

“WHAT GOOD NEWES FROM BARBARY?” NASCENT
CAPITALISM, NORTH-AFRICANS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF
ENGLISH IDENTITY IN THOMAS HEYWOOD’S DRAMA

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During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries England experienced an epistemological transition that entailed the construction of a still precarious identity. This process involved the adoption of a new economy (nascent capitalism) and the shaping of a proto-racialist project of exclusion, which was mainly addressed towards the Muslim Other. In this paper I will show how a corpus of four plays by the Elizabethan playwright Thomas Heywood problematizes this project by simultaneously reinforcing and interrogating it: I will suggest that whereas the new economy is apparently privileged and celebrated and Islam still appears to be approached without racialist assumptions, the plays develop some strategies that nostalgically question nascent capitalism and its consequences, as much as they start to display a process of racial stereotyping towards North-African Muslims. The four plays studied are Parts 1 and 2 of *The Fair Maid of the West* (ca. 1599-1603 and 1625-1630) and *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (Parts 1 and 2) (ca. 1604 and ca. 1605). In order to explore these texts, and to define how the plays engage with these processes, I will employ Juri Lotman’s cultural semiotic notion of the *semiosphere*.

Keywords: Thomas Heywood, drama, Early Modern period, Islam, economy, capitalism, race, semiosphere, Lotman, *The Fair Maid of the West*, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*

In his 1999 influential study on the relations between England and Islam in the Early Modern period, Nabil Matar explains how Muslims were not, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the object of English colonial depredation simply because, far from being able to engage in the military conquest of Muslim countries, Britons feared and admired Islam as an advanced community from economic, social and military perspectives (Matar 1999: 5-12, 1998: 7-35).¹ Indeed, England did not become a colonial

¹ Since in the Early Modern period Muslims and Islam were, in Edward Said’s terms, the chief Others on English soil (Matar 1999: 3-5), they were unambiguously associated with two major locations: North Africa (Barbary, mainly) and the Ottoman Empire (Turks). Side by side with the terms *Muslim* and *Black* there appeared the derogatory term *Moor*, as a concept which, itself, vaguely included a variety of types and origins: from the Blackamoors of the Sub-Saharan regions, through North-African (black or not) Muslims from Barbary (modern day Morocco,

power until the late seventeenth century: the first English colony in America (the settlement of Virginia) was only created after Elizabeth's death, in 1607, and was slowly followed by other precarious settlements throughout the century, to the extent that English colonial possessions well into the seventeenth century were still considerably inferior to those of Spain. In relation to North-African Muslims Queen Elizabeth did try to establish relations with Moroccan rulers, but of a commercial and military, not a colonial, nature: first with King Abu Marwan Abd al-Malik (1576-78), and later with his successor (and last Saadi monarch before the division of the kingdom) King Ahmad I al-Mansur (1578-1603) (Bak 1996: 197-210; Matar 1998: 3-20, 1999: 7-12).²

Under both kings Elizabeth sent as many as four embassies to Morocco: both the London merchant Edmund Hogan and, later, ambassador De Cardenas explored possible military alliances against Spain but, above all, they tried to negotiate beneficial trade agreements for English factors working in North Africa, in a clear economic move intended to promote commercial agreements between equals. At the climax of these relations a Moroccan embassy arrived in England in 1600, and stayed in London (significantly by the Royal Exchange) for more than five months (D'Amico 1991: 33-38; Matar 1999: 10-12). Nabil Matar has brilliantly written about the symbolic significance of the portrait of the Moroccan ambassador painted during this visit: the Muslim Other defiantly posing at the heart of the European metropolis, an image which Matar contrasts with the contemporary painting of the Flemish artist van der Straet. The latter portrays Vespucci, the European subject, gazing at a naked Indian (an object of consumption) in the colony, i.e. America, as an example of the different status that Muslims and Indians enjoyed for the English (Matar 1999: 11-2). The fact that England did not envisage the possibility of colonising Morocco necessarily led to other, mainly commercial, kinds of relations, which were fostered by the fact that Moroccan Muslims were not major enemies of England (Bak 1996: 199-205) and both Moroccans and English had Spain as a major military rival and commercial competitor (Bak 1996: 216; Dimmock 2005: 3).

Basically, what England lacked in order to be able to conceive of the geography of Islam as a colonisable location was technological superiority and a system of economic organization that we may today identify as capitalism, and to a great extent the former depended on the latter. There is not a final agreement about when capitalism actually appeared in England, and even Karl Marx himself referred in an ambiguous manner to the origins of capitalism in England and elsewhere. In *Capital* he firstly mentioned the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as the period when something we might call nascent capitalism emerged in England only to acknowledge, a few pages later, that

and parts of Algeria, Tunisia and Libya), to tawny Moors from North Africa. On its part, the 'Turke', although Muslim, was not usually associated with blackness or with Africa. See Hall 1995: 3-24; Bak 1996: 197-212; Vitkus 1999: 7-12. On the specific treatment of black-skinned people, see Tokson 1982: 4-14. On the representation of Turks, and its role in Early Modern English society and politics, see Dimmock 2005. For a detailed survey of plays of specifically Ottoman content, see McJannet 1996.

