in the English imagination, and in the dramatic production of the period, in the representation of southern Europeans and Moors.<sup>134</sup> These strangers are described either positively and/or negatively, as in the case of the Spaniards and of some Muslim societies (such as the Ottoman community) who are contemplated with envy and resentment for their military superiority and

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<sup>134</sup> The term 'Moor' in early modern Europe was often used indistinguishably to designate members of communities as different as those of Northern Africa and the Levant, Sub-Saharan Africa, or even those of the New World.

economic potential, but at the same time, with admiration towards their wealth and technological expertise. The English desire to take part in the Mediterranean trade, the occasional alliances created for this purpose, or the unspoken aspiration of contact with an appealing and advanced foreign culture, could incite the temporary fluctuation in the community—and thereafter in drama—towards a positive vision of these unexpected allies.

Such attitudes, however, were never present in discussions on the sub-Saharan African or the inhabitant of the New World. In this case, the factors affecting the oscillation of opinions concerning these individuals depended on utterly different approaches, which would be impossible to direct towards the Muslim Moor. On the one hand, the interests on colonisation promoted the descriptions of the natives of the New Worlds, and especially of black Africans, as harmless and amiable individuals allegedly ready to welcome the European coloniser; but, on the other, they were pictured as underdeveloped or even non-human and soulless individuals in order to justify their enslavement and labour exploitation.

Nevertheless, in the Mediterranean context, and finding itself in a military and/or economically aggressive proto-capitalist world, England had to struggle to achieve a central position from a respectable but less competitive situation. Hence, the figure of the Moor or the Spaniard is often presented in terms of excess and immorality, treacherousness and corruption, eventually providing a contrasting image employed to enhance with its negative features the positive representation of the islanders.

The literary production of early modern England presents a picture of how the events and anxieties of the period could affect the community, while they also reflected and, perhaps, on occasions produced social change (López-Peláez, 2007b: 125-26). In fact, despite the traditional hostility towards Otherness and difference, literature could be strategically designed, either voluntarily or unintentionally, with a double purpose: it (re)created the acts of individuals who seemed to represent an ideal image of the English identity by highlighting the differences between their behaviour and that of Others (such as the member of a foreign culture or the local unruly individuals); but, at the same time, it could undermine the prevailing national conventions presenting antithetical positions (Sinfield, 1992: 48). This way, such judgments were inevitably made public and could be questioned by the reader or spectator, who may consider them a plausible alternative to the established principles (1992: 48). In a society torn between fears about foreign influence or invasion, and worried about the presence of English insubordinates who could be inspired by alien ideologies or even bear allegiance to foreign communities (Demetriou, 2011: 196; Fuchs, 2007: 96), we may recognise in drama an unconscious internal struggle, or perhaps a conscious effort, towards dissidence, hidden behind an apparent conformity to the accepted social conventions. Such elements could provide, for instance, a brief glimpse of a wealthy and cosmopolitan world where class mobility was possible and, by means of which, the traditional fixed position of the high classes could be subtly challenged (Dollimore, 1989: xxi).

In the 1980s Jonathan Dollimore already suggested the possibility that, during this period, several plays did question the structures of the accepted conventions, while such traditionalist ideologies were also introduced in the text to comply with the demands of the powerful local authorities, and (apparently) employed in order to support their principles and their actions (1989: xxiii). This could be done by introducing subtle allusions that would collide with such ideas or by representing the disagreement of an individual with these factions (1989: 8). In fact, even if the strict censorship that analysed literary production forced playwrights to hide possible allusions to dissidence, theatre could be a particularly dangerous medium to expose the gaps and the contradictions of the socio-political structure of a state or even as a means to undermine the ideological legitimacy of monarchy, law, religion or the accepted morals (1989: 22-25). Even if a dramatic work presented a collapse within the social order and its final restoration, the lapse of time when anarchy was on stage could be used to

give to the audience a glimpse of political insubordination. Perhaps, to escape censorship, dissidence was strategically demonised and condemned —eventually favouring the re-establishment of such stability—, but the dissenting aspects could be the actual message for the audience (1989: 22-25). This rebellion was often initiated by an Other: an individual with a different religion, a rebellious woman, an unprivileged individual, or a foreigner, as we can observe in works such as George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (ca. 1588), *Titus Andronicus* (ca. 1592) and *Othello* (1603-04) by William Shakespeare, Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion* (ca. 1600), and Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust* (1618-20), to mention only a few English plays from 1500 to 1660 where a foreigner is presented as an individual who shakes the foundations of social order.<sup>135</sup>

