THE IMAGE OF MOORS IN THE WRITINGS OF FOUR ELIZABETHAN DRAMATISTS: PEELE, DEKKER, HEYWOOD AND SHAKESPEARE

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted by
Mohamed Ibrahim Hassan Elaskary

To the University of Exeter
April 2008

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

........................................

1
I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisors, Dr Mohamed-Salah Omri and Dr Philip Schwyzer, for their patience and assistance in the preparation of this thesis. Honestly, I cannot find words to express my thankfulness and gratitude to them. In addition, due thanks should go to Professor Muhammad Abou Liala, the former head of English Department, and to all members of staff at English Department, the Faculty of Languages and Translation, al-Azhar University, for their valuable support over the years. Lastly, I would like to thank the Egyptian government, and Egyptian tax-payers, for funding this project; without the scholarship I have been granted this dissertation should not have come to light.
THE IMAGE OF MOORS IN THE WRITINGS OF FOUR ELIZABETHAN DRAMATISTS: GEORGE PEELE, THOMAS DEKKER, THOMAS HEYWOOD AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

The word ‘Moor’ is a loose term that was used in Medieval and Renaissance England to refer to the ‘Moors’, ‘blackmoors’, ‘Negroes’, ‘Indians’, ‘Mahometans’ or ‘Muslims’. All these terms were more often than not used interchangeably. This study is concerned with the Moor from North Africa.

This study is divided chronologically into two phases. The first part deals with the plays that were written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I while the second part examines the plays that were written during (and after) the rule of King James I. Queen Elizabeth I and King James I had opposite points of view when it came to the relationship between England and the Muslim world. Thus, while Queen Elizabeth was in closer alliance with the Moors and the Turks than the Spaniards and the French, King James I chose, only after a few months of being enthroned as the King of the English monarchy, to befriend the Spaniards rather than the Moors and the Turks.

The plays discussed in this thesis will be viewed against the opposite policies adopted by Elizabeth I and James I concerning the relationship between England and the Muslim world. The idea of poetic verisimilitude will be given due importance throughout this study. In other words, I propose to answer the question: did the authors discussed in this thesis manage to represent their Moorish characters in an efficient and objective way or not?

Warner G. Rice, Mohammed Fuad Sha’ban, Thoraya Obaid, Anthony Gerald Barthelemy and Gerry Brotton had written PhD dissertations on the image of Moors, Turks, or Persians, in English drama. This study, however, will focus on the image of North African Moors in Elizabethan drama. What I intend to do in this thesis is to relate each of the plays discussed to a context (political, historical, or religious) of its time. My argument here is that the tone and the motive behind writing all these plays was always political. For example, George Peele’s The Battle of Alcazar will be related to the historical and political givens of the 1580s, i.e., the familial strife for the throne of Marrakesh in Morocco, the Portuguese intervention in this Moorish-Moorish conflict and the friendly Moroccan-English relations. Thomas Dekker’s Lust’s Dominion will be viewed in the light of the Reconquista wars and the expulsion of the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula. Thomas Heywood’s The Fair Maid of the West will be seen in
relation to the theme of conversion and Moorish piracy that were so vigorous in the 16th and 17th century. William Shakespeare’s *Othello* is unique and it represents what may be ranked as the earliest insights regarding the idea of tolerating the Moors and foreigners into Europe.

The contribution this study aims to offer to the western reader is that it involves scrutinizing Arabic texts and contexts whenever available. Thus, Arabic sources concerning the historical accounts of the battle al-Kasr el-Kebir (the battle of Alcazar); the expulsion of Moors from Spain or Moorish and Turkish piracy are to be invoked. In the same vein, the reception of these plays in the Arab world is to be reviewed at the end of each chapter.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research context</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aims and objectives</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological approach</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of study</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue: The Historical and Political Background</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: The Political Representation of the Moors in George Peele’s The Battle of Alcazar</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The historical and political moment</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of the play</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peele’s Moors</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reception of The Battle of Alcazar in the Arab world</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: The Moors of Spain in Thomas Dekker’s Lust’s Dominion</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical background</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorship</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of the play</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Moors of Spain</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reception of Lust’s Dominion in the Arab world</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The Devil and the Noble Moor in The Fair Maid of the West</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical background</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorship and sources of the play</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moors and Britons cultural competition and the theme of conversion</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reception of The Fair Maid of the West in the Arab world</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The early years of the 1550s witnessed the first sizeable appearance of black people in England; those whom English merchants took captive and brought to England to work as slaves.\(^1\) John Hawkins was among the earliest English adventurers to bring black people to England and to sell some other black Africans into slavery in the New Found World.\(^2\) In the 1550s, a black man who was brought to England was married to a native white woman. The child that the mixed couple brought to life was described as black as “coal”.\(^3\)

The words “Moor,” “blackman”, “blackmoor,” “Negroe,” “Aethiopian,” (or even “Turk,” and “Arab”) were used interchangeably in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in spite of the fact that the English became aware of the distinctions between different types of blacks.\(^4\) The word ‘Moor’ was commonly used to refer to Muslims in general whether they came from Africa or Asia.\(^5\) Thus, the inhabitants of the island of Molucca (part of today’s Malaysia) are referred to as “Moors in religion”.\(^6\) In fact, as Anthony Gerald Barthelemy puts it, “almost anyone who was not Christian, European, or Jewish could have been called a Moor; this includes Asians, Native Americans, Africans, Arabs, and all Muslims regardless of ethnicity.”\(^7\) Throughout this thesis, the term ‘Moor’ is used to refer to Moors from North Africa or those who come originally from North Africa. These are to be distinguished from blacks, Negroes, Turks or Arabs who appeared on the London stage in Elizabethan drama.

In Elizabethan England, the word “Moor” was sometimes used synonymously to refer to “traitors”\(^8\) while in Spain the term ‘Moro’ was used derogatorily to mean a

---


\(^2\) Richard Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, voyages, traffiques & discoveries of the English nation: made by sea or over-land to the remote and farthest distant quarters of the earth at any time within the compasse of these 1600 yeeres (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1903-1905), vol. vi., 299, 340, 341, and vol. vii, p. 5, 6, 27, 55, 59). Henceforth referred to as Principal Navigations.

\(^3\) The tale of “A true discourse of the three Voyages of discoverie…” in Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations, vol. v, p. 180, the story is narrated by George Best.


\(^7\) Barthelemy, Black Face Maligned Race, p. x; Tokson, The Popular Image of the Black Man, pp 1- 4. Barthelemy’s definition of the word ‘Moor’ can be found in pp 6-8.

\(^8\) See the chapter on Lust’s Dominion.
‘dog’. Quite often, the word ‘Indian’ was confused for the ‘Moor’, as is the case in *Lust’s Dominion*. In spite of the fact that there was no dearth of information about the Moors, blacks or Africans, more often than not there was a sort of confusion between blacks, Moors and Indians. Earlier in the twentieth century Louis Wann argued that confusing the Moor for the Indian is a puzzling question to answer and by the end of the century Nabil Matar gave an answer to the question. English writers, Matar argues, tended to superimpose the image of Indians, natives of the West Indies at that time, on Muslims because they were unable to dominate them.

Throughout Medieval and Renaissance Europe, the followers of Islam, known also as Mahometans, Saracens, Moors or Hagarians, were viewed by Europeans as pagans, infidels or, at best, heretics. In Medieval Europe, Islam was thought of at that time as more of a sect or a heresy coined by Mahomet than as a heavenly monotheist religion. Mahomet was portrayed as being more of a (false) God, not a Prophet, who, failing to become a Patriarch, created his own Mahometan sect. Thus, through a process of misrepresentation and demonization of Islam, Daniel Vitkus writes, “iconoclasm becomes idolatry, civilization becomes barbarity, monotheism becomes polytheism and so on.” Elie Salem argues that the Elizabethans were “subjective” in their writings about Muslims and that the point of view they adopted or the ideas they held of Muslims were closer to the Medieval than to the Renaissance way of thinking. In the same vein, Richmond Barbour agrees that in spite of the fact that there was no lack of information about the ‘other’ in Elizabethan England the majority of writers chose to lead a “binary” attitude towards the ‘other’.

---


12 Matar exclaims how it is paradoxical that the conflation of the Moor and the Indian “appeared in the society that produced philosophical empiricism and was on the verge of the scientific revolution.” Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University press, 1999), pp 15-17. Henceforth referred to as *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*, quotation comes from p. 16.


Exotic stories about the Orient and its people appealed to the Elizabethan dramatists and audiences alike. The logic behind using Africa as a setting by Elizabethan dramatists is that such an act, expectedly, would have bred more spectacles to the theatre. The Elizabethan folk must have found stories about the “harem of North African rulers and description of the courts of the West African Negro kings” or slave trade fascinating.

All Moors, white, brown, black or Negroes, were usually associated with loads of negative characteristics; being cruel, greedy, inferior, impulsive, aggressive, pagan, devilish or voluptuous, and a few positive ones; being daring, strong, hard-working or, sometimes, passionate. Due to bible-based racial theory, blackmoors were cursed and viewed lightly by their white counterparts until the first half of the twentieth century. It were these negative attributes associated with the Moor figure, argues Mohamed Laamiri, that made his image “an attractive Other and a popular exotic subject which fired the public imagination by the fantastic stories about the Moors and the Barbary States.”

Elizabethan dramatists got their stories about the Orient from four main sources: returning fighters who fought the Muslims in the medieval age; history books and published travel accounts that were available at that time; the then living merchants and traders who travelled to the Orient; and, most importantly, the accounts of those captives who were captured by Moorish and Turkish pirates along the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The contact between merchants, travellers, and men of letters in the 16th and the 17th centuries was an established one. Writing on the relationship between merchants, privateers, princes, and men of letters in the Elizabethan age, Kim Hall argues that all these were “connected in court and diplomatic politics and many sought to enrich themselves through encroaching on the Portuguese monopoly of African trade.”