² The English did attempt to colonize North Africa, but since they lacked the necessary military and economic resources they failed conspicuously: the only post they had been able to occupy, Tangier, had to be abandoned in a rather unheroic manner in 1684, two years after they had arrived (Matar 1999: 15-16).

what appeared then was only the prelude to the revolution that laid the foundations of capitalism (in Halpern 1991: 67). If we identify the origins of capitalist formations with the rise of primitive accumulation,³ then we can determine that the development of proto-capitalist modes of production in seventeenth century England was a more or less immediate consequence of, basically, the expropriation of agricultural land (by means of enclosures and dispossessions, and of land used for investment of capital); of the expansion and consolidation of the market; of the discharge of feudal retainers; of the introduction of a repressive legislation; of the price rise and the (partially state-controlled) decline of wages; and of the accumulation of capital proceeding from slave trade, piracy, the dissolution and plunder of the monasteries and the new agriculture (Halpern 1991: 63; Hill 2002; Howell 2002: 17-21). From all these features we can then safely maintain that there was a transition towards something we may call nascent capitalism in the seventeenth century.⁴ And, as Christopher Hill among others has claimed, this transition, beyond the merely economic, produced a major epistemological shift in the construction of what we may call – for want of a better term – English identity: “This was in itself a moral as well as an economic revolution, a break with all that men had held right and proper, and had the most disturbing effects on ways of thought and belief” (2002; Howell 2002: 17-22).

English auto-images and hetero-images, or the image that the English had of themselves and that which they constructed about others – in short, English identities – were thus conflictively altered by means of these two elements: the economic and epistemological transition to a new kind of society, first, and also the relations established with a new and until then unknown culture, which was threateningly and radically Other especially because it was dangerously powerful, a culture that significantly played a leading (and also new) role in the new economic and social scenario (Hoenselaars 1992: 10-15; Hill 2002). That all this had an impact on the cultural production of the age is logical if we consider the importance of, most notably, drama in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. David H. Sacks has explained how the theatre contributed to arrange the apparently disparate economic consumption and modes of production into orderly and meaningful activities, and this not the least by means of the nearly fifty million visits to English playhouses registered between 1567 and 1642. The concern with a new English society, and the preoccupation with the existence of the Muslim Other, were both produced and reproduced by contemporary

³ By *primitive accumulation*, a termed initially coined by Karl Marx although never very clearly explained, we mean “the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as ‘primitive’ because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital” (Marx 1977: 874-75). As can be seen from this definition, it constitutes the origins of capitalism.

⁴ This ‘nascent capitalism’ (in Raymond Williams’ terms an ‘emergent’ idea) can be more specifically characterized by an incipient desire for profit (Marx’s view); the increasing production and commercialization of commodities; the progressive consolidation of absolute private property; and a strong concern with economic rationality (in Max Weber’s classical approach). Also, capitalism (either ‘nascent’ or ‘full’) is best understood as a process based on the commodification of the forces of production (human capacity for labor): the capitalist pays for labor-power obtaining a surplus-labor that eventually will become surplus value (Cohen 1985: 162-163).

drama, which actually created “a marketplace of ... personal identities” (Sacks 2002: 154-55) since, in short, the “text ... portrays and constitutes culture and identity” (Harding 2002: 133).

My discussion stems then from the belief that whereas so called “urban drama” (Howard 2002: 163-67) contributed to a conflictive debate on nascent capitalism, especially in its London (and most significant) location, plays about Islam and accounts by travellers, theologians and polemicists “created the representations that would define early modern Britain’s image of the Muslims...”, an image pervaded by “racism and bigotry” (Matar 1999: 12-13). I am persuaded that Thomas Heywood’s drama constitutes an illustrative example of this because, among other things, like much popular culture from any age, it is capable of engaging with and responding to the conflicts of the period in meaningful ways, simultaneously capturing and (re)producing the tensions, contradictions and uncertainties of the age. I maintain this (like Charles Crupi) against the widespread view of Heywood’s drama (and popular culture, for that matter) as a “formulaic appeal[s] to simple emotions and widespread beliefs” (Crupi 2004: 299), and also against a perception of plays such as, for example, *The Fair Maid of the West*, as an instance of adventure drama of the kind that “uses incident to cancel [philosophical] matters” and that attempts “to replace subtlety with simplicity”, preventing, by means of “swiftness of movement [,] ... any significant meaning from arising” (Turner 1968: xv). In this essay, then, I will analyze *The Fair Maid of the West (FMW) Part 1* (ca. 1599-1603) and *Part 2* (1625-1630), and *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody (IYK) Part 1* (ca. 1604) and *Part 2* (ca. 1605), in the context of nascent capitalism and its relation with Islam, to explore how this bears a significant relevance in the process of construction of an English self-image or identity.

One of the most powerful approaches to all kinds of communities *qua* cultures (communities and cultures from all ages) is the one proceeding from the ranks of cultural semiotics as developed by Juri Lotman and the semiotic School of Tartu.⁵ To be sure, the relations established between England and Islam are evidently, and among other things, relations between cultures. Equally so are those developed within England among the different participants in the transition towards early modernity and capitalism, and as such they are all to a great extent conditioned by semiosis, that is, the production and exchange of meaning and symbols. Lotman developed in the nineteen eighties the notion of the *semiosphere* as “the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages” (2001: 123) and, although his initial approach was certainly structured around a linguistic model, he later qualified this definition to expand *languages* in order to include *texts* and *cultures* (roughly, Foucauldian *discourses*). In short, Lotman’s semiosphere can be defined as the space where all semiosis takes place and outside of which no semiotic process is possible. It is characterized, firstly, by its heterogeneity: the semiosphere is composed of a diversity of languages and texts that “relate to each other along the spectrum which runs from

⁵ The best compilation of Lotman’s thought, apparently fragmentary as it is, is the Spanish edition in three volumes by the Cuban critic Desiderio Navarro (with Manuel Cáceres), *La semiosfera*. Arguably, and given the nature of most writings by Lotman, we cannot find a more comprehensive and informed edition in any other language, including Russian. See Lotman 1996; 1998; 2000.

complete mutual translatability to just as complete mutual untranslatability" (2001: 125). And, secondly, it is also qualified by the notion of the boundary or frontier, "the outer limit of a first-person form" (2001: 131), which functions as one of the primary mechanisms of semiotic production of meaning.