## FROM AFRICA TO EUROPE

Since the Muslim invasion of Spain in 711, for the English of the early modern period the image of the Moor was deeply intertwined with that of the Spaniard and the Portuguese (Bartels, 2008: 127-28). In fact, among the first contacts between Moors and Europeans we could stress the ones with the Moriscos, the baptized Moors who remained in Spain after the decisive outcome of the *Reconquista* (1492). These individuals nominally adopted the Spanish language, religion, and customs, but they secretly remained Muslims, spoke Arabic and kept their own Moorish customs. At the same time, the economically admired and envied Italy shared with Habsburg Spain a Mediterranean geographical position, their association — as Catholics— to the Pope, and a significant commercial exchange with several non-European communities. Associated with wealth but also with lust, Machiavellianism and corruption, it was no coincidence, hence, that the busy Mediterranean could represent quite a complex idea in the English imagination and, perhaps, a cohesive economic force —or, in the case of Spain, an actual military menace—, gradually influencing and approaching England from southern Europe. To exemplify this complicated relationship with alien societies, we could consider *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) where Robert Burton not only corroborates the hostility towards the Muslim Others, but also their common traits with European communities such as Spain and other Catholic or Mediterranean Others:

... All hote and Southerne Countries are prone to lust, and farre more incontinent, then those that liue in the north... so are Turks, Greeks, Spaniards, Italians, and all that latitude... (Pt. III, Sect. II, Memb. II, Subsect. I)  
See but with what rigor those iealous husbands tyrannise ouer their poore wiues, In Greece, Spaine, Italy, Turkey, Africke, Asia, and generally ouer all those hot countries. (Pt. III, Sect. III, Memb. II, Subsect. I)

Yet, in drama the foreign Other was not always described in negative terms. For instance, despite the sustained antagonism among the convictions of different communities, religion was occasionally used to stress similarities and affinities with other societies when

<sup>135</sup> Among other titles presenting alien characters such as Turks, Jews, Spaniards or Italians, we could mention the works of Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine*, parts I and II (1587 and 1588) and *The Jew of Malta* (1589-90); George Peele's *Soliman and Perseda* (1590); Robert Greene's *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (1588), *Orlando Furioso* (1589/1594?) and *Selimus, Emperor of the Turks* (1594); *The Fair Maid of the West*, parts I and II (1603 y 1630) and *If You Know not Me You Know Nobody*, part II, by Thomas Heywood; William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (ca.1598); *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612) by Robert Daborne; *The Knight of Malta* (1618) by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger; *The Courageous Turk* (1618) and *The Raging Turk* (1618) by Thomas Goffe; *Philaster* (1609) and *The Island Princess* (1621) by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher; *The Changeling* (1622) by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley; *A Game at Chess* (1624) by Middleton; or *The Renegado* (1623) by Philip Massinger. For a comprehensive corpus dealing with Moors in early modern English drama see Luciano García's (2011) *The Moor in the English Dramatic Mirror: The Term 'Moor' in the Primary Texts of Early Modern English Plays*. In López-Peláez, J. (ed.). *Strangers in Early Modern English Texts*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang, p. 25-74.

needed. This is the case of the Muslim doctrine, whose similarities with the Protestant principles and the positive side of both its teachings and its practitioners were emphasized when the situation required an alliance, for example, against Catholic communities. Such sympathy is evident in the cases where England established either military or economically oriented alliances with the Moroccan or Ottoman Muslims. The agreements established by Elizabeth I in the 1580s with the Ottoman Sultan Amurath III were deemed highly valuable in their opposition against a common competitor: the Spanish monarchy. Such sentiments are evoked by George Peele in *The Battle of Alcazar* (ca. 1588), where we may perceive certain degree of affinity with the Moroccan community and the English aversion towards Spain. Here Peele describes the legitimate King of Morocco as the “brave Barbarian lord Muly Molocco” (1, Prol., 12), fighting against unlawful Muly Mahamet. The traitor is supported by the naïve King of Portugal, who is, on the other hand, sympathetically described, being the victim of his own fiery foolishness and of the dealings of the treacherous and “double face[d]” King of Spain (3.1.50).

At the same time, in a period when the improvement of the financial conditions of an individual in England was still a difficult task, foreign communities could be considered as lands for opportunity associated with an image of wealth and power available to those who would willingly convert to Islam. Such desire of contact with these appealing and exotic distant cultures is suggested in the anonymous treatise *The Policy of the Turkish Empire* (1597), where the author complains that the renegade carried about all the quarters and streets of the City, with great triumph and joy of the people, who have drums and trumpets sounding before them; & besides divers gifts and rewards bestowed upon him, he is made free for ever after from all tributes and exactions. Through the desire of which gain & privilege, many of the Greeks ... and many Albanezes ... doo willingly offer themselves to be circumcised (1597: 24).

Likewise, English conversion is documented in texts such as Edward Kellet and Henry Byam’s *A returne from Argier. A sermon preached at . . . the re-admission of a relapsed Christian into our Church* (1628), where the Byam asserts:

. . . I am informed, many hundreds are Musselmans in Turkey and Christians at home, doffing their religion as they do their clothes, and keeping a conscience for every harbour where they shall put in. And those apostates and circumcised renegadoes they have discharged their conscience wondrous well if they can return, and (the fact unknown) make profession of their first faith. These men are cowards and flexible before the fall, careless and obstinate after it. . . . (1628: 74)

This was the case not only of several Muslim territories such as Persia or the Ottoman Empire, but also of Christian European locations such as Spain, France or Venice, described as alluring cosmopolitan and wealthy lands. This image of the foreign space is suggested by the proud Venetian noble Brabantio in Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1602-03), who, awoken in the middle of the night, complains: “... This is Venice / My house is not a grange ...” (2008: 1.1.108-09), establishing not only a separation of class between himself and the soldiers who noisily irritate him, but also highlighting the economically challenging status and enviable position of Venice.