---

17 Jones, *Othello’s Countrymen*, p.117.
18 Ibid, p. 87.
19 Ruth Cowhig in David Dabydeen (ed.), *The Black Presence in English Literature*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), chapter 1. This is the book, along with review of Nabil Matar’s *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen* in *The Sunday Times*, that inspired me to undertake this study. (“Turkish delights”, *The Sunday Times*, Culture, January 16 2000, pp 40-41)
Research context

Interdisciplinary studies have been fashionable in the last few decades. Recently, cultural, gender, ethnic, and new historicist studies came to the foreground. Of all these schools I will undertake this study from a New Historicist point of view. I am aware of the ramifications of the term “New Historicism”. I am using the term “New Historicism” in its broader and simplest sense; i.e., relating a work of art to its historical and political background. At the top of the New Historicist agenda lies the need to focus on the historical, political and cultural aspects in a society. New Historicism, thus, would authorize us to link a work of art that was written, composed, or created in the past to the present. It is mainly New Historicism that would allow me to relate the texts I will be scrutinizing to the environment in which they were created. Hence, I would be in a position to discuss these texts in relation to more than one context of its time; whether historical, cultural, religious or political.

Like any literary school, New Historicism has its prophets, supporters, or opponents and foes. At the heart of New Historicism is a desire to put texts into the contexts in which they were created. Historicising a text, one would agree with Virginia Vaughan here, will help us bridge the gap between the past and the present. Not only, that New Historicism, argues Edward Pechter, involves studying the “reception” of texts as well. In re-reading, or in Peter Erickson’s words “rewriting”, Renaissance drama, we are “rewriting ourselves”. However, the criticism that has been levelled against New Historicism is that the school has “remained mesmerised by Shakespeare to the exclusion of ‘lesser’ writers”. Rightly, Daniel Vitkus criticizes Greenblatt and his colleagues for applying, (anachronistically, from his point of view) a western imperialist

24 Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher state “we had never formulated a set of theoretical propositions or articulated a program; we had not drawn up a sequence of questions that always needed to be posed when encountering a work of literature in order to construct a new historicist reading...” (Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago; London: Chicago University press, 2000), p. 1.
model to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries texts. This is what my study departs from; concentrating on lesser Elizabethan dramatists.

Aims and objectives

An interest in the relationship between the East and the West in Western culture came to prominence since the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and never faded away. The representation of Moors (and Muslims in general) has emerged as a major topic in modern and contemporary scholarship. In their voluminous studies on the representation on Moors and Muslims in English and European literatures, Warner G. Rice, Samuel Chew, Eldred Jones, Mohammed Fuad Sha’ban, Thoraya Obaid, and Dorothee Metlitzki trace the representation of Moors, Arabs, Turks and Persians in English literature in general; in Medieval morality plays, Elizabethan tragedies, Elizabethan and Jacobean pageants and masque. Most recently, Daniel Vitkus, Jack D’Amico, Nabil Matar, Jerry Brotton, Mathew Dimmock, Khalid Bekkaoui, and others, have been engaged in an active pursuit of the relationship between the East (particularly the Muslim world) and the West during the Renaissance (and after) and the effect such a relationship had on the representation of Oriental and Muslim characters in the writings of the same period.

Daniel J. Vitkus, “Turning Turk in *Othello*: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 2 (1997), p. 146. Europeans, states Vitkus, were “colonisers” as well as “colonised” by others. (p.146) Henceforth referred to as “Turning Turk”. Said proposes that, in its attempts to take control of the Orient, the West has stereotyped and misrepresented the orient and its people. (Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1979)


The study undertaken by Mohamed Fuad Sha’ban (in 1965) spans the period from 1580 to 1642. In this study, Sha’ban tackles the theme of travel literature and traces the image of Muslims in Elizabethan drama but he seems to be more interested in the relations between the Ottoman Empire and England than that between Morocco and England and more in the representation of Turks than Moors. Warner G. Rice’s voluminous work on the image of Muslims in English literature is one of the most comprehensive studies in the field. Rice’s excursion is, in my views, indispensable for any researcher who approaches the topic. In this study, Rice gives a thorough historical background of the period he was scrutinizing; the history of the Ottoman Empire; the history of the Barbary States; a survey of travel accounts of those travellers who travelled to the Orient and an outline of the afflictions and miseries his fellow European captives had to endure in the Ottoman Empire and Barbary States in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rice then traces the image of Moors, Turks, and Persians in English literature from as early as the medieval ages till the end of the Elizabethan era. Samuel Chew’s study on the relationship between the West and the Muslim world and the representation of Muslims does not differ considerably from the ones undertaken by Rice and Sha’ban.

The studies undertaken by Eldred Jones, Elliot Tokson and Anthony Gerard Barthelemy share the same line; representation of black people in English literature with more emphasis on those black characters with darker skin.34 Jones, Tokson and Barthelemy tend to agree that the black man was misrepresented, demonized and tarnished. Jones and Tokson seem to have agreed to the fact that it was the biblical curse along with travel classical accounts narratives that negatively affected the way black characters were represented; descants of ‘Ham’ and heathenish barbarians. While Jones differentiates between villain and noble black characters (Moors with darker skins and those with brown or lighter skin) Tokson disagrees with his predecessor arguing that there is “little evidence from the texts to support” Jones’s idea.35 In Black Face Maligned Race, Anthony Barthelemy traces the image of black characters in English drama from Shakespeare to Southerne.36 In the first chapter, Barthelemy gives an expanded definition of the term ‘Moor’. In the second chapter, Barthelemy summarizes the appearance of black Moors in masques and pageants. In later chapters, Barthelemy classifies his Moors according to colour: devilish and awful darker-skinned Moors (Muly Mahamet, Barabas, Aaron and Eleazar) and good light-skinned Moors.

34 Jones, Othello’s Countrymen; Tokson, The Popular Image of the Black Man and Barthelemy, Black Face Maligned Race.
36 Anthony Barthelemy, Black Face Maligned Race.
(Abdelmelec, Prince of Morocco, Othello and Joffre) labelling the latter as “Ethiops washed white”. Barthelemy did not build a lot on the historical or cultural aspects related to the representation of the black people.

The writings of Daniel Vitkus, Jack D’Amico, Nabil Matar, Jerry Brotton and Mathew Dimmock share much more in common than they do not; all concentrating on the historical background and the interaction between the West and the Muslim world. Brotton however, seems to be much interested in history and travel than literature while Dimmock seems to be more concerned with the representation of “Turks” than ‘Moors’ in English literature. Matar is the one who has shown the greatest interest in studying the historical relationship between the East and the West. His works have opened up the field and encouraged a new generation of researchers.

Most recently, the image of Muslims in English literature has attracted the attention of students and scholars in the Arab world. In less than five years, three studies on the image of Muslims in English literature and the relationship between the Muslim world and the West have been undertaken in a single education institution in Egypt. In 2003, Kamal Boraq’a Abd al-Salam examines the Muslim-Christian dialogue from as far back as the seventh up until the twentieth century. In 2004, el-Sayed Abdullah Muhammad traces the image of Muslims in the works of Christopher Marlowe. Though mistaking Aaron (in Titus Andronicus) to be a ‘Muslim’, el-Sayed Abdullah Muhammad dates what he terms “the western man’s misconception of Islam and Muslims” back to the medieval ages. In 2006, Alaa Salah Eldin Mahmoud sketches out the representation of the Muslim in John Dryden’s plays. Alaa Salah Eldin Mahmoud’s thesis is mainly concerned with The Conquest of Grenada.

Building on all these sources, I choose to lead a middle way between those who declare that the Moors were always misrepresented than represented (Matar and Bekkaoui, among others) and those who argue that they were represented in an objective way. For example, I agree with Matar when he argues for his case against a colonialist critical approach to early Elizabethan texts yet I disagree with him when he claims that

---

37 Abd al-Salam argues that the writings of John of Damascus represent one of the earliest rounds of dialogue between Christianity and Islam. (Kamal Boraq’a Abd al-Salam, “Muslim-Christian interfaith Dialogue (Hiwar) history and Nature” (unpublished MA thesis, University of al-Azhar, Cairo, 2003), p. 53.
all Muslims characters were represented negatively on the English stage.\textsuperscript{41} Here I may be
closer to Dimmock who refers to what he takes to be a “variety”\textsuperscript{42} of the representation
Muslims in English literature in the medieval and Renaissance periods yet I contend that
in spite of the fact that the image of Muslims was “varied” it was more of subjective
and stereotypical than objective and dynamic nature. My main idea is that the image of
Moors has never been all in all static; it varied according to the historical and political
moment and according to the religious beliefs of the creator. However, what I would like
to reiterate here is that those playwrights who represented the Moors and Turks in an
objective or favourable way are exceptions and not the norm.

It is the purpose of this study to trace the image of Moorish characters in the light of
the historico-political context in which the plays were written. The Elizabethan era
represents a unique moment when it comes to studying the relationship between England
and Morocco or the image of Moors. The reason is that the relationship between England
and Morocco at this time has never been closer than it was during the reign of Queen
Elizabeth and Mulai Ahmed al-Mansour. By choosing to study the image of the Moors
from a New Historicist point of view, I would like to stress the fact that it was the
historical-political element more than anything else was that shaped the way the Moors
were portrayed in Elizabethan England. In other words, I will be arguing throughout this
study that the amiable relationship between Morocco and England positively affected the
way Moors from North Africa (not any other category of Moors) were represented
during the rule of Queen Elizabeth. On the other hand, with the coming of King James I
to the throne of England and the familial strife for the throne of Morocco things changed
to the worse; historically and theatrically.