The simplest model that a culture makes of itself is canonical, and it is inevitably based on boundaries, the limits that separate a space characterized as 'cultured', 'civilized', 'safe', 'central' or 'unmarked', from that considered as 'natural', 'hostile', 'wild', 'peripheral' or 'marked'. In short, the 'canonical' separation between 'Culture' and 'Nature' and all other oppositions derived from it. The boundary will not only separate the outside from the inside, but will also act internally, to signify inner alterity or diversity, which is always defined by non-reciprocity (Sonesson 2005), as is the case with social, cultural or economic minorities, immigrants, marginalized communities, and so on. This heterogeneity will ultimately lead to the negotiation of conflict, which implies contradiction, but also dialogue. Indeed, the main function of the boundary is as much to separate as to translate texts of an alien semiotics into our recognizable language, and this is achieved by performing the function of a membrane that controls, filters and/or adapts (that is, 'translates') the external text, as a way to re-structure, come to terms with, or even re-invent it (Lotman 1996: 24-29, 2001: 131-140). So, in order to introduce an external culture into the semiosphere, this culture and its texts must be 'translated' or explained in our terms: otherwise they will remain as absolute aliens (Lotman 1996: 61-73). This model helps to account for the ambiguous and conflictive relations established in Early Modern England between the residual feudal episteme (or semiosphere) and a new, emergent and still uncertain semiosphere of nascent capitalism, as we shall see.

Lotman's translation, however, although a form of dialogue among cultures, has also to be qualified, and we must distinguish cultures from non-cultures and extra-cultures. In the Freudian terms of *ego-id-alius*, culture is the realm of the subject, while extra-culture is the reign of the non-subject, and non-culture the space of the non-person. Culture may enter some form of dialogue *with* extra-culture, but may only – at most – talk *about* non-culture (Sonesson 2005).⁶ Following this pattern, Muslim culture belongs in the Early Modern period (in principle, as we shall see) to extra-culture: it can be translated, albeit with difficulty, to a relatively recognizable language, whereas Muslims, on their part, not only considered Britons as inferior but did not even recognize them; that is, they saw them as non-culture (Bak 1996: 197-200, 212-16; Matar 1999: 1-5). How Islam was displaced to a non-culture position has to do with a colonial narrative that began to be developed in the second half of the seventeenth century.

⁶ This classification can be exemplified by Todorov's classical analysis of the attitudes of the Spaniards towards the peoples and cultures they encountered in the New World: Whereas for Columbus Indians belonged to non-culture and so he listed them together with the animals and plants he found, being consequently uninterested in interacting with them, Cortés, on the contrary, tried to learn the Indians' languages and to find out about their political and cultural structures, since for him they constituted an extra-culture. Conversely, the Indians did not see the point in sacrificing Spaniards since, they believed, the gods would not understand them as Spanish culture was 'non-culture' and the language of the Spaniards was untranslatable (Todorov 1982: 23-41, 106-37; Sonesson 2005).

The four plays under analysis here present, in principle, a generally coherent view of trade as positive for the country and for society at large. Part 2 of *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* exemplifies, in the historical figure of Sir Thomas Gresham,⁷ the benefits of capitalism, trade and mercantilism. When devising the building of the Royal Exchange, his great work for posterity, Gresham envisages a utopic world of domestic and international commerce, a world built, like the Royal Exchange itself, on a hierarchy of maids, prentices and masters that profit economically, socially and – one would say – metaphysically from Gresham's alleged philanthropy:

Some shall prooue masters and speake in Greshams praise,
 In Greshams worke we did our fortunes raise.
 For I dare say both Countrey and Court,
 For wares shall be beholding to this worke.
 (1138-1141)

Gresham is certainly not the only merchant positively portrayed in the second part of *IYK*: the play abounds in images of, and references to, historical men, and some women, who in a certain way, the play suggests, were beneficial for the community (748-855, 1142-1162). They function as models for wealthy tradesmen such as Gresham or Hobson, although each will fulfil that role according to his or her capacity. But the positive influence of trade is everywhere in the play. It is not only that merchants help to sustain the crown financially (2028-2039), or that God is believed to have a dealing in the prosperity of substantial citizens (2081-2084): merchants seem to be so essential for the evolution and progress of the country that they openly claim a central role in the symbolic construction of England as a modern state. When the London merchant Hobson meets the Queen, he is outraged that she does not seem to know him or acknowledge his importance:

QUEEN. Friend, what are you?
 HOBSON. Knowest thou not mee Queene? Then thou knowest no body.
 (2020-2021)

In this picture of apparent harmonic integration money also plays a major part in the composition of personal development, to the extent that it is even described as a main component of spiritual welfare. In general, as plays produced right in the middle

⁷ Sir Thomas Gresham (1519-1579), son of Sir Richard Gresham (Lord Mayor of London), was a London financier, merchant and economic thinker who worked for Queen Elizabeth (and previously for King Edward VI) as Royal Factor. Gresham was instrumental in restoring the value of the previously debased pound sterling; he also acted as ambassador and agent of the Queen, and he trafficked, for the crown, with arms and foreign money. Gresham's best-known initiative, and one of his most lucrative businesses, was the building of the London Royal Exchange (modelled on the bourse in Antwerp). His most significant contribution to economic thought was *Gresham's Law*, a principle whose central tenet is that in a legal tender currency situation, bad money drives good money out of circulation. This theory, previously formulated by Copernicus and even hinted at by Aristophanes, is still influential in economic theory (Rolnick and Weber 1986: 185-199; Selgin 1996).