Finally, the New World and Africa were also considered attractively threatening and exotic locations, as suggested by Shakespeare in *Othello*, where its protagonist asserts in a popular passage that when he spoke with Desdemona about the experiences of his life she was amazed by his exotic stories:

OTHELLO: Her father loved me, oft invited me;  
Still questioned me the story of my life  
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes  
That I have passed.

...  
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,  
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads  
Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear  
Would Desdemona seriously incline;

...  
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear  
Devour up my discourse. ...

...  
She loved me for the dangers I had passed (2008: 1.3.127-66)

In this passage of *Othello*, based on John Pory's 1600 translation of John Leo Africanus's *A Description of Africa* (1526), the representation of the Moor is associated with a wide range of foreign Other figures. Here the image of the noble Moor—the soldier of Venice—, collides with the one of the barbarous black sub-Saharan African. This ambivalent approach towards the stranger could be the result of the changing relations with foreign communities, or of a flexible attitude provoked by the shifting socio-economic situation and the political interests of England, presenting the exotic image of an appealing, even if excitingly threatening Orient, suitable for financial adventurers. The unbalanced descriptions in drama, however, could also respond to the uneven arrangement within the text of the submissive attitudes that agreed with the socially accepted conventions of the period, subtly alternating with elements of resistance that displayed an alternative to those standards, and which, for instance, described the lands of the stranger as a site of peril but also as one of freedom.

In order to hide the dissident elements (even if we find some cases where the foreign Other is described in a positive way), a negative overall implication was typically required in a situation of intercultural tensions. The English resentment against Spain and the Pope, the menacing incursion of non-European religions and cultures in Europe, or the fears towards a stranger menacing racial 'purity,' in all likelihood influenced such accounts. Thus, again in *The Policie of the Turkish Empire* (1597), the author provides some evidence about the presence of these anxieties by asserting that

The Turks do desire nothing more than to draw both Christians and other to embrace their religion and to turn Turk. And they do hold that in so doing they do God good service, be it by any means good or bad, right or wrong. For this cause they do plot and devise sundry ways how to gain them to their faith. And many times when they see that no other means will prevail, then they will frame false accusations against them (1597: 19).

#### DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES: MOORS AND SOUTHERN EUROPEANS

During the early modern period, Moors, sub-Saharan Africans, and the inhabitants of the New World were clearly recognised by Europeans as pertaining to very different communities. Muslim societies, for instance, were recognised as powerful and technologically advanced, while black Africans were considered inferior or even non-human, a mere

commodity for slave-trade, being their skin colour an alleged mark of servitude.<sup>136</sup> In the 1970s Hayden White pointed out that, even if —from antiquity— the features of the two societies were occasionally confused, both were clearly recognised by Europeans as different societies (1978: 165). The sub-Saharan individual was deemed a speechless, ‘monstrous,’ and animalised “Wild-Man”, while the “Barbarian,” such as the Muslim Moor, was the subject of a different culture (1978: 165). Yet, at the same time, these extra-Europeans were often portrayed as having similar physical and behavioural features, despite the awareness that the two communities were by no means the same: for instance, the inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa were frequently pictured as darker than the “tawny Moores.” As Loomba explains, “the word ‘blackamoor’ ... collapses religious and somatic vocabularies, which, despite knowledge about white Moors and non-Muslim blacks, could not be unknotted. In fact the same writer can make distinctions between the two and collapse them” (2000: 211).

Among the features supposedly shared by these communities, we could mention the attribute of ‘excess’ or lack of control; while physical ‘anomalous immoderation,’ for instance, allegedly mirrored behavioural sexual intemperance, presenting an intolerable challenge to the prowess of the European individual. Such characteristic was not only attributed to sub-Saharan individuals, but also bestowed on Muslim or Arab characters as we may perceive in the dialogue of act 4 concerning the fight between Philip and Eleazar in Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion* (ca. 1600). Here, when the armed Spanish prince defies the Moor claiming his life, Eleazar blatantly challenges Philip’s manliness by adding:

ELEAZAR. ... With that! what a blunt axe? think’st thou I’le let  
Thy fury take a full blow at this head,  
Having these arms, be wise; go change thy weapon.

...

PHILIP. ... Come Moor, I am arm’d with more then compleat steel, ...

...