When it comes to the image of Muslims in general and Moors in particular, it is of
paramount importance to refer to the striking historical analogy between the Renaissance
period and the 20th and the 21st centuries. The 16th and 17th centuries Moorish and Turkish
piratical attacks against European vessels and interests in the Atlantic and along the
European shorelines and mainland waters and the Morisco dilemma in Spain may go in
parallel lines with the present day on-going battle with what the West has termed as
“political Islam” or “Islamic terror”. The current political situation, the emergence of
“political Islam”, the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the Twin Towers in United Sates of

\textsuperscript{41} Matar argues that in Elizabethan drama no “single” Muslim character shows awareness of

\textsuperscript{42} Dimmock objects to Matar’s generalization that the image of Muslims was negative all the
time and that no Muslim character fared well on the English stage. (Dimmock, \textit{New Turkes}, pp
10, 15-16)
America in 2001, the war against the Taliban movement in Afghanistan and the war on Iraq have rendered the need to scrutinize the Muslim “other” a must.

This thesis is concerned with studying the image of the Moors in the writings of four Elizabethan dramatists: George Peele, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood and William Shakespeare. When it comes to the representation of “others” on the London stage in Elizabethan England, the Moors took a prominent position. Of all blackmoors and Moors, this thesis is concerned with the representation of North African Moors in Elizabethan drama. The Moors discussed in this thesis are North African Moors (Muly Mahamet, Abdelmelec, Muly Hamet, Mullisheg and Joffer) or those who are of North African origin (Eleazar and Othello). The choice of these plays is not random. The reason for selecting these plays is twofold: firstly, the Moors in these plays are North African and secondly they are dominant figures who manipulate and determine action in the plays. Hence, other categories of non-North African Moors (such as blackmoors, Negroes, or Africans) and minor Moorish characters are given less attention in this study. The aim is to examine thoroughly how these Moorish characters were represented on the London stage in the Elizabethan period; specifically in the light of the historical and political context at that time.

Of all those who have written on the interaction between the East and the West and or the representation of “others” in English literature, I have found the writings of Daniel Vitkus, Jack D’Amico, Nabil Matar, Jerry Brotton and Mathew Dimmock intriguing, daring, objective and indispensable to my study. However, some of these studies cover more than one decade, some trace the image of Moors, Turks, or Persians in English literature in general while some others concentrate on either the literary or the historical side. My study, on the other hand, will limit itself to studying the image of the Moor in one single genre (drama); one single race (North African Moors) and one specific period of time (the Elizabethan period and Jacobean era).

**Structure**

This thesis is divided into four chapters, an introduction and a prologue. The introduction sets the background and the framework of my study; outlines what I will examine in this thesis. The prologue is meant to serve as a quick survey of the historical and the political background of the Elizabethan period in order that the reader will be familiar with what was external factors that might have had played a role in the making of these plays. The New Historicist approach I apply in this study renders the contextual
aspects (whether historical, political, economic etc.,) as valid as any integral textual element in determining the meaning of a text. Here lies the importance of the Prologue.

In the first chapter, I will be studying the image of Moors in George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar*. Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* mirrors the real accounts of the battle of al-Kasr al-Kabīr between the forces of Mulai Abd el-Malek and Ahmed al-Mansour from one side and the forces of Mulai Mohammed el-Sheikh (el-Masloukh) and King Sebastian from the other side. Peele’s uniqueness can be summarized in the fact that he is the first English Elizabethan dramatist to represent this wide-ranging bunch of Moors, i.e., devilish Moors and noble Moors. Peele did not follow the then common prejudice existing in his society at that time. I will be arguing in this chapter that Peele was politically motivated when he represented Abdelmelec and Muly Hamet as righteous Moors and Muly Mahamet as a devil Moor. Peele, I presume, sided with the historical Abd el-Malek and Ahmed al-Mansour because they had close ties with Queen Elizabeth.

In the second chapter, I examine the representation of the Moors in Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion*. Written by the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, *Lust’s Dominion* is totally different in spirit from all other plays discussed in this thesis. The play echoes the anti-foreign sentiment that was rife by the last few years of the sixteenth and the early ones of the seventeenth century; the riots against foreigners. Dekker’s depiction of Eleazar and his fellow Moors can be classified under what may be described a ‘misrepresentation’ than ‘representation’ of the Moors. Eleazar, the villain in *Lust’s Dominion*, is a diabolic Moor who is ready to do anything in this world to take revenge against the Spaniards and wreak havoc on Spain. He is even happy to have been cuckolded by the Spanish crown prince as long as this may help him achieve his target: destroying Spain.

In the third chapter, I study the representation of Moors in Thomas Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West*, Part I and Part II. The play was written in two parts between 1610s and 1630s and the author gives a contradictory image of the Moors in both parts. In *The Fair Maid of the West*, Part I, Heywood introduces his audience and readers to Moors that were hospitable, kind, and generous with whom the English can negotiate and trade. Mullisheg (the Moorish King) falls in love with Bess Bridges (an English young girl) who along with her crew had to sail to Maamora for lack of water and food supplies. By the end of Part I of the play, when the Moorish King knows that Bess is betrothed to Spencer (who was at that time at the palace of the Moorish King), suppresses his love for the beautiful princess and releases the English travellers allowing them to go back to England loaded with many precious gifts to the English couple whose matrimonial bond he has blessed. In Part II which is written about thirty years later,
Heywood succumbs back to the classical anti-Muslim and anti-Moorish sentiment that was typical at that time. Thus, Mullisheg who behaves in a kingly manner in the first part of the play reverts back and behaves in the then fashionable villainous and cruel Moor manners expected from him by the audience. Agreeing to release Bess and her crew by the end of Part one, Mullisheg breaks the solemn vow he has given to Bess and starts playing the treacherous and sensual Moor type. My argument is that Heywood’s change of mode was politically, and religiously, motivated. Read against the themes of piracy and conversion that were soaring at the time of the making the play, one can understand why a dramatist such as Heywood (known for his patriotism and religiosity) chooses by the end of Part II of *The Fair Maid of the West* to convert the Moor, Joffer, to Christianity.

The fourth chapter deals with Shakespeare’s *Othello*. As the case with all other plays, *Othello* will be discussed in the historical and political context in which it was written. When it comes to the image of Moors in *Othello*, one can say that Othello is the most famous Moor ever to be created by a dramatist. In examining the Moor in *Othello*, I will be arguing that the Othello is distinctive in his rise and fall and that he is among the most amiable Moorish characters ever created. If Peele and Heywood followed the political line of their time when representing their Moors, Shakespeare was independent; rather he revolted against it and produced an incomparable Moor.

It is in line with main figures in the field, Vitkus, Matar, Dimmock, and Brotton that I intend to pursue this study. I hope it will serve as a contribution to the field of interdisciplinary literary, cultural, or Mediterranean studies. By being given a somehow detailed survey of the historical and political background, the reader may find reading this thesis appealing. By giving more attention not just to the historical and political background but showing how these manifested in the writings invoked in this thesis, I hope my study will fill a gap in this field.

What is unique about this study, I presume, is that I will be referring to the reception of the plays discussed throughout this thesis in the Arab world. The reader may find the sections on the reception of Peele, Dekker and Heywood in the Arab world to be noticeably short; this is not due to the researcher’s lack of ability to conduct research in this regard. I have surveyed dozens of Arabic books that deal with and trace the history of theatre in the Arab world yet I have found that there is much less interest in Peele, Dekker and Heywood than in Shakespeare. The reasons for this are many. First, the
earlier founders of the Arab theatre and translators, I come to conclude, were more French (and Italian) than English oriented. Among the most prominent men of letters to be translated into Arabic are, among many others, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Shaw, Dante, Moliere, Voltaire, Hugo, Dumas, Dostoevsky, and Brecht. The second and main reason is that, I totally agree with Yusuf Najm here, Arab translators and theatre directors used to translate or perform a play not according to its genre but to its author’s popularity, its success and its suitability to be the Arab world; socially, politically and religiously. The theme, and language, has always been of high significance when choosing to teach, translate, or perform a play in the Arab world.

Methodological approach

Orientalistic or Post-colonialist methodology will be rather discarded than invoked in this study. The reason for this is that it was the East, not the West, that had the upper hand when it comes to the political and military context. Here I am fully aware that the main players on the political and military scene at that time were the Ottomans, the Portuguese and the Spaniards and that the West used to think, and still does, of the

44 George Abyad (1880-19??) and George Iskander (1890-1909) travelled to France while Maroun al-Naqash (1825-1894) and Yakoub Sanno‘ (1839-1912) travelled to Italy to study European drama. (Najm, Al-Masrāḥiyyah fī al-Adab al-<Arabī al-Ḥadīth: 1847-1914) pp 150-152, 125-128, 41-45 and 77-84) Mohammed al-Kozai attributes the French influence on early Arabic drama to closer ties between France and the Arab world. He states:

The impact of the west was at the beginnings restricted to French drama because of the closer ties between France and the Mediterranean Arab countries, which was fortified after Napoleonic campaign and the cultural success it left behind, and by the activities of the French missionaries in Syria.