of the transition from a feudal economy to something we have identified as nascent capitalism, Heywood's two parts of *The Fair Maid of the West* may also be said to show a major concern with the role of money and wealth in the new economy. Part 1 contains no fewer than forty references to gold or money, and indeed there is a sustained concern with economy, trade, commerce, piracy and privateering, and with the commodification of love, sex and friendship. In this first part a successfully capitalistic Bess Bridges expresses an almost absolute happiness "[f]or money flows/And my gain's great" (II.i.148-49). To be sure, Bess materializes in this play the capitalist dream of escaping from the ranks of the have-nots to engross the bourgeoisie, and in an innocent and somehow comic way – if only perhaps unwillingly – she even declares to be "ecstasied" (I.iii.42) when, as a consequence of the tragic misfortune of her beloved Spenser, the latter suddenly changes her status and condition by providing her with the necessary wealth to purchase her own tavern. The play evidently depicts Bess's social and economic progress from being a girl in a tavern to becoming a capitalist entrepreneur who runs her own business and employs others (from I.iii.52) but this idealistic and exemplary progress is problematized by her final twist in order to engage in, arguably, the most disturbing and contradictory activity at the time for an alleged capitalist merchant: piracy. The problematic relation of Bess with various kinds of commerce, be they legal or not, goes beyond the conflictive nature of piracy and privateering, though. Indeed, women had a role to play in England's commercial aspirations through the metaphor of trade as a form of marriage or "intercourse of amitie", in Samuel Purchas' words (in Hall 1995: 123). Together with the anxiety over miscegenation, both international trade and 'mixed' marriages made a number of statements about the nature of something that was still precariously perceived to be 'English identity'. If trade (like marriage) seems to exert a homogenizing influence, it also (like marriage again) "leaves unspoken the more threatening possibility: that English identity will be subsumed under foreign difference" (Hall 1995: 124).

According to Jean Howard, referring to Part 1 of *FMW*, something like a discourse of national identity arose in Early Modern England to the extent that the English tried to be described as a fairly consistent and homogeneous semiosphere or, in her words, as a "fraternity of subjects within an imagined community defined in part by a bounded geographical essence and in part by cultural and racial *differences* (emphasis in the original) from other such imagined communities" (1994: 101). In similar terms, Ton Hoenselaars has explained how "one nation's view of the character of another provides an insight into its own self-estimate as well" or, in other words, of "the constituent elements of a national ideology" (1992: 15). Although I am aware that this is what Anthony Cohen has criticized from an anthropological perspective for being conceptually insufficient (1993:198), it very aptly for the present purposes incorporates the spatial and the racial in a discussion on identity, on England as a geographical and semiospheric location, and on skin colour and the symbolic constructions of sameness and difference.⁸

⁸ This has important consequences for a discussion on identity and culture: as Anthony Cohen has explained, "in claiming [cultural identity] you do not merely associate yourself with a set of characteristics: you also distance yourself from others" (1993: 197).

Although colour and cultural differences among sub-Saharan Africans and Muslims (either Moroccans or Ottomans) were actually perceived, it seems that the Early Modern English for some reasons persistently failed to discriminate appropriately among terms such as Aethiopian, Moor, Blackamoor or Negro. In fact there was a tendency to ignore the religion of Muslims in order to focus on their ethnic otherness, and so names with a religious meaning were abandoned in favour of those with an ethnic or national connotation: Saracens, Moors, Blackamoors, Turks or Tatars. When religion was alluded to, then Mohammed is presented not as a prophet but as a deity who is part of a heathen pantheon with devilish idols: Apollin and Termagant (Viktus 1999: 8-9). And Muslims were increasingly depicted as jealous, lascivious, treacherous, excessively refined and pagan (Tokson 1982: 3-13; Vaughan 1994: 68; Viktus 1999: 2-12). Hence also the new use of the term *Barbary* in order to denigrate Muslims, who, to be sure, were well known to be a civilized and refined people.⁹

However, there is evidence that Early Modern England had already had various contacts with black Africans (sub-Saharan Africans, to use a modern term), and with Muslims (Moroccan or Ottomans). This seems to leave no doubt as to the existence of a cultural and political stereotyping that had an ideological function. Nabil Matar explains how Britons produced a portrait of Muslims that did not correspond to their actual experience with them but was the representation of a representation, based on their encounters with American Indians: English merchants, privateers, diplomats, sailors and outlaws had entered into close contact with North-African Muslims and with Ottomans, and hundreds of Early Modern Englishmen “took the turban” every year, besides the already mentioned relations between the monarchs of Morocco and England (1999: 13-15). This has to be connected with an increasing demand for publications on Muslims and sub-Saharan Africans, which contributed to the construction of a discourse of difference that established the allegedly innate evil of Muslims and Blacks alike (Vaughan and Vaughan 1997: 25-44). Gustav Ungerer, among others, has explained how English merchants “became heavily enmeshed in the African slave trade as early as the 1480s”, and how blacks were bought and sold in England well before the seventeenth century (2005: 255), which again seems to prove that Early Modern dramatists and most playgoers were able to distinguish between both Muslims and black –sub-Saharan- Africans, and them from Indians from the New World.