ELEAZAR. ... Fling me thy sword, there’s mine, I scorn to strike  
A man disarm’d. ... (1994: 4.3)

As a possible defence of ‘white’ masculinity, such confrontation could be countered by means of a scheme of ‘feminization’ of the Moor and, by association, of the foreign Other in general, especially in a situation of contact between Muslims and Catholics. This is the case of Dekker’s play where the Queen Mother, who would “wage all Spain / To one sweet kisse” of her Moorish lover (1994: 1.1), and her son, King Fernando, are driven and completely overpowered by their passions —traditionally considered a feminine weakness—, being unable to govern their realm with a steady and vigorous hand, an attitude typically associated with men. Hence, described as weak, effeminate, lascivious and cowardly, with a religion easy to undermine, and effortlessly converted to Protestantism, the Moorish “extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere,” and, to some extent, the Catholic individual, were represented as the opposite image of the ideal and stoically hardy Englishman (Shakespeare, 2008: 1.1.37-38). Such attitude, however, may betray a reaction to a sense of insecurity motivated by the presence of the powerful foreign communities, and a need to characterize the English as virile, masculine, noble, chaste and not (unless forced — but even then, only temporarily) prone to commit apostasy (López-Peláez, 2007b: 132-33).

The contact through history between different ethnicities and cultures in Europe were probably significant factors in the formation of an English national identity. The coexistence

<sup>136</sup> Recent studies by Gustav Ungerer on previously overlooked early modern English and Spanish records, show that the English were active in the slave trade in Andalusia as early as the 1480s when the English merchant William de la Founte became involved with this business (2008: 17-18).

of Moors and Catholics (such as Italians, for commercial purposes, but especially Spaniards), for instance, could provoke a combined rejection of those southern European and extra-European cultures, and therefore the association of the one with the other under analogous conceptions. Such contact, in turn, provided a further element to stress the difference between the Mediterranean and the English communities. The attempt to blur the space that separates Muslims and Catholics is noticeable in *Lust's Dominion*, where the Moor Eleazar, a former Moroccan prince, now married to a Spanish noble woman, tries to erase such boundary by stressing the importance of hierarchy: "Although my flesh be tawny, in my veines, / Runs blood as red, and royal as the best / And proud'st in Spain ..." (1994: 1.2). Similarly, in the 1622 anonymous pamphlet *Newes From Pernassvs*, the features of the monarchy of Spain are described as being comparable to the ones of the Moor, having "a complexion very tawny, much inclyning to the Moore, therefore her customes are rather proud, then graue; and in all her actions, hath more of the cruell then the severe" (1622: 9). As Vitkus points out, during this period we may notice a fear towards, and a conflation of internal (European) and external (extra-European) enemies. In fact, both the Muslim community and the Catholic Pope were considered a menace for Europe: the former would attack and threaten with conquest and physical submission the white, Western society, while the latter represented a further menace of corruption of the very soul of the individual (Vitkus, 2003: 60, 77-78).

During the early modern period, the influence of Moorish customs or the integration of the Muslim Other within Western or Christian communities was thus believed to affect the established structure of society. More than ever, after the Moorish occupation of Spain and Portugal during the Middle Ages, the introduction of foreign habits within Europe could be considered appealing —and, therefore, threatening for both the soul and the state— as a consequence of the tolerance of several Muslim and southern European societies in aspects such as social mobility. In fact, while nascent capitalism in England was occasionally a good time for profit-making, the humblest individuals, for whom the improvement of financial conditions was an arduous task, could be tempted to 'take the turban' in order to achieve what was considered to be the more accessible wealth and power of certain foreign communities. This attractive possibility and the inherent positivity attached to such contact with the foreign culture was displayed in dramatic works such as Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* plays (1587 and 1588) where the valiant warrior obtains power and wealth in an Oriental context from the humble position of a Scythian shepherd.

Yet, as Burton points out, for the Christian islanders to commit apostasy was not only an act of rupture with religion, it was a "subjugation of English masculinity": it revealed lack of manliness or weakness, as the individual was unable to resist the conversion (2005: 32). Barthelemy, in addition, suggests that the attractive idea of sexual freedom assigned to Muslim communities combined with social repression in England could provoke a feeling of "sexual insecurity" and "anxiety;" a desirable but simultaneously 'sinful' status that might produce a sentiment of guilt and the resulting rejection of such behaviour (2005: 121). As a response to this internal struggle, the Moor was considered liable and therefore likely to be demonised for an alleged excessive sexual craving that, perhaps, was experienced as a fantasy by the Protestants themselves because of the suffocating social restraint within their own society.

Matar, on his part, explains that in this period a number of Englishmen were appealed by the Islamic culture and voluntarily converted to the religion of the Moor (1999: 19, 28, 33). Yet, from an English perspective and as a possible response to such threat of conversion, Burton suggests, Protestant English individuals were represented as the only ones strong enough to resist such temptations and apostasy. Otherwise, if they finally yielded to a different creed, this conversion was either merely faked out of interest or produced by a temporary moment of weakness and foolishness, as they inherently kept the strength provided



by the 'true' religion: Christianity (2005: 16-17). Such opinion is suggested by Edward Kellet in *A returne from Argier. A sermon preached at . . . the re-admission of a relapsed Christian into our Church* (1628), who asserts that English renegades are "... the chameleons which will change colour with every air, and their belief, for matters of small moment" (1628: 35).