18
Orient as an inferior “Other” no matter who is the strongest. The vast majority of plays with a Moorish theme written during the Elizabethan or Jacobean periods may be discussed in terms of an Orientalistic point of view but seldom from a colonialist perspective. One would completely agree with Nabil Matar in this regard. Matar’s words, in this regard, are compelling:

Historians and critics who have inaccurately applied a postcolonial theory to a precolonial period in British history forget that in the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, England was not a colonial power- not in the imperial sense that followed in the eighteenth century. Although England had colonized Wales and Scotland and was waging a colonial war in Ireland, at the time queen Elizabeth died, England did not yet possess a single colonial inch in America.\(^\text{47}\)

At a time when the English were not well known enough to the Turks and Arabs in Jerusalem that the former had to identify themselves as French instead, I would say that it is illogical to speak of the English as colonizing the East at that time. It may be convenient to quote an early seventeenth century English traveller here. Henry Timebrlake along with some other English pilgrims who went to visit the Holy Land mentioned that he and his English fellows had to introduce themselves as French because the Turks, Timebrlake states, “know not what you meane by the word Englishman… that when any of my countremen vndertooke the like trauaile, at the Iates of Ieruslaem they should term themselues Frenchmen… because they are well knowne to the Turkes.”\(^\text{48}\) English Renaissance knowledge about the Orient might have been solid but, to echo Vitkus here, for “an English to “know” about the Islamic culture in 1560 or 1630 was not to maintain power over it.”\(^\text{49}\)

Subsequent to the coming of James I to the throne of England, one of the earliest colonial enterprises against North African countries was raised less than one year after the death of Queen Elizabeth by Henry Roberts, England’s agent in Morocco, who called on King James I to colonize Barbary for its wealth and to bring its infidels to Christianity.\(^\text{50}\) More than twenty years later, that is in 1630, John Harrison, King Charles’s agent in Morocco asked the king to plant an English colony in Barbary both for the joy of God and for the honour of the king.\(^\text{51}\) In both cases kings of England did not adhere to the calls for colonizing heathen Barbary. So, unlike the Spaniards, the

\(^{47}\) Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*, p. 10.


\(^{49}\) Vitkus, “Turning Turk”, p. 11.

\(^{50}\) For detailed information see Tristan Marshal, *Theatre and Empire: Great Britain on the London Stage under James VI and I* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp 9-40; chapter entitled ‘A Jacobean Empire’ and Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*, p. 10.

\(^{51}\) Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*, p. 10.
French, or the Portuguese, the English had nothing, or little, to do with the earlier stages of colonization in Africa. Thus, while the Spanish, the French and the Portuguese had seized some ports and gained some sort of influence in North Africa:

Britons did not seize a single inch of Muslim land throughout the Age of Discovery. Even in the second half of the seventeenth century- when the colonies in North America were aggressively being expanded, England not only failed to expand in the Mediterranean but actually had to give up its only outpost on Muslim land- Tangier.”

Moreover, it was not the Britons who colonized the Moors it was the latter who were “threatening to land in England.” Moorish pirates were pressing so hard at British home water that Sir Francis Bacon in 1617, in a meeting with merchants and sea captains [in 1617] argued that England could not confront the Moorish, basically Algerian, pirates on its own. Unless joined by other European sea powers, Spain, France or Holland, the English could do little in relation to their conflict with the Barbary corsairs. Only about fifty years later, with the coming of Cromwell, the situation changed to the advantage of the British. Yet again, though the English had now begun their colonial career in the West Indies and had built their castles in the New Found Land such castles “were never built by Britons on Muslim soil. As a result, Britons never used the term ‘colonize’ to describe their relations with the Muslims.”

One can conclude, then, when it came to the relations between the Muslim world and England, at least during the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, there was no colonial discourse. On the military and economic levels, the Muslim world, here the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary States, was more than equal to the West. Thus later, while the Britons felt superior of themselves in their encounter with the West Indians they were humbled in their encounter with the Muslim world where “Englishmen possessed no invisible bullets because the Muslims were religiously and militarily powerful, were widely influencing English culture, and were dictating their own terms of commercial and industrial exchange.” So, while Englishmen were triumphant in the West Indies they found themselves humbled in North Africa, the Levant and the Ottoman Empire; “conquerors in Virginia, they were slaves in Algeria.”

However, this does not mean at all that England was void of any colonialist activity. Rather, though with no remarkable success at the early stages, the English were so determined to compete with the Spanish and the French in colonizing the West Indies. It

52 Matar, Ibid, p. 17.
54 Matar, Ibid, p. 11.
must be noted here that the nucleus of the colonial activity and the emergence of the Great British Empire was founded during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. There were serious attempts on behalf of the English, with the initiation and full support of Queen Elizabeth herself, to rival England’s adversaries (at that time Spain and France) in maritime affairs and colonial enterprises. In fact, English aspirations to expand their realm to include parts of the West Indies and the Orient dates more than a century back from the Elizabethan era. As early as the 1430s, the author of *The Libel of English Policie*, according to Sha’ban, urged the English sovereignty to improve their naval fleet so that they would be able to deter other nations from threatening English ports and, on the other hand, to compete with other nations in gaining new lands.

I will be reading the plays from a New Historicist point of view, i.e., historical, political, and economic givens will be brought back to life and the plays would be examined in light of these. My study fits and, at the same time, departs from Edward Said’s Orientalism. In other words, I agree that a line has been drawn between the East and the West. According to such a paradigm orchestrated by Said and those who follow him, the East and the West are set in a binary vicious circle: civilization versus backwardness, humanity versus barbarism, religiosity versus heathenism and so on. The plays discussed in this thesis show clearly that it was the political aspect that more often than not played a major role when it came to portraying ‘Others’; amongst them Moors. The clearest evidence is the fact that it was only the brown and the light skin Moors of North Africa who fared well in Elizabethan drama. Their fellow black Moors with darker skin, on the other hand, were painted in the then commonplace and stereotypical fashion.

**Significance of study**

Drawing on the historical and political givens of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this study aims to re-read the plays discussed here in the light of the historical-political moment in which they were written. This study principally departs away from the traditional literary studies in that it focuses not only on the text but also examines the outside factors (biographical, cultural, historical, political etc.) that may be of any importance to the making of the text. Reading Elizabethan plays, it is impossible, one would agree in this regard with Gerard Barthelemy and Simon Shepherd, to disregard

---

59 Sha’ban, “The Mohammedan world”, pp 41-42.
the historical, political and social aspects that were dominant in Elizabethan England. Here I agree with Barthelemy and Shepherd.\(^{61}\) One of the remarkable features of contemporary literary studies, argues Vincent Leitch, is the “diversity of materials considered relevant to the enterprise [i.e. material discussed in connection with literary works]”\(^{62}\). Works of literature, continues Leitch, are no longer being seen as detached from the outside world they belong to but, rather, they are “increasingly regarded as communal documents or as events with social, historical, and political dimensions”\(^{63}\).

When it comes to the representation of Moors in Elizabethan drama, Moors will not be seen as a detached or an isolated block removed from other characters in the play but, rather, a part of a whole that should be seen in relation to other characters in the play. In other words, this study attempts to give an answer to the following question: is Moorish villainy qualitatively different from other kinds of foreign villainy? Or is there an element of racism here? Or are they vilified in fundamentally the same way as the Spaniards, Italians etc.? To argue, in this regard, that the Moors were misrepresented in works of art in the medieval or Renaissance periods may count as redundancy. The majority of critics, for example Samuel Chew, Eldred Jones, Elliot Tokson, Anthony Barthelemy, Daniel Vitkus, Jack D’Amico and Nabil Matar stressed the fact that the Moors were painted in a very negative way and most of the time they were confused with Indians, Negroes or heathens and Zoroastrians. So, the aim of this study is not to prove or disprove that there was, or was not, a misrepresentation of the Moors. Rather, this study is meant to say that it was not unusual in medieval and Elizabethan England that all those who were not Puritan or English, be it Moors, Turks, Italians, French, Spanish, or even English dissidents, were ridiculed or misrepresented, even in a far more bitter way. Thus, for example, if the Moor is described as “lustful” in *Lust’s Dominion* or in *The Fair Maid of the West*, the French in *Henry V* was tainted as “over-lusty”\(^{64}\).

The most important issue that this study will try to give an answer to is: to what extent do English playwrights base their representation of Moors on genuine first or second-hand knowledge of the Muslim world (from history books, travel-writing etc.),

---


\(^{63}\) Ibid, p. ix.

\(^{64}\) In *Look About You*, an Englishman complains “I know your French hearts thirst for English bloud.” Cited in Richard Vliet Lindabury, *A Study of Patriotism in English Elizabethan Drama*, published PhD Dissertation, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1931), p. 69. Though it may be rather dated, Lindabury’s book is an important one for anyone studying Elizabethan drama, especially those who are more concerned with the political and historical question.
and to what extent do they rely on pre-existing European Christian stereotypes? In other words, it might not be difficult for an English dramatist to present a Moorish character from an European point of view, yet it would be rather challenging for him to present it from a Moorish point of view; expressing the inner feelings, thoughts or religious leanings of a Moor. Shakespeare is the top among the few who have written about the ‘others’ and their feelings: the Moorish Othello or the Jewish Shylock. Othello, in this concern, is the Moorish ideal figure against whom we may judge the success, or the failure, of the main plays discussed in this study.

---

65 I am echoing here the idea of “negative capability” coined by the eminent Romantic poet John Keats.
PROLOGUE

THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The aim of this brief interlude is to shed some light on the historical background of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and outline the relationship between England and Morocco at that time. The reason is that to give the reader an idea of what was going between the two parties at that time. Hence, it might be easier to see the parallel lines between history and drama; how the political ties between Morocco and England affected the way Moors from North Africa were represented on the London stage in Elizabethan England.