As in the case of the transition to the new economy, the conspicuous presence of Islam and Muslims in Heywood’s drama seems to confirm the role of these plays in the process of construction of an Early Modern English identity, as this paper suggests. In the two parts of *FMW* there is a significant ambiguity as to what may be the actual portrait of Muslims that the play is interested in building and, although both plays provide all Muslims with the standard stock of clichés, racist features, ahistorical

⁹ Yet, the alternative perspective of noble Moors depicted in Early Modern drama should not pass unnoticed. These characters, contrary to what some critics appear to suggest (Vaughan 1994: 59), did not begin and end with *Othello*, as the case of King Abdelmalec in Peele’s *Battle of Alcazar* seems to prove. Abdelmalec, a historical figure, is presented by Peele as noble and virtuous, “a perfect expression of Renaissance ideals of kingly virtue” (Bak 1996: 208), in clear contrast with the villainous Muly Mahamet from the same play (Vaughan 1994: 58-60).

allusions and xenophobic behaviours typical of popular drama,¹⁰ there is also a fair number of favourable allusions to Islam and Muslim characters. In the first part of *FMW*, Spenser takes refuge in Fez (Morocco) after having murdered a rival. Thus, Morocco is the destination to which his beloved Bess Bridges, conveniently dressed as a man, heads her ship, appropriately (and ominously) called the 'Negro'. Indeed, and as we saw above, many English merchants, but also pirates and criminals, decided to take Morocco or, less frequently, the Ottoman empire as their country of adoption, sometimes even converting to Islam (the so-called *renegadoes*).¹¹ Heywood's two parts of *FMW* use this historical well-known motif to explore what was perceived as the contradictory nature of Muslims, who are certainly presented under an ambiguous light. To begin with, Morocco is not depicted as a 'non-culture' location: this realm is presented as a nation pursuing its own commercial and political interests just like any other European power both in connection with its foreign relations – Christian merchants in Morocco right before King Mullisheg's accession to the throne enjoyed, we are told, "traffic and freedom" (1 *FMW* IV.iii.16-17) – and also regarding some internal measures – the king's actions are ruled by his desire to bring safety, wealth and peace to his kingdom (2 *FMW* IV.iii.1-18). And in relation with Muslim alleged lust, Mullisheg simply shares with English Christian characters an immediate infatuation with Bess; indeed, he cannot be said to treat her worse than most of these other Christian would-be lovers (1 *FMW* V.i.21-29).

Then, although both parts of *The Fair Maid of the West* produce contradictory and mutually exclusive readings of most Muslim characters, in Part 2 there seems to prevail an image of Muslims as potentially noble characters. It begins with Joffer, one of the principal counsellors of King Mullisheg, who not only claims that "(a)ll moral virtues are not solely grounded/In th'hearts of Christians" (III.i.97-98), but acts accordingly, allowing Bess's beloved, Spenser (to the risk of Joffer's own life), to momentarily escape from Mullisheg's court in order to let Bess know that he is alive. This generosity makes Spenser lament that "Moors will say/ We boast of faith, none does good works but they" (III.ii.104-05), and wonder whether honor is "fled from Christians unto Moors" (III.i.102). It should be noted that the fact that it is clearly a rhetorical question should not prevent us from perceiving how the reactions of other Christians regarding this same situation are far less noble than the Muslim bashaw Joffer's (III.ii.119-30). Indeed, both he and Spenser seem, through their shared code of honour, to be closer to one another than to their respective fellow countrymen, to the extent that estament, or class behaviour, seems to supersede race. Also, Mullisheg's reaction to Joffer's nobility reinforces the evidence of virtuous behaviour among Muslims: he does not reject Joffer's honourable action in itself, but simply on the grounds that the English Christian Spenser, "a stranger so remote/Both in Country and religion", cannot "harbor

¹⁰ Muslims were not the only ones to be stereotyped. Spaniards (among others) were consistently vilified in, mostly, drama and pamphlets (Hoenselaars 1992: 15-67, 126-47; Demetriou 2003: 31-62).

¹¹ This tendency, already significant in the sixteenth century, increased during the seventeenth: the Republic of Salé, on the Moroccan Atlantic coast, after seceding from the Kingdom of Morocco became a notorious refuge for Muslim and, especially, Christian pirates between 1627 and 1641 (*Embajada de España en Marruecos* 1992-1994: 93).

such/Noble virtues” as accompany the behaviour of a Muslim (III.iii.25-26; 38-39). This magnificent example of the relativism of national morality can be read as a critique of cultural and religious stereotypes, and cannot pass unnoticed since it is the last portrait we have of Moroccans in both plays. Also, although in a perhaps more oblique way, Muslims are introduced in the opening lines of *2 IYK* as reliable trading partners (1-56), to the extent that the play opens with an exchange between an English factor and a “Barbary Marchant” on the issue of the sugar monopoly.

But, in spite of all the above, the plays are far from providing a homogeneous and unproblematic description of Muslim characters: side by side with the previous evidence, they also seem to be characterized by their proverbial and alleged lust and their deceiving nature. Notably, King Mullisheg is depicted in Part 1 of *FMW* as mostly ruled by his passions (IV.iii.27-34), a dramatic description that is continued in Part 2 (I.i.209-13), where his wife, Queen Tota, plans to revenge for his lechery “at full” and, at the same time, be “sweetly satisfied” by being herself unfaithful to him and having intercourse with the English Spencer (I.i.114-93). In a clear contrast with the ‘other’ virginal Bess of the play (i.e. Queen Elizabeth as an everpresent intertext), Mullisheg also proves to be a ruler for whom his personal desires are more important than his kingly duties, and thus he repeatedly offers to load Bess and her followers with gold just on account of Bess’s beauty (Part 1: V.i.37-38, ii.36-37), a promise that he fulfils in Part 2 (III.iii.176-85); exchanges kisses for royal pardons and commercial rights (Part 1: V.ii.79), and plans to ravish Bess even after he had explicitly repented from his lustful nature (Part 2: I.i.223-39). There is a sustained concern with sexual excess (Mullisheg in Part 1, both he and his wife in Part 2) and Heywood also puts much emphasis on skin colour, as the most conspicuous and relevant difference between Muslims and English or Europeans and, at least in part, as an explanation for the deviant behaviour of Moors (Part 2: II.vi.65-66; II.vi.75-76; III.i.104; and Part 1: V.ii.64-65). When everything else looks the same, as Bess’s servant Clem implies, there is always the colour difference between Moroccan and English: “they [the English] never sit down to meat with such foul hands and faces [as the Moors]” (2 *FMW*, I.i.68-76).