Usually, this was not considered to be the case with Catholics or Muslims, as they were both allegedly ready to succumb to apostasy, lust and miscegenation even in their own lands. Such action not only proved their weakness, but also their supposed lack of masculinity, providing a further contrasting image to describe the incorruptible, strong, and therefore manly Englishmen. This is often exemplified in early modern travellers' accounts and plays, such as Philip Massinger's *Renegado* (1624) where the Italian Antonio Grimaldi yields to the sexual appeal of a Moorish woman and takes the turban; or *Lust's Dominion*, where the Spanish Queen unflinchingly surrenders to Eleazar's magnetism.

During this period, apostasy was altogether a subversive act against the established class system: a danger for the state and, as a result, for the structure of society as a whole (Burton, 2005: 102-04). The intrusion of the extra-European Other within Europe was often interpreted as fostering subversive acts against the accepted social mandates and hierarchy, as they could raise the interest of subjects who may eventually rebel and claim for the adoption of the foreign less strict social and moral order (2005: 102-04). This process was presented as a factor that would open a breach into the secular and religious orthodoxy, finally affecting society, as the underprivileged communities could challenge the authority and the hegemonic status of the high classes. In all probability, the playwrights of London had to make sure not to challenge the legitimacy of the monarch and the court, but at the same time they had to please the lower classes whose main interest were on "sensationalistic," racy, and dissident or "politically sensitive" subjects (Kavanagh, 2002: 154). They had to "avoid the censure of the London authorities," determined to close the theatres for their 'immoral' example, but simultaneously the dramatists had to be polemic enough to appeal to the audience that would supply their "court patron" with the necessary benefits for the business (2002: 154). Historical events and preoccupations were included in early modern plays, not only because drama both constitutes (that is, creates, informs) and reflects, or is constituted by society, but also because these conflicts were what actually concerned and interested the audiences of the period.

#### SPAIN, VENICE AND ROME: ANXIETIES ABOUT PERMEATION AND THE CORRUPTION OF THE STATE, THE CHURCH AND THE FAMILY IN *TITUS ANDRONICUS*, *OTHELLO* AND *LUST'S DOMINION*

Despite the close supervision of theatrical production in England,<sup>137</sup> a dissident attitude and the challenge of laws and conventions could operate on the early modern stage, albeit always concealed within the text and performed not by a Protestant English individual, but by a southern European, a Catholic, or an extra-European Other. To achieve a seditious undertone, the antagonistic characters could be the ones entrusted with the task of questioning the social order in the heart of a Western community. The anxieties about the permeation of the Other and the socio-political, religious and economic confrontations with Spain (especially in the post-Armada period), for instance, produce a scenery where a cruel and lustful Moor, challenges and corrupts the court, the church, and society, if allowed within Europe.

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<sup>137</sup> In early modern England, potentially subversive elements in theatre were carefully inspected by authorities such as the *Master of the Revels* (Richmond, 2004: 272). This public person was a court official who supervised the development of dramatic production, as any performance had to be licensed before its enactment (2004: 272). Any reference to seditious opinions in the supervised work could lead to the censorship of the play or the punishment of the playwright (2004: 272-73).

In the heart of distant Spain, the Queen of *Lust's Dominion* (ca. 1600) is described as an unrepentant and lascivious woman, who does not show the least remorse for her adulterous acts despite her husband's feeble health condition. Moreover, her affair with Eleazar, the Moor, eventually destabilizes society, a situation clearly associated with the Queen's lack of morality, as she brazenly admits:

QUEEN. My husband King upon his death-bed lies,  
Yet have I stolne from him to look on thee;  
A Queen hath made her self thy Concubine (Dekker, 1994: 1.1)

King Fernando —Queen Mother's son— is also a shamelessly lecherous noble; while other characters are not represented on better terms. In fact, the Spaniards in most cases are depicted as excessively religious, superstitious, proud, lustful and weak, having a distracted attitude that makes them blind before the mischief of Eleazar, that freely manipulates them, and who, having "...scattered this infection, on the hearths / Of credulous Spaniards..." proclaims: "... Spain I will drown thee with thine own proud blood ..." (1994: 2.5, 6). In fact, the Moor goes beyond moral corruption, as he even seems to be actively trying to twist further the image of an already corrupted Catholic Church by plotting the usurpation of the King's crown with the aid of Cardinal Mendoza. This act, nonetheless, would not be possible without the presence of the already corrupted Spanish clergyman who, as the Queen states, on occasions entreated her to "leave the Court, and fly into his arms" (1994: 3.6). Here the promiscuity of the southern European Court and Church is hence associated with the lasciviousness of the Moor, as Spain is paradoxically portrayed as Lust's dominion. In fact, regardless of the strict social codes promoted by Catholicism during the early modern period, Spaniards were depicted as having frivolous and lustful dispositions, hidden behind a mask of austerity. Hence, the Spanish Court is imagined as a den of iniquity and corruption, where lecherous, greedy and arrogant conducts seem to be thoroughly accepted.