The relationship between England and Morocco (known at that time as the kingdoms of Marrakesh and Fes) is an ancient one. E. W. Bovill traces the commercial ties between the two kingdoms back to the twelfth century⁶⁶ while Ṣalah Al-<Aqqād dates it back to the “early days of the Saadis” dynasty.⁶⁷ The Renaissance period, according to Matar, witnessed England’s “first amicable engagement with Islam after centuries of crusading wars.”⁶⁸ Queen Elizabeth, Matar maintains, was the “first English monarch to cooperate openly with the Muslims and allow her subjects to trade and interact with them without being liable to prosecution for dealing with “infidels”.”⁶⁹ To effect closer ties with the Muslim world, especially the Barbary States and the Ottoman Empire, Queen Elizabeth, Matar argues, “encouraged her merchants to export to the Turks numerous types of military equipment…and gunpowder.”⁷⁰ On the Moroccan side, England used to import saltpetre and sugar for timber and military equipment.⁷¹ Saltpetre, at that time, was so

---

⁶⁹ Matar, Turks, Moors, and Englishmen, p. 19.
⁷⁰ Matar, Islam in Britain, p. 124.
rare in Europe while in abundance in Barbary, Persia and India. So when Queen Elizabeth knew that saltpetre can be imported from Barbary (this was during the reign of Abd el-Malek) she did not hesitate to permit her agents to bring home the quantities required provided that ships “should not be allowed to pass into Portuguese or Spanish hands.” England’s trade with Morocco, however, was not affected by the sudden death of Abd el-Malek. His successor, who was eager to maintain and improve his military capabilities, was keen on having stronger commercial and military relations with Elizabeth; the only Christian European leader at that time who was prepared to “defy the papal ban on trafficking with Muslims in war material.”

Queen Elizabeth, as a prudent politician, realized that it was for the advantage of her nation and people to have friendly ties with the Muslim world. The Turkish-Anglo-Moroccan alliance was based on practical, firm, grounds; each party needed the other. Queen Elizabeth, according to Matar, did not hesitate to ask the help of the Ottoman Sultan, Murad, when the threat of a Spanish imminent attack against England loomed in the 1580s. Most recently, Jerry Brotton attributed the victory against the Spanish Armada not to Sir Francis Drake’s heroic actions but to the Turkish support. Brotton told The Guardian reporter that it was an “unnoticed letter from Elizabeth’s security chief and spymaster, sir Francis Walsingham, to her ambassador in Istanbul showed that it was Turkish naval manoeuvres rather than Drake’s swashbuckling which delivered the fatal blow to the Spanish invasion plans.”

In their turn, the Turks, and the Moors, one can say, should have welcomed such an alliance. The Great Turk was busy in his wars with Persia, and of course his continual clashes with Spain, while the Moors were exhausted for many years in domestic feuds and overwhelmed by potential aggressions from their neighbours; Spain and Portugal. The Anglo-Islamic alliance, if one can call it as such, was of great importance, on the economic side; especially in the case of England and Morocco. England was in need to venture into new markets to sell its goods. Elizabeth, according to Matar, was “eager to find new markets for merchants and secure military support against Spain throughout the 1580s and 1590s, the queen offered the Turkish and Moroccan rulers mutually beneficial

73 Ibid, p. 49. Edmund Hogan, the Queen’s agent in Barbary, was commissioned to procure a secret agreement with the Moroccan ruler, Abd el-Malek, according to which the English would get saltpetre and the Moroccans would get munitions. (Bovill, The Battle of Alcazar, pp 49-52).
74 Ibid, p. 158 and al-Ghunaymi, Mawsū‘āt Tārīkh al-Maghrib al-‘Arabī, p. 198. Not only did Britons trade with Muslims they also “transported Muslims to the Hajj in Mecca so the pilgrims could escape the Maltese pirates….” (Matar, Turks, Moors, and Englishmen, p. 6.)
76 “Why we must thank the Turks, not Drake, for defeating the Armada”, The Guardian, June 1 2004, p. 1.
and practical agreements."\(^{77}\) The relationship between England and Spain, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, was growing tougher and tougher. Hence, England’s economic situation, to quote Fisher, was so affected to the extent that England was “urgently seeking new markets for its wares in North Africa and the Levant”.\(^{78}\)

In addition, there were some more reasons why the Britons sought commercial and military cooperation with North Africa. Thus, the trade between England and the Barbary States (and the Ottoman Empire), to use the words of Fisher, presented “a marked contrast to our [English] experiences in Spain, where our [English] ships were liable to be relinquished or embargoed and our [English] merchants thrown into prison…”\(^{79}\) Unlike the case with Spain, there was an agreement between England and Morocco according to which Queen Elizabeth managed to get assurance from the Moors that formally secured for English ships free access to the ports of Barbary for shelter and refreshment.\(^{80}\) Queen Elizabeth, of necessity, chose to confederate with the Muslim world. In spite of the fact that they saw both Catholics and Muslims as enemies, Elizabethans felt safer amongst the Moors than their fellow Christians, the Spaniards:

> The Elizabethan English viewed the peoples of both these religions [Catholicism and Islam] as enemies but they did not fear them equally; in a period when the Spanish, not the Turkish, Armada threatened England, the papist emerged as the more dangerous foe of the two. It is no wonder, then, that the English and other Britons felt safer among the Moors than the Spaniards, and soldiers were more willing to serve- or even be captured-by the former than the latter.”\(^{81}\)

The Moors, too, were in a similar position. Powerful enemies surrounded Morocco from two sides: the Turks from one side and the Spanish and the Portuguese from the other. Morocco was virtually the only Arab entity that did not come under Ottoman suzerainty. The Turks were pressing harder to have access to the Moroccan Atlantic coasts and the Moors resisted persistently.\(^{82}\)

Therefore, Elizabeth of England and al-Mansour of Morocco were put in the same critical situation, i.e., threatened by a mighty enemy. On the commercial level, too, the two parties, as has been noted earlier, needed one another. This is what rendered the


\(^{79}\) Fisher, *Barbary Legend*, p. 64, parentheses added.

\(^{80}\) Ibid, p. 122, my parentheses. Mulai al-Mansour’s edict for the protection of the English in his dominions was published in Hakluyt’s (*Hakluyt, Principal Navigations*, vol. iv, pp 275-276). This typically echoes Mullisheg *The Fair Maid of the West*. (Part I, Act V, i, 51-58)

\(^{81}\) Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*, p. 77.

\(^{82}\) The Saadis, according to al-*Ghunayr*, thought highly of themselves (whether it is true or not) as descendants of Prophet Mohammad and hence they might not act as subordinates to the Turks. (*Mawsū‘āt Tārīkh al-Maghrib al-<Arabī>*, pp 200 & 208)
alliance between England and Morocco more advantageous for both sides. Politically, both wanted an ally against a bitter enemy. What made Protestant England seek the help of the Sunni Ottoman Empire against Catholic Spain is the same that obliged Alawi83 Morocco to turn to Catholic Spain, or Protestant England, to form an alliance against the Sunni Ottoman Empire. No wonder, then, if Elizabeth “seemed to prefer cooperating with Islam rather than Papal Catholicism.”84 Al-Mansour, too, on the other hand, did not so much fear the Spaniards as he did the Turks.85 No wonder then, again, if the Moroccans were reported to have celebrated the defeat of the Armada or that the defeat of the Portuguese at Alcazar was attributed to the English cannons shot by the followers of Abd el-Malek and al-Mansour against Sebastian’s army.86

Abū Fāris Al-Fishāṭī, the 16th - 17th century historian who witnessed all these incidents, summarizes the ties between Morocco and England at that time:

The Castilian tyrant [Philip II] endured many misfortunes with major Christian countries fighting him tooth and nail. The toughest of all those who fought him was the daring Queen of England whom the Emir of the believers [Mulai Ahmed al-Mansour] tempted to confront the Castilian tyrant. He [al-Mansour] offered her all the support he could by exporting to her copper and saltpetre as well as some other raw materials she needed.87

It was during the reign of Mulai Ahmad al-Mansour that the relationship between England and Morocco reached its peak with the al-Mansour proposing to launch a Moroccan-English attack against Spanish interests in the West Indies.88 Military and commercial cooperation between England and Morocco was so strong that Matar described it as a “strategic alliance between London and Marrakesh”89. In 1600, the Eagle sailed in a secret mission to England. On board was the Sharif’s envoy to Queen Elizabeth, Sidi Abd el-Wahed Anouri (known in Western sources as Anon, or Anoune) joined by some Moroccan merchants and an interpreter.90 The aim of this confidential

---

83 Alawi, or Sharif, is an Arabic word used to refer to those who belong to the family of Prophet Muhammad.
85 Al-Ghunaymī, Mawsū’āt Ṭārīkh al-Maghrib al-<Arabī, p. 204.
86 For how the Moroccans celebrated the defeat of the Armada see: al-Ghunaymī, Mawsū‘āt Ṭārīkh al-Maghrib al-<Arabī, p. 317 and al-<Aqqād, Al-Maghrīb Al-<Arabī, p. 61; on blaming the defeat of the Portuguese at Alcazar on English cannons used by the Moors see Charles Edelman (ed.), The Stukeley Plays (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, The Revels Plays Series), the introduction. Cf. Dimmock argues that the English exported weapons to both sides: the Moroccans and the Portuguese. (New Turkes, p. 122)
88 Matar, Turks, Moors, and Englishmen, p. 9.
89 Ibid, pp 20-21. The story of the proposed military action against Spanish colonies was recorded in detail by Bovill. (The Battle of Alcazar, p. 181)
journey was to tell the Queen about Mulai al-Mansour’s plan that England and Morocco would attack jointly Spanish interests. The Moroccan ambassador assured the Queen that “England and Morocco united would be able to deprive Philip of all his possessions in both the Old and New Worlds.” The Moroccan delegation stayed for six months during which they had the chance to attend the Queen’s coronation. The Moors also raised as much fascination as repulsion in the minds and hearts of the locals.