The discourse of race now supersedes that of gender, and the contrast established between English men and women and Muslims is not only visualized by means of skin colour but it is evidently intended to have a mostly moral dimension. From the Middle Ages, the alleged blackness of Muslims (either ‘tawny Moors’ or ‘blackamoors’) had had a clear ethical importance: blackness signified evil, or, in other words, blackness was the livery of malignity, a clear identifier that marked Africans as permanent others (Bak 1996: 208-12).¹² Thus, if the English are depicted as reliable, honourable, courageous, chaste, masculine and noble (*FMW* Part 1:

¹² There is a long history behind the denigration (*de-nigrare*) of blacks. Many of these discourses made their way well into the Early Modern period: the cultural background (Thomas Browne’s works based on Pliny or Herodotus); the religious discourses (the sons of the lascivious Ham, whose sins condemned his descendants to bear the mark of evil); or the ‘scientific’ explanations of skin colour (Samuel Petty’s *The Scale of Creations* or even Jean Bodin’s climate theory). Blackness was easily associated with Islam in the uncertain geography of the seventeenth century, although it does not mean that the English believed that all Africans (including North Africans) were uniformly black or tawny (Bak 1996: 197-200; MacDonald 1997: 7-16).

I.i.336-43; III.ii.75-76; III.ii.131-35; III.iii.38-39; IV.vi.145-47), Muslims – as we have seen – seem to be, for the most part, mutable, dishonourable, cowardly, lascivious, effeminate and treacherous (*FMW* Part 1: IV.iii.27-40; V.i.14-15; V.ii.34-37; 64-65). This main contrast produces an element of strangeness that is easily explained as a product of the perception of the Muslim semiosphere as non-culture: difficult to translate or decipher, strange and alien to the English.

The plays show a concern with mutability from a nearly stoic perspective that has a special relevance as it links the two major preoccupations of these plays, namely race and trade, or a semiosphere characterized by a racial and cultural episteme, on the one hand, and a mercantile one on the other.¹³ It is in this sense that mutability appears as a dominant feature of Muslims in Part 2 of *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*: in an unhistorical but dramatically useful scene, Gresham's major trade agreements are shown to be with Morocco, with whose king he has negotiated the monopoly of the sugar trade with England.¹⁴ But a factor recently arrived from Morocco informs that the King has just died in the historical Battle of Alcazarquivir, and the new Moroccan monarch has denounced the agreement and has decided to keep Gresham's money:

GRESHAM. Our Factor, what good newes from Barbarie?
What sayes the King, speake, didst thou sommon him?
Or hast thou brought my threescore thousand pound?
Or shall I haue the Sugars at that rare? [...]
FACTOR. The King that in the regall chaire succedees
The King late dead I summon'd, and demaunded
Either your money tendred, or the Sugars
After the rate propos'd, hee denied both
Alleaging though he was successiue heire,
He was not therefore either tide to pay
The late Kings debts, nor yet to stand vnto
Vnnecessarie bargaines.
(1475-1488)

¹³ *Neo-stoicism* is the term commonly used to refer to the renewed corpus of Stoic thought appearing in Europe during the Early Modern period. It maintains the basic tenets of classical stoicism to which it adds a humanist approach. See Chew 1988. All four Heywood's plays under study here abound in references to Stoic injunctions against mutability, showing emotions, despair, false appearances, corruption, or revenge; and in favour of stability, the acceptance of the reversals of Fortune, quiet life and Stoic 'plain dealing' (2*FMW* I.i.223-39, III.i.75-78; 1*FMW* III.iii.31-42, I.ii.30, II.ii.53-54; 1*IYK* 301-311, 1076-1085, 1330-1333, 1346-1360; 2*IYK* 633-642).

¹⁴ Monopolies (or the acquisition by an individual or company of exclusive rights to commercialize – import or export – a product) became one of the defining features of the new economy, and one of the clearest causes of the impoverishment of large sections of the population in the seventeenth century. Supported by the crown to control the profits made by certain companies, and also promoted by great merchants to the disadvantage of smaller ones, monopolies are in the foundations of the greatest fortunes made during this century and one of the most important causes of vertical mobility in the Early Modern period (Halpern 1991: 85-89; Sacks 2002: 139-55).

But in much the same way that piracy is problematized as it endangers capitalism at the same time as it provides the wealth needed for its development, trade with Muslims proves to be simultaneously necessary and undesirable, stressing both the wealth and power of Islam as much as its ultimate Otherness (its semiospheric untranslatability) when compared with the (pretended) reliability and honesty of English merchants. Barbara Fuchs has also posed this problem in illuminating terms, linking the conflictive construction of capitalism with the unstable identity represented by the renegade and its alliance with Barbary (2000: 51).