According to Barthelemy, Dekker's play suggests that the vices of the Spanish Court are the main responsible of endangering the whole community and of almost allowing the objective of Eleazar to take place: to satisfy his lustful desire for Isabella that menaces to produce hybridization in the Western world (1987: 105). At the same time, the Catholic Church is similarly depicted as a decadent institution consumed by corruption from its very foundations —represented by immoral, humble friars—, to its highest rank —occupied by Cardinal Mendoza. Yet, as an alternative (or parallel) reading of Dekker's censure of the Spanish community, we could consider that in *Lust's Dominion* the playwright describes two representatives of the high classes: the Queen —the symbol of the noblest and wealthiest classes within the court—, and the Cardinal —her counterpart within the powerful church. By means of such examination of these characters as iconic figures of their respective spheres, we may suggest that their behaviour might have been associated by Dekker's contemporaries with the church and the state in general —as institutions—, and therefore, with the ostentatious English Court that, during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, embodied both orders. In fact, most likely, the excesses and wealth typically associated with the court could not go unnoticed among the monarchs' subjects.<sup>138</sup> In their descriptions of the court and of the penetration of the extra-European Other in Europe, when Shakespeare and Dekker speak about Rome, Spain or Venice, they could be actually thinking —consciously or unconsciously— about London and the English society (Praz, 1996: 8-9), while, of course, pointing at other cultures, locations and beliefs. In fact, the use of these foreign locations as settings could prove safer, while to situate the action in England might be excessively challenging and hazardous.

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<sup>138</sup> See Dollimore (1989: 4, 25, 143).

The presence of foreign Others —or the individuals who Richard Marienstras defines as the “perpetual enemies,” identifying them with the ‘enemy within’ (1985: 104-17)— are perceived as particularly dangerous, especially if they allegedly seize the control of society and manipulate the state, as a result of their lustful association with members of the ruling classes. This fear is presented in *Lust’s Dominion*, where Eleazar —married to a Spanish noblewoman and lover of the Queen of Spain— almost achieves the crown of the kingdom; and in William Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (ca. 1592) and *Othello* (1603-04), where we can observe a further association of Moorish characters with European Others.

In *Titus Andronicus* the Goth Queen Tamora, made prisoner by the Romans along with her Moorish servant and lover Aaron, seizes control of the state from the first act, when she —acting as a peacemaker— declares with apparent optimism:

TAMORA. Titus, I am incorporate in Rome,  
A Roman now adopted happily,  
And must advise the emperor for his good.  
This day all quarrels die, Andronicus;  
And let it be mine honour, good my lord,  
That I have reconciled your friends and you.  
For you, Prince Bassianus, I have passed  
My word and promise to the emperor,  
That you will be more mild and tractable. ... (Shakespeare, 2008: 1.1.459-70)

Of course, as Barthelemy suggests, this situation takes place because the Others’ “unholy grip on the community” not only remains “unsanctioned,” but also because their very presence is allowed within it (92-93). The lustful Roman emperor, Saturninus, even fosters this integration when, in the first act, he asserts that he will make Lavinia his “empress,” and then suddenly changes his mind, because “Lovely Tamora, Queen of Goths” outshines the “dames of Rome” (2008: 1.1.240, 312-18). Now, Saturninus chooses the outsider as his consort, hence, apparently making Tamora “Empress of Rome” driven by his lustful purposes (2008: 1.1.240, 312-18).

Such situation of contact with a foreigner promotes the eventual destabilisation of the whole society, especially when the stranger is given free access within the domestic sphere, or the state, as shown in *Othello*, where the soldier enters in both Brabantio’s house and the Venetian government (D’Amico, 1991: 164). Because of this acquiescence, Desdemona marries the Moor secretly, preferring him to a European —“The wealthy curled darlings” of Venice—, and challenging not only social order, but also Western masculinity (Shakespeare, 2008: 1.2.69). Desdemona, even before her entrance onstage, is described as a “fair woman,” who “made a gross revolt” by running away with a black Other:

RODERIGO. ... your fair daughter,  
At this odd-even and dull watch o’th’ night,  
Transported with no worse nor better guard  
But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier,  
To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor —  
... if you have not given her leave,  
I say again, hath made a gross revolt;  
Trying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes  
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger  
Of here and everywhere. ... (2008: 1.1.121-38)

The outcome of this particular situation will bring Othello before the Duke of Venice at the end of the first act. Yet, even if Brabantio now warns the State that "... If such actions may have passage free, / Bondslaves and pagans shall our statesmen be" (2008: 1.2.100), the faultline activated within the European society cannot be fixed, as the Moor has already been allowed within a family and the state of Venice, where "Valiant Othello" has been employed, ironically, to fight against other Moors: the Turkish (or Ottoman) enemies.

The three plays, therefore, may suggest an ambivalent attitude towards the intruder. Others, such as Othello, Eleazar, Aaron or Tamora, cannot be openly accepted as members of the host community, and must be necessarily expelled from it. However, it may also briefly display a positive attitude towards such strangers, revealed by a concealed desire of contact with the exotic and, to use a Freudian concept, 'uncanny' foreigner. At the same time, of course, to keep up appearances this desire is not attached to English individuals, but to southern European Others such as the noble Venetian Desdemona, the Roman Emperor Saturninus, or the Queen Mother of Spain. In fact, probably, hybridization was unthinkable in England, and the local audience would not contemplate optimistically an explicit reference suggesting that a white English could marry or have an affair with a Moor or a black person. Moreover, a play reproducing negatively life at the Court of London, as the one of *Lust's Dominion*, could entail the censure of the play or even the punishment of the dramatist. The relationship of a Moor such as Othello would be improbable with a member of the nobility and could be considered an aberration and a 'crime' against society.