European writers, however, did not take al-Mansour’s offer to be genuine. Bovill, for example, argues that al-Mansour was not serious in his offer. The reason Bovill gives is that al-Mansour did not help Drake in his expedition to Portugal which aimed to put Don Antonio on the Portuguese throne. Al-Mansour, according to Bovill, suggested that the Queen should provide him with “hundred ships to transport across the Straits an expedition which was prepared to send against Spain…” while the Moroccan king would pay “150.000 ducats” when the ships are under his disposal. Don Antonio, who was at that time in England sheltered by Queen Elizabeth, blessed the proposed alliance between Elizabeth and al-Mansour and sent his son, as a pledge of honour, to al-Mansour. The three parties, Elizabeth, al-Mansour and Antonio, would benefit from such an alliance: Elizabeth will show Philip a mighty hand, al-Mansour will get all the cities and ports the Portuguese had been keeping for many years, and Antonio will be back to the throne of Portugal. However, when Elizabeth permitted the Norris and Drake expedition to go to Portugal to help plant Don Antonio in the throne there, al-Mansour failed to fulfil his promise.

Arabic sources, on the other hand, tell a different story. Concerning the fact that al-Mansour did not offer the necessary help for the Drake expedition, Al-Ghonimy argues that the Moroccan side did offer help. Al-Mansour, as Al-Ghonimy puts it, though he declined to participate in the campaign, supplied the English party with victuals, money and arms. The reason Al-Ghunaymi gives us for al-Mansour’s reluctance to join the English ally is that both parties did not share the same point of view regarding the timing of the expedition or how it would go on. Al-Mansour, according to Al-Ghunaymi, stated in a message to the Queen that the English fleet would approach the Northern Moroccan

92 D’Amico, *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama*, p. 36.
94 Al-<Aqqūd, Al-Maghrib Al-<Arabi>, p. 62
95 Ibid, p. 62.
98 Ibid, pp 196 & 318. Al-Ghunaymi argues that al-Mansour, upon persistent demands from Queen Elizabeth, “provided her with huge amounts of money to help the pretender Don Antonio regain his throne.” [p. 196]
coasts at the same time in which the Moroccans begin their attacks against Ceuta from sea and land with the aim of obliging the Spaniards to leave their posts on the Atlantic. Then both sides, the Moroccan and the English, would push the Spanish southward.\textsuperscript{99} Al-
\textless Aqqāд, however, states that al-Mansour did not provide Norris and Drake expedition with the due supplies he had promised Queen Elizabeth because he was afraid that Philip of Spain might use the same excuse to fight him, i. e., supporting one or more of the Moroccan claimants to the throne who escaped Morocco and were living in Spain under the shelter of Philip II.\textsuperscript{100} This is exactly what happened. Soon Philip, knew about the proposed Anglo-Moroccan attack, he reacted by sending one of al-Mansour's enemies, al-Naser bin Abdallah al-Ghalib, back to Marrakech with much munitions and many thousands of men, and victuals, to revolt against his uncle.\textsuperscript{101}

Unlike Queen Elizabeth, King James I, just within the first year of his rule, changed the foreign policies of England towards the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{102} In 1604, James improved Britain's relations with its bitter enemy, Spain, with the aim of forming an alliance against the Turks and the Moors. Both sides signed a peace treaty, after a long period of struggles and conflicts, in 1604, only a few months after ascending the throne of England. In Elizabethan England, Muslims might have been portrayed badly in works of literature, or pageants, but in Jacobean England, they were viewed as infidels worthy of nothing but a new crusade to baptize them.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{99} Al-\textless Ghūnaymī, \textit{Mawsū\textsuperscript{a}t Tārīkh al-Maghrib al-\textless Arabī}, pp 316-317.
\textsuperscript{100} Al-\textless Aqqāд, \textit{Al-Maghrib Al-\textless Arabī}, p. 63 and Yahyā, \textit{Tārīkh Al-Maghrib Al-Kabīr}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{101} Al-\textless Ghūnaymī, \textit{Mawsū\textsuperscript{a}t Tārīkh al-Maghrib al-\textless Arabī}, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{102} D'Amico, \textit{The Moor in English Renaissance Drama}, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{103} Matar, \textit{Turks, Moors, and Englishmen}, pp 129-167, chapter entitled “Holy land, holy war”.
In this chapter, I discuss the image of Moors in George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar*. The play is a carbon copy of the actual battle of Al-Kasr Al-Kabīr that happened in 1578. A fierce battle was fought between the forces of the two royal claimants of the Moroccan throne; Moulai Abd El-Malek and Moulai Mohamed El-Sheikh with the latter aided by King Sebastian of Portugal. The fight ended with the triumph of Abd El-Malek’s side and the humiliating crush of El-Sheikh’s, and Sebatian’s, forces. The play was written by the end of the 1588 and the beginning of 1589; ten years from the actual battle. Most recently, *The Battle of Alcazar* has received considerable attention in the writings of Dimmock and Matar. In *New Turkes* Dimmock studies the play in the historical and political context of the 1570s and 1580s; i.e., the Anglo-Moroccan/Turkish alliance. Dimmock examines the Anglo-Moroccan/Portuguese angle arguing that the play is pro-Portuguese and that Peele sympathised with Sebastian. Peele’s politically-oriented decision to relocate the play in a pro-Portuguese environment “ignores the benefits gained from their expulsion from North Africa in favour of the catastrophe for English national security that the defeat represented.” 104 In the same vein, Matar examines the play in the light of the Elizabethan historical and political context. As far as Matar is concerned, I would agree with him here, *The Battle of Alcazar* is “the only play in the whole Elizabethan repertoire to portray the Christian-Islamic conflict in North Africa with historical accuracy.” 105 Matar argues that the play reflects the friendly relationship between England and Morocco and that the closer ties between Elizabeth and Al-Mansour played a major role in the way English dramatists represented Moors during the Elizabethan age. 106 Matar scrutinises the play against the Moroccan ambassadorial visit of 1589. In this regard, Matar claims that the message that Peele wanted to deliver to his Queen (who like Sebastian of Portugal negotiated with the Moors) and people is that an alliance between Queen Elizabeth and King Al-Mansour may turn to be as dangerous as the alliance between Sebastian and Moulai Mohamed El-Sheikh. 107

107 Ibid., pp 16-17.
Reading *The Battle of Alcazar*, being a play based on (and mirroring) an historical event represents a challenge for the reader since he/she has to decide whether to read it as a fictional work of art detached from its author, time and environment or to relate it to its historical and political and social background. Here, I will examine *The Battle of Alcazar* in the light of the historical and political circumstances surrounding the making of the play. The average reader will not find it difficult to grasp the fact that Peele was quite familiar with what was going on in Morocco at that time: the sectarian strife for the throne of Morocco between the two factions of the Saadi ruling family as well as the political situation of the time manifested in the importance of a strong relationship between England and Morocco. England had shown interest in North Africa, especially Morocco, as early as the 1550s. Not only did the Moors and the English share an interest in effecting a healthy commercial and political alliance but also they did share the same enemies: Spain and Portugal.\(^{108}\) Though the destination of Sebastian’s 1578 expedition to Africa was known to be Barbary there was some doubt in England that his aim was not Barbary but Ireland. In this context, the contemporaneous Arabic account of Ma’rakat Wadi Al-Makhazen unfolded in Abū Fāris Al-Fishāṭlī, *Manāhil AlĪṣāfa fī Mā’āthir al-shurafā* and Muhāmmad Ibn Saghīr al-Ifrānī’s *Nuzhāt al- Hadī bi Akhbār Mulūk al-qarn al-Hādī* will be invoked.\(^{109}\) The importance of Al-Fishāṭlī’s account is that it is one of a couple of primary Moroccan sources written shortly after the battle of Alcazar. Al-Fishāṭlī is a 16\(^{th}\) century historian (CE 952-1031, Islamic Calendar) who witnessed the battle and hence it would be appropriate to use his account, as well as that by al-Ifrānī’s, of the battle as a cornerstone background against which the play may be re-interpreted. Al-Fishāṭlī was so close to the ruling Saadi family that he was chosen by Ahmed al-Mansour to write the correspondences that he used to send to foreign rulers.\(^{110}\) Al-Fishāṭlī was commissioned by the royal Saadi family to write the history of Morocco and the account he produced came to be known as *Manāhil AlĪṣāfa fī Mā’āthir al-shurafā*.

In the same vein, I scrutinize the presumed original written material that critics named as the sources from which Peele got the story of the play. In this context, I will be arguing that Peele got his story from Polemon’s *The Second Part of the Booke of...*
When it comes to the image of the Moors, I will be arguing that the Moors that Peele represents in *The Battle of Alcazar* are many and these include the noble and the villain Moors. The point I make in this chapter is that the Moors that Peele introduces may be divided into two groups, the good Moors and the villain Moors and that he presents the Moorish side that was on friendly terms with England (i.e., Abd El-Malek and those on his side) in a more amiable way than the side that was in alliance with Portugal (i.e., el-Mutawakel and those on his side). My argument here is that the commercial and political relationship between England and Morocco had taken its toll on the tone of the play, i.e., pro/anti Moorish. In other words, the friendly commercial and political ties between England and Morocco seemed to influence the way Peele presented his Moors. I would be arguing that Peele is among the earliest Elizabethan dramatists to draw a sympathetic representation of the Moors. By the end of the chapter, I will be referring to the reception of Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* in the Arab world. The battle of al-Kasr Al-Kabir (known in European sources as the battle of Alcazar) was so important an event that many parties were concerned about its course, and results. The Moors, as Bovill put it, won a battle that was to “astound Europe and alter the course of history in two centuries.” Upon his accession to the royal throne of Marrakesh, after winning the battle of Alcazar, Mulai Ahmed (who came to be known as al-Mansour [the victorious]) received international envoys that came to congratulate him on the victory against the Portuguese and his cousin. These envoys included: the pasha of Algiers, dignitaries from Portugal who came to ransom Portuguese prisoners in Marrakech, an ambassador from Queen Elizabeth, an ambassador from France, an ambassador from Spain and an envoy from Sultan Murad. When it comes to reception of *The Battle of Alcazar* in the Arab world, I would be arguing that the play has received critical acclaim in North Africa, especially Morocco. The theme and the locale of the play should have made it a favourite topic for academic studies in English departments in Morocco and North Africa in general.