As in the case of the treatment of Muslims and their relation with the English semiosphere, capitalism, or the new economy, receives a contradictory, ambiguous or conflictive treatment in Heywood's plays, which somehow produce, as C.W. Crupi claims of the second part of *IYK*, "a serious disruption(s) of the capitalist myth-making" (Crupi 2004: 298). This new economy has been described as one replacing an old society based on gift-exchange by a new one structured around the buying and selling of commodities. Barbara Sebek has explored how this transition implied a reconfiguration and a disruption of traditional social relations: a community ordered by a gift-exchange dynamics, typical, although by no means exclusive, of medieval societies, reproduces an ethics of neighbourliness, the old reciprocity nexus, whereas a society based on relations of exchange of commodities, of the kind emerging in the Early Modern period, is mostly based on profit and economic gain (Sebek 2001).¹⁵

To begin with, Gresham's figure, apparently celebrated in *2IYK*, is not so unproblematic as has traditionally been claimed. Certainly, a number of obscure historical events interrogate this pretended hagiographical dramatization of Gresham on account of the enclosures he promoted, the polemic building of his sumptuous mansion, his deviant connections with the crown (putting crown money to his personal use), the irregular construction of the Royal Exchange (foreign and cheap workforce hired, land expropriated), or his apparently illegal purchase of the plots of land surrounding his own manor, among others (Crupi 2004: 301-04).¹⁶

¹⁵ However, we should not believe that this general transition that engendered nascent capitalism from the late medieval market was so abrupt as to simply replace one for the other in a linear way. In this sense Raymond Williams' distinction of the three aspects of culture and social formations (the residual, the dominant and the emergent) is of central importance, since it rejects the mechanical simplification that usually accompanies much theoretical thought on culture and society. In Sebek's words, these three levels should be seen as "mutually constitutive symbolic economies that often overlap or blur together, and that gain meaning in relation to one another" (2001), rather than as establishing simplistic mechanical oppositions. These faultlines are easily perceived in the resistance to change that these plays reproduce. A deeper analysis of this transition, and of the differences of the gift-exchange and the commodity-exchange approaches to communities, can be found in Max Weber. See Weber 1958; see also Habermas 1970. For an alternative perspective and a response to Sebek see Shershow 2001.

¹⁶ A hint of Gresham's problems with the law and/or the Crown does appear in the play: Gresham's suit with Ramsey introduces a suspicion on the legitimacy of many capitalist operations and, most disturbingly, on the nature of the rights of property (*2IYK* 496-7). Actually foreign workers (from the Low Countries) were hired by Gresham in the construction of the Royal Exchange, a decision that was bitterly contested by English bricklayers. Between 1517 and 1595 several violent demonstrations took place in London to protest for the presence of foreigners

The economic degradation, in *2IYK*, of Tawnicote, the peddler of Kent, is arguably another of the most problematic and contradictory consequences of the new economy. Capitalists in all Heywood plays analyzed here, but especially in the second part of *IYK*, have apparently been, as we have seen, idealized: Bess Bridges as the girl in a tavern transformed into a wealthy international merchant, then married into the nobility; Sir Thomas Gresham as successful Elizabethan international businessman, the idealized citizen, philanthropist and capitalist merchant prince. Both are surrounded by a multitude of would-be capitalists who either attempt with difficulty to prosper (Clem, Goodfellow) or are clearly on their way to success (Hobson, Spencer) (Crupi 2004: 296-300). But just like *FMW*, the second part of *IYK* – in its construction of an English Early Modern identity – clearly disrupts these pretendedly harmonious processes of economic and cultural transformation through the dramatization of the apparition of new kinds of individuals: the extravagant international wealthy merchant, but also poor and vagrants, masterless men whose mere presence reveal a major social, economic and epistemological crisis of an unprecedented dimension. Their apparently uncontrollable nature, which appeared threatening to Early Modern communities, produced a change in the perspective and attitudes towards the poor which has been termed the “desanctification of the poor” (Halpern 1991: 73). Tawnicote embodies this new disturbing reality. If within the previous economic semiosphere of feudalism poverty was exclusively understood as a problem pertaining to widows or to the sick, under the new economy it acquires a new meaning. Anyone can become poor, and a man may see himself forced to “dig liuing out of stones” for his family and yet be unable to “yeeld them sustenance” (1545, 1554).

Two scenes exemplify in Part 2 of *IYK* the dynamics, the new language and the disturbing consequences of nascent capitalism. In the ‘Forest scene’, the London merchant Hobson abandons the certainties of the London capitalist semiosphere to enter both physically and symbolically a forest in which he will come face to face with the disastrous consequences of the new economy. It is significantly here, at the boundaries of his semiospheric location, where a different language can be heard and translated, that Hobson meets the dark side of the new economy:

Mother a me what a thick myst is here:
I walked abroad to take the mornings ayre,
And I am out of knowledge, bones a me
(1557-1559)

Then, Hobson meets Tawnicote (an honest worker from the merchant’s own experience), a peddler who used to bring ‘country money’ to the metropolis (a historical source of wealth for English nascent capitalism) and who has fallen victim to the new economy: Tawnicote has come to that point where all he owns and can sell is his workforce: “This spade alas, tis all the wealth I haue” (1631). Confronted with the cruel situation of Tawnicote, all that Hobson is able to do, “out of knowledge” as he claims to be, is to voice the capitalist and puritan metaphysical and teleological belief

working in England. The Parliament tried to appease the people by expelling in 1575 most Flemish workers and refugees (Marienstrass 1985: 102).

that “Heavens will for all, and should we not respect it/We were vnworthy life” (1650-1651). Tawnicote, on his part, produces a much more subversive reading of his misery, by blaming not Heaven but the new wealthy: “our ages fault the mightier,/Teare liuing out of vs, we out of her [the Earth]” (1555-1556), who exploit the poor just as these exploit the Earth. In other words, Tawnicote identifies a systematic connection between the wealth accumulated by the likes of Gresham and Hobson and the poverty of the Tawnicotes that nascent capitalism has produced. The play does not blame an individual agency but economic activity *per se*, which eventually commodifies human beings and degrades the environment (Howard 2002: 180-82; Crupi 2004: 315-20).