Finally, when facing the coexistence with ethnically different individuals, a further element revealing the anxieties of Christianity is the problem of miscegenation. The new-born of an interracial or intercultural couple becomes the symbol of the perpetuation of a rejected ethnicity or culture, and the admittance of a descendant of these Others could signify the loss of control over a determinate branch of society: the family — a reflection of society itself. The union of a white woman —also considered an Other in a patriarchal society— with a Moor was considered particularly negative, because it meant not only a challenge of local power, but also a defiance of the white man's masculinity, rejected in favour of an extra-European Other. This could also explain why early modern plays exploring this subject are usually set in a place other than England: Englishmen were not the protagonists of these dramas because their authority and spotlessness could not be challenged or considered in peril. This union —hybridization or miscegenation—, considered illicit at the time, was rejected because it broke homology (the same with the same) by introducing difference, compared with actual, physical 'monstrosity.' In *Othello*, for instance, Iago warns Brabantio that Desdemona's and Othello's descendants will be a sort of deformed creatures half human, and half animal: "...you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse, you'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have coursers for cousins, and gennets for germans" (Shakespeare, 2008: 1.1.113-15).

The possible outcome of this situation could be the creation of a "civil monster," namely, an Other born in a 'civilised' culture (Shakespeare, 2008: 4.1.61). This possibility could reveal the early modern anxieties regarding a possible 'invasion' of aliens that might therefore 'attack' Christianity not only from 'without,' but also from 'within;' and, what is more, the internal enemy could be not only a 'civil monster,' but also an English apostate (Fuchs, 2007: 96). As Brabantio suggest with his warning "... If such actions may have passage free, / Bondslaves and pagans shall our statesmen be" (Shakespeare, 2008: 1.2.100), the danger of miscegenation could be also seen as threatening 'blood purity' and the state itself. It signalled promiscuity and corruption within the community, and therefore it could open a breach in the state and damage the 'purity' of an 'unmarked' white Western society, while providing the Other with rights and privileges; thus, creating the already mentioned 'civil monster.' This situation, once again, is often provoked by a weak southern European

such as the lascivious Spanish Queen of *Lust's Dominion* or the Roman emperor Saturninus in *Titus Andronicus*. The result in the last case is the birth of Aaron and Tamora's child, who is rejected by his own mother as we can learn from the reaction of his nurse when she brings the baby to his father:

NURSE. A joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue.  
Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad  
Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime.  
The empress sends it thee, thy stamp, thy seal,  
And bids thee christen it with thy dagger's point. (Shakespeare, 2008: 4.2.66-70)

As a consequence of such situation of exclusion, rejection was reinforced if the two figures, the foreign and the female alien, joined and initiated a disruptive campaign against the socially accepted order, challenging the traditional roles within the family and the state. Moreover, through history women were typically associated with mutability, a feature that they often shared with the alien Other in early modern literature, and, hence, the union of a woman with a Moor was probably considered particularly dangerous, as it could unleash chaos and disrupt the social order. According to Sinfield, the relationship between a woman and the Other was often considered sexually-centred, and therefore dangerous for the whole community: it reinforced the villain's unholy grip on society as the position of both women and foreigners was regarded as one of dependency (1992: 92-93). In fact, although at some points Moors and blacks were depicted as barbaric and cruel, they were also criticised for being effeminate and weak because of their alleged dependent and parasitic nature.

In drama, eventually, the disciplined and morally contained characters —or an ultimate 'divine justice'—, prevailed on the rebellious acts and suppress the lustful attitudes of both Moors and southern Europeans (Dollimore, 1989: 28). By means of this strategy, the audience of both the high and the low classes might be contented: the latter could contemplate a (brief) challenge of the social order, while the former could see how finally order and providence triumph and contain the insubordinate characters.

## CONCLUSION. DISSIDENCE AND CONTAINMENT

In early modern English texts, strangeness, Otherness, or rather the 'uncanny' could be represented not only by blacks or Moors, but also by Spaniards, Italians and Portuguese, among others. These individuals were typically pictured in the plays in a negative way, but occasionally they could be depicted from a sympathetic perspective. During this period, several powerful Muslim countries, wealthy Spain, or the modern and fiercely competitive Republic of Venice (typically associated with the lust and the Machiavellianism of the greedy and treacherous merchant and with lack of moral rectitude), were cosmopolitan, mercantile, open and, in the case of Venice, non-monarchic societies, probably regarded as the counter-images of England.

The new ideas introduced by the innovative administration and lifestyle of the Mediterranean could, from an English perspective, 'poison' the minds of the early modern individual, who might be tempted to imitate the foreign cultures. Hence, despite the concealed attraction and the sympathy felt towards the novelty and the exoticism of these societies, the Mediterranean attitudes had to be attacked and criticised, as the English underlying, or morally established, conservative attitudes clashed (in this initial phase of interaction) with the dynamic and cosmopolitan communities, characterised by their relationships with diverse ethnic groups.