**I: The historical and political moment**

*The Battle of Alcazar* is based on an historical event that took place in Morocco in 1578: “Ma<rakat Wadi al-Makhazen” [the battle of Makhazen valley]; the battle of al-Kasr Al-

---

It concerns the story of the battle fought for the crown between the two factions of the Saadi family in Morocco in the 1570s. The founder of the Saadi dynasty is Mulai Mohammed bin Abd el-Rahman, known also as al-Ka’em bi Amr-Allah. In 1509, due to the then continuous Portuguese aggressions against Moroccan ports, the people of Sus asked Mulai Mohamed bin Abd el-Rahman to lead them in their jihad against the Portuguese and the Spanish who occupied many Moroccan cities and ports. After his death, Mulai Abd el-Raman’s two sons, Ahmed al-A’reg and Mohamed el-Sheikh continued their struggle against the Spanish and Portuguese intruders. Between 1530 and 1540, the two brothers were successful in forcing the Portuguese to leave Asfi and Azmaor which they had occupied for years. Though the Watasi ruler offered the Saadis to govern Marrakesh in the name of the Watasi family, Mohammed el-Sheikh rejected the offer (Ahmed al-A’reg accepted it) preferring to continue his war against the Portuguese, the Wastasids and his own brother, al-A’reg. Mohamed el-Sheikh managed to defeat them all. Abou Hassoun al-Watasi, the son of Mohamed al-Portugali, known also as al-Burtuqa-li, escaped a narrow death. Abou Hassoun sought the help of the Spanish and Portuguese kings to aid him against Mohamed el-Sheikh but he was advised to ask for the help of the Turks. After his defeat in Marrakesh, Abou Hassoun sought the help of the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, to restore him to his royal throne in Marrakesh. Suleiman ordered his emir of the sea, Saleh Raies, to help Abou Hassoun to regain his lost throne and Abou Hassoun was soon back on his royal seat in 1554. Mohammed el-Sheikh, after a bloody battle, overcame the Wastasids. El-Sheikh did not surrender and led a counter attack against Abou Hassoun and his Turkish

113 The words ‘ma’rakat’ means ‘battle’, ‘wadi’ means ‘valley’ and ‘Al-Makhazen’ (storehouses or warehouses) or ‘makhazen’ without the Arabic definite article ‘Al’ (the) is the name of the place where the fight was fought.

114 Al-Ka’em Bi Amr Allah is an Arabic name that refers to “the one who acts according to the law of Allah”.


117 Yahyā, Tārīkh Al-Maghrīb Al-Kabīr, p. 56.

118 Abou Abdallah al-Watasi was named by some writers as al-Burtuqa-li (the fair-skinned) or al-Portugali (the Portuguese man) because he was said to be captured by the Portuguese, as a boy, when they took Salee in 1471. See al-<Aqqād, Al-Maghrīb Al-<Arabī>, p. 45 and Muhammād Mazālī and al-Bashīr Ibn Salamāh (trans.), Tārīkh Shāmāl Afriqiyyah, p. 257.


backers and managed to remove him for the second, and last, time from the throne of Marrakesh in the same year. Abou Hassoun and scores of his family members were murdered while al-A’reg, el-Sheikh’s brother, was put in prison. Suleiman, however, offered to form a confederation with Mulai Mohammed el-Sheikh but the latter refused on the grounds that being Sharif (i. e., belonging to Prophet Muhammad’s linage) he is not to accept to be ruled over by a “foreigner”. The Ottoman Sultan reacted his own way, Mohammed el-Sheikh was killed by Turkish agents in Morocco and his head was taken to Constantinople.

Before his death, by appointing his son Abdallah al-Ghalib bi Amr-Allah as his heir to the throne of Morocco, Mohammed el-Sheikh annulled the law set by his father who decreed that that all his male sons should succeed him on the throne of Morocco one after the other. Abdallah al-Ghalib reigned his full course, from 1557 to 1574. On ascending the throne of Morocco, after the murder of his father by Turkish agents, Abdallah followed his late father’s suit in adopting a hard-line policy toward the Turks. Moreover, al-Ghalib was in alliance, secretly, with the Spanish and the Portuguese. The tension between the Turks and the Saadi ruler in Marrakesh grew tougher with the first harbouring the enemies of the latter. Because of this antagonistic atmosphere between the two parties, al-Ghalib befriended the Spanish. To render an effective alliance between him and the Spaniards al-Ghalib surrendered to them Salee, Larache, Velez and El-Beriga. The relationship between al-Ghalib and Philip of Spain was so friendly that the latter sent him, as a gift, thirty strong Spanish bodyguards to protect him.

121 Al-Fishāṭī, Manāhil Alṭāfa, p. 108 ff.
122 Al-Ghūnaymī, Mawsū‘āt Tārīkh al-Maghrib al-<Arabī, p. 54.
123 Yahyā, Tārīkh Al-Maghrib Al-Kabīr, p. 37.
124 Al-Ifrānī Nuzhāt al-Hadī, p. 42. Al-Ifrānī states that the Turks plotted to kill Mohammed el-Sheikh because he threatened to invade Egypt and take it back from the Turks who had already occupied it in 1516/17.
126 It was Abdallah al-Ghalib, as has been reported by De Castries, who gave Juan Benton, an English merchant who was in Morocco at that time, a “ten camels’ load of palm date to take to England”. (De Castries, Les Sources Inédites L’histoire du Maroc, vol. 2, p. 583). The document is in Arabic and there is a French translation of the text.
130 Bovill, The Battle of Alcazar, p. 35.
In like manner, before his death al-Ghalib named his son (Mohammed el-Mutawakel) not his brother (Abd el-Malek) as his heir to the throne of Morocco. As a result, to clear the way for his son to the royal seat, al-Ghalib adopted the Ottoman custom of beheading all the potential claimants to the throne. Upon al-Ghalib’s orders, three of his brothers were killed while the other brothers escaped a narrow death. Those who fled to the Ottoman Empire were Abd el-Malek, Abd el-Mo’men, Omar and Ahmed. In 1574, after the death of al-Ghalib, Mohamed el-Mutawakel (known also as el-Maslokh) ascended the throne of Morocco. El-Mutawakel followed his father’s suit in adopting a tough policy towards the Ottomans. He set himself against the Turks and, instead, sought friendly relationships with the Spanish and the Portuguese. El-Mutawakel’s uncles (Abd el-Malek and Ahmed) who at that time were taking shelter in the Ottoman Empire were given the due support by their host, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. In 1574, just after the death of Suleiman and the ascension of Murad to the royal seat in Constantinople, the forces of Abd el-Malek and his brother Ahmed, aided by the Great Turk, recaptured Fez and Marrakesh and ousted el-Mutawakel in 1575. As soon as Abd el-Malek and Ahmed approached the city of Fes, they were joined by thousands of the folk (many of them were Moriscos) who were displeased with el-Mutawakel’s attitude towards the Spanish and the Portuguese. El-Mutawakel was completely defeated and he, along with a couple of hundred of his followers, managed to flee to the inaccessible wild mountains in the south of Morocco. This marks the first round of the battle for the throne of Morocco.

The second round starts with el-Mutawakel’s preparations for a comeback fight against his uncles. In spite of the fact that el-Mutawakel rejected an earlier offer from

131 Al-Ghûnaymî, Mawsû’ât Târirh al-Magrib al-<Arabî, p. 140.
133 Al-Ghûnaymî, Mawsû’ât Târirh al-Magrib al-<Arabî, p. 141. English sources spoke of only three brothers, not four. Yoklavich argues they were two, Abd el-Mo’men and Abd el-Malek since al-Ghalib spared Ahmed, the youngest, because he was too young and hence did not pose any threats to him.(Yoklavich, Life and Works of George Peele, p. 227)
134 Ibid, p. 158.
135 Abd el-Malek and Ahmed stayed for a few years in the Ottoman Empire and Abd el-Malek is reported to have fought with the Turks against the Spaniards and Europeans in The Lepanto in 1571. (Wafaa Witchou and Hussein Haider (trans. from French into Arabic), Marakat wadi Al-Makhazin bain Al-Molok Al-Thalatha [The Battle of Al-Makhazen Valley between the Three Kings] (Beirut and Paris: Ouejdat Publications, 1987) Henceforth referred to as Marakat wadi Al-Makhazin.
136 Al-Ghûnaymî, Mawsû’ât Târirh al-Magrib al-<Arabî, pp 105-106.
138 Al- Fishâtî, Manâhil AlṢâfa, pp 23-37.
Sebastian to assist him against his uncles, now he had no other option but to accept the help of the Portuguese King. In return for the assistance promised, el-Mutawakel agreed to forsake three Moroccan cities, as well as leaving his son as a hostage at the mercy of Sebastian.

After the initial victory against his nephew, Abd el-Malek started a diplomatic campaign to secure his place at the helm of the throne of Morocco. He sent his envoys to thank the Ottoman Sultan for assisting him in his war against his nephew. He also sent messages to the English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish monarchs assuring them that he is willing to maintain good relations with them all. John Williams, an English merchant from the London Merchants Company delivered a message from Abd el-Malek to Queen Elizabeth in which the King assured the Queen that all needed protection to English merchants and ships will be given. A few months later, Abd el-Malek met Edmond Hogan, Queen Elizabeth’s Ambassador, and discussed with him the commercial ties between the two countries with the latter taking the chance to complain about Moroccan Jewish dealers who were reluctant in giving him the goods he paid the price for three years earlier.

To avoid a war with his nephew, the Spaniards, and the Portuguese, Abd el-Malek sent his envoys to Philip II and Sebastian offering them a bid of friendship. According to the terms of the understanding reached between Abd el-Malek and Philip the first agreed not to aid any enemy of Spain, even The Great Turk himself, while Philip would not aid Sebastian in his intended African expedition. Philip is understood to have

---

141 Witchou and Haider (trans.), Marakat wadi Al-Makhazin, p. 105.
142 Ibid, pp 105-106. The commercial relationship between England and Morocco prospered during the short reign of Abd el-Malek with the English Queen giving no or little attention to the Portuguese, the Spanish and the Papal requests not to trade with the “infidels” (ibid, p 114)
143 Ibid, p. 135. For Hogan’s account of the meeting and his impression of Abd el-Malek see Hakluyt, Principal Navigations, vol. iv, p. 159. This will be invoked in detail when discussing the characterization of Abdelmalec.
144 Bovill, The Battle of Alcazar, p. 60. Arabic sources do not build so much on this point.
145 Philip took the middle way: he offered to give Sebastian conditional minimal military aid and, at the same time, promised Abd el-Malek aid against his nephew. (Bovill, The Battle of Alcazar, p. 60) Abd el-Malek, according to Yoklavich, had “come to a secret understanding with Philip that, despite promises, Sebastian would get no help from Spain.”[p. 274] But Arabic sources do not sanction such an agreement. Thus, for example, Yahyā (Tārīkh Al-Maghrib Al-Kabīr, p 39) and Al-<Aqqād (Al-Maghrib Al-<Arabī, p. 56) argue that Abd el-Malek was expecting Spanish aid against his nephew (and Sebastian should the latter come to Barbary) but the Spanish did not send any. The reason they give us is that Philip did not reach an agreement with Abd el-Malek. Only al-Ghūnaymī, among all the Arabyc sources I have consulted, refers to the assumption that there was a secret agreement between Philip and Abd el-Malek. Abd el-Malek, as al-Ghūnaymī puts it, though a close ally of the Great Turk, in order not to put himself under the mercy of the Turkish dragon, tried to effect friendly relations with the Spanish and the
accepted such an offer. In the same vein, Abd el-Malek sent many letters to Sebastian telling him of the futility of his intended war in Africa. He reminded him that it is of no use to him or to Christianity to aid one Moorish side against the other. He told him that it is better for him to go back home. Moreover, Abd el-Malek offered to give Sebastian more advantages than those promised by his nephew, el-Mutawakel, should he retreat to Portugal. Though warned by Philip and many noblemen in his retinue not to go for war in Barbary (since he had not married yet and there was no heir to the throne in Portugal) yet Sebastian stepped forward with his preparations for the fight. Sebastian had determined, many years earlier, to invade ‘heathenish’ Barbary.

El-Mutawakel sanctioned an agreement according to which he would surrender a few Moroccan ports to Sebastian. On the 25th of June 1578, Sebastian, with an army of about 50,000 men and women, headed to Barbary. Some Arab historians estimated the number of those who followed Sebastian to be 125000 or 50000 while many others put the number as ranging between 3000 and 5000. Mustering his forces, the young king

146 Polemon, The Second booke of Battailes, pp 27, 75. Only al-Ghonimy, of all European and Arabic sources I have read, doubted the idea that Abd el-Malek was so serious in his generous bid to Sebastian. He took it to be some sort of the psychological war done by Abd el-Malek against Sebastian with the aim of knowing how the Portuguese King would react.[ pp 180-181]
147 Mazālī and Ibn Salamāh (trans.), Tārīkh Shamāl Afriqiyah, pp 175-176.
148 Kings of Portugal, not only Sebastian, had intentions to have control over as many coasts as on the Atlantic, or the Mediterranean. The Turks and Moroccans did the same. The Renaissance period witnessed active colonial activities on all sides, the East, the West, or the New World. Sebastian wanted to have a post on the Atlantic coast. France, according to al-Ghūnaymī, was in control of el-Kasr el-Saghir and England was pushing hard to obtain commercial privileges on the Moroccan coast with the aim of improving its trade with Barbary. [Mawsūʿāt, pp 174-175]. To prevent strife between Portugal and Spain, the Pope, in 1494, sanctioned a bull that Castile and Portugal that divided the Maghrib, Barbary, with its Atlantic coasts between Portugal and Spain “Portugal was given a free hand on the Atlantic coast where the Mediterranean coast of Ceuta was left for Spain”. [Ronald Oliver, The Cambridge History of Africa (London, Cambridge University press, 1977) p. 409 and al-Ghūnaymī, Mawsūʿāt, pp 29-30] From 1514 on, according to Oliver, the Portuguese, now having control over many Barbary cities (Ceuta [in 1415], el-Kasr el-Kebir [in 1458], Tangier and Arzila [in 1471], Safi [in 1508], and Azamor [in 1513] grew more aggressive. They were reported to have reached the gates of Marrakesh in 1514/1515. (Oliver, The Cambridge History of Africa, pp 397-398)
149 The unknown author of Dolorous Discourse estimated the number of Sebastian’s army at 40000. These included “1600. Portingale footemenne, and 4000. horsemene. 10000. footemenne of Spaniardi, high Almaines and Italians, and 1000. that were Pages, Purueiours and such lyke…” (Dolorous Discourse of a most Terrible and bloody battle, fought in Barbary, 1579, Sig A). He put the number of Abd el-Malek’s army at 70000 (Dolorous Discourse, Sig Bii) Yoklavich reckons that the number of Sebastian’s force was 28000 (Life and Works of George Peele, the introduction). Yousef Nekrouk puts the number at around 17000.(Witchou and Hussein Haider (trans.), Marakat wadi Al-Makhazin, p. 151)
150 Al-Fišḥāṭī, a sixteenth century Moroccan historian who witnessed the battle and was close to Ahmed al-Mansour, put the number of Sebastian’s army at 80000 of whom only about fifty survived (Manāḥil Alṣāfā, p.39); Al-Ifrānī, a seventeenth century Moroccan historian, strangely enough, overestimated the number of Sebastian’s followers as 125000 (Nuzhāt al-Hadī, p.74). Al-Ghūnaymī, a twentieth century Arab historian, took them to be 50000. Al-
was put in a critical situation; he wanted to fight the war though the omens predicted a
catastrophe. El-Mutawakel’s advice was to delay the attack, which was imminent, till
“late in the day”, an advantage to European soldiers who are not accustomed to fighting
in such a hot weather as in Barbary.\(^{151}\) Though the wisest option, many of Sebastian’s
commanders opposed it. Sebastian did not adhere to el-Mutawakel’s counsel and
adopted the opinion of his experienced captains who told him that it is best for them to
attack the enemy at the earliest possible moment.\(^{152}\)

Thus, the battle started on a hot Monday on the 4\(^{th}\) of August in 1578. Against all the
odds, Sebastian and el-Mutawakel’s followers scored an initial victory against their
enemies. The Portuguese side took the lead and the followers of Abd el-Malek and
Ahmed had to retreat as a result. Being very ill and unable to lead the army, Abd el-
Malek asked his chamberlain (Radwan el-Aleg) not to tell anybody about his death when
it comes.\(^ {153}\) Only a few hours later he died.\(^ {154}\) Sebastian and his followers did not take
advantage of the initial win they had against their enemy while Abd el-Malek’s army,
now led by his brother Ahmed and el-Aleg (Abd el-Malek’s chamberlain) re-arranged
their lines and stood firm and soon they started a counterattack. Sebastian and his forces,
to use the words of Bovill, were in a place, to their disadvantage, where their enemy
“had intended them to be” i.e. surrounded by the Moorish soldiers from three directions
and by the “unfordable Lixus” (or Loukkos) river from the fourth.\(^ {155}\) The followers of
Abd el-Malek began an act of massive slaughter against the European soldiers and the
followers of el-Mutawakel. Those who chose to flee the bloody scene were not so lucky
since they were met by the “unfordable” river since Ahmed joined by more than four
thousand soldier demolished the bridge the Portuguese had already built.\(^ {156}\) To add to the

\(^{151}\) Ghûnaymî states that the forces of Sebastian included “20000 Spanish, 12000 Portuguese,
1000 Italians, 3000 Germans and 4000 Papal troops; in addition to many other volunteers from
England and Spain as well as 1500 Portuguese soldiers who joined the expedition at Tangier
(\textit{Mawsû‘ät}, p. 178). Ro. C., an English traveller who was in Barbary around the time of the
battle put the number of Sebastian’s soldiers at 30000. For a fuller account and for the number
of British mercenary soldiers fighting with Sebastian and those who later were engaged in the
sectarian strife for the throne of Morocco after the death of al-Mansour in 1603, see Ro. C.
“History of Barbarie” in Samuel Purchas, \textit{Haklyutus posthumus : or, Purchas his pilgrimes,
contayning a history of the world in sea voyages and lande travells by Englishmen and others
(Glasgow: MacLehose, 1905-07), vol. vi, p. 56 & pp 