Equally, the ‘Courtesan scene’ reproduces a commodification of the female that we can also find in *FMW*: the erotic discourse of the prostitute (like that of the first Bess) eventually establishes a property link that ties her jewel, her chain, her ring and her own body, all of them commodities that John Gresham (Sir Thomas Gresham’s nephew) wants to purchase. Interestingly, all the tokens that the young man wants from the prostitute she refuses to give since – she claims – they cannot be purchased: they were gifts that other men gave her. Against John Gresham’s attempt at capitalist commodification which he intends to materialize in a commodity-exchange, the courtesan replies with a gift-exchange mentality. She, of course, is completely at ease in the commodity-exchange dynamics the young man suggests, but it is noticeable how she escapes this game through recourse to an earlier, residual, late medieval mentality. Eventually the courtesan, however, escapes this alienation and avoids this commodification that the young man openly declares: “thou hast a Commodity that I must needs take vp” (1754), precisely because she is simultaneously producer and merchant, resisting thus the capitalist process of alienation of the producer from the means of production even at her own expense (1715-1785).

But it is probably the figure of Sir Thomas Gresham that introduces a clearest interrogation on capitalism as the alleged unconflictive defining feature of Early Modern identity. In principle a homage to the historical figure of Gresham as a model capitalist, Heywood’s Gresham is hardly a prince of the new economy, and this not only through the obscure circumstances surrounding his career explained above. His reaction and eccentric exhibition after learning that his major source of wealth, the sugar monopoly, had been lost, involves wasting thousands of pounds in a carefully prepared performance before an audience of aristocrats. Besides, he has an extreme concern with his reputation, ostensibly shows his immense fortune and behaves with a clear lack of the puritan and neo-stoic modes of thrift and austerity then adopted by capitalists, features all these that clearly characterize him more as a representative of the old feudalist semiosphere than as an early modern product of the new economy (1385-1544):

What Dukes, and Lordes, and these Ambassadors
 Haue euen before our face refusd to purchase
 As of too high a price to venture on,
 Gresham a London Marchant here will buy.
 (1514-1517)

Heywood's capitalist hero, it seems, contains the residual elements of the episteme that he appears to be destined to replace, and, consequently, in him we find a number of economic traits we could define as recessive or residual, such as liberality, gift-exchange, tributary practices, generosity or reciprocity, which are shown as interacting, opposing, completing and eventually giving way to others such as profit-making, commodity-exchange, egotistical calculation, gain or commercial transactions (Heal 1990; Sebek 1998, 2001). The traditional – late medieval – ethos of the old economy was based, at least nominally, on generosity or liberality, and to this value Gresham eventually returns in his grand display of power and wealth: when explaining the humanist dimension of his great work, the Royal Exchange, "an Vniuersitie within it selfe" (1538), Gresham ends up explaining that:

W're not like those that are not liberall
Till they be dying, what wee meane to giue,
Wee wil bestow, and see done whilst we liue
(1542)

As we have seen, the construction of an English semiosphere in the Early Modern period implied the intersection of a number of discourses (or 'languages') that entered into some form of dialogue. A multitude of meanings, new and old, were created and transformed, and an epistemological and moral change took place. Like all semiospheres, the one thus created was heterogeneous and permeated by boundaries, and consequently was characterized, among other features, by the new and diverse economic relations that constituted nascent capitalism and by the construction of England's auto-images and hetero-images as tactical identities on the bases of, among other things, skin colour and 'race'. But this heterogeneity implied that there were various densities of meanings, which itself means that this transition and these definitions were not uniformly carried out, perceived or understood. Hence the conflictive construction of capitalism exemplified by Heywood's plays, in which a contradictory dialogue with the new economy is established. The beneficial accumulation of wealth and progress by means of the ruthless imposition of the laws of the market is confronted with the destruction of the reciprocity nexus typical of feudalism, hence the figure of Tawnicote, while the humanistic and stoic contempt for worldly possessions is partly replaced by the new ambition produced by the rise of new markets, new economic relations and new ideals. The character of Sir Thomas Gresham embodies well these contradictions: when compelled to pay a tribute to the most prominent representative of the new capitalist episteme, Heywood can only produce a conflictive character, halfway between feudal society and new economic relations, simultaneously exemplifying and rejecting capitalism, embodying residual and emergent elements of the new economy.

Likewise, the ambiguous representation of the Muslim Other – civilized enough to become a recognizable trading partner, powerful to the extent of becoming a rival and competitor in different areas, but at the same time a representative of a non-culture, and consequently an unreliable ally and eventually a potential prey to military expansion and colonial depredation – is simultaneously shaped in opposing, often

mutually cancelling, terms: lascivious but noble; pagan but monotheistic; different but politically necessary.

To conclude, all these plays problematize the construction of an identity based on the new economy and on new racial definitions, and as a result England as a project proves to be conflictive, ambiguous and contradictory. The semiosphere that Heywood describes is anything but homogeneous, and this means that these plays, far from reproducing this transition without complications, actually interrogate the systems of belief that made it possible, and they do this through the faultlines that cut across the texts and show them as ambiguous pieces of popular culture. And as we have seen, these fractures take the form of gentlemen turned merchants, merchants who become pirates, and tradesmen who behave like aristocrats; Muslims who prove to be as noble as Christians, and Christians who are as lecherous as 'Moors'; women who pass as males, and males who pursue, purchase, and always unsuccessfully try to commodify women. And, as symbols of that, condensing those meanings theatrically, an English Queen whose identity depends on her tradesmen, and a Christian maid among the 'Moors'.

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