From an English perspective, precisely because it seems so (immorally) attractive and exotic, the attitude and the innovation ascribed to the Other reveals the weakness and corruption within his state, religion and society. Hence, a final restoration of order is required to re-establish the balance and the accepted social and moral system, punishing the stranger and setting an example for anyone secretly seduced by the conduct of the Other. Such restoration is achieved in the texts by means of an execution of the outsider or, significantly, through a racial purge that echoes the expulsions of those citizens perceived as alien Others in Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In *Lust's Dominion*, for instance, the words of Cardinal Mendoza who says to Eleazar "To beg with Indian slaves I'll banish you" (2008: 1.3), and King Philip's final words sentencing "For this Barbarous Moor and all his black train, / Let all the Moors be banished from Spain" (2008: 5.6), seem to be inspired by these deportations, or to anticipate the massive expulsions of Spanish Moriscos that would take place in 1609.<sup>139</sup>

The introduction of the Other and of dissidence in society, especially in the case of *Othello*, is sometimes mixed with an unusual subtle attitude of sympathy. Still, eventually in this and other plays the expressions of sexual and religious freedom, the integration of a stranger, and the dangerous instances of miscegenation, are finally silenced or rejected as acts of dissidence against the traditional social roles. In the scene of Othello's suicide, while he describes himself as "a malignant and a turban'd Turk" who "Beat a Venetian and traduced the state," the Moor also declares that he would re-establish order by taking "by the throat the circumcised dog," and by stabbing himself (Shakespeare, 2008: 5.2.362-65). Such turn, as Vitkus suggests, "might be interpreted as a noble act in the tradition of pagan heroes like Antony," but, if this undertaking is "read in the context of the play's persistently Christian language of divine judgment, it merely confirms his identity as an infidel" (2003: 104). In his last words, he corroborates his nature as an egocentric and unforgivable misbeliever, a "base Indian" who "threw a pearl away" and who does not actually show repentance, but merely tries to manipulate what he thinks will be the accounts about his life: "Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, / Nor set down aught in malice" (Shakespeare, 2008: 5.2.351-52).

As we have seen, in early modern England the shifting attitudes towards the Moor and the foreign Other in general, depended on very different aspects, such as the political conflicts and the commercial alliances among communities. But, among other factors we could suggest the presence of a national fear of being 'contaminated' by a foreign culture mixed with an unspoken desire for intercultural contact, a sentiment of admiration for other societies, and a desire for challenging the national established principles, eventually hidden and contained by the apparent restoration of social order.

All these aspects affecting and, in turn, being affected by the new developing national identity, created around and in contrast with the figure of the foreigner (especially the Muslim and the black stranger), initiated, from the early modern period, a gradual displacement of other cultures and ethnicities. Such rejection, translated to southern European or Catholic communities, whose supposed corruption was either enhanced or provoked by their connection to non-European societies, would finally group different communities under the same notion, representing the negative pole of what is neither English nor white or Protestant, and so on.

In fact, we may suggest that, as shown in several early modern texts, in Europe and especially in England there is a gradual displacement, first, of sub-Saharan Africans considered as mere commodities, and as falling outside the sphere of what was allegedly

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<sup>139</sup> These lines could be either added in following editions of the text or the expulsions were anticipated by Dekker — taking into account the precarious conditions of Moriscos in Spain or the late deportations in England (Bartels, 2008: 120). In fact, 1609 was the year of the beginning of the final massive expulsion, but Moriscos had been expelled and discriminated against for decades before that date.

‘normal,’ ‘good,’ and ‘unmarked;’ second, of the northern Africans or Muslim communities, which are often and increasingly regarded as the main corrupters of the legitimate order in Europe; and finally, of the southern European or Mediterranean communities which — because of their liminal position— are considered as the main responsible for giving free passage to the non-European Others within the white, Western world, a situation that will eventually, and unavoidably drag them out of what was considered the ‘civilized’ world.<sup>140</sup>

As we can infer from this lineal movement from Africa to Europe, there is a gradual shifting of what is deemed the core of civilization, traditionally situated in the Mediterranean sphere. As a result, from an English point of view, the ideological centre and the very essence of the European society are now displaced to northern Europe, finally establishing its very core in England.

Yet, these implications could be (un)consciously questioned by early modern dramatists, who may employ and illustrate some aspects of this foreign influence as appealing and liberating. In spite of the introduction of elements which demonise the stranger and widen the separation with the southern and extra-European Other, early modern plays often seem to be simultaneously incorporating foreign social customs and ideologies while handling them to undermine social and ideological conventions. That is, by presenting a (fleeting) challenging idea, they could be willingly or unconsciously introducing these concepts which menaced to defy the order established by an English society that sees itself as unmarked, masculine, and morally superior. Such order seeks homogeneity, fixity, and social control, in opposition to the diversity or movable and permissive condition represented and offered by the fascinating stranger.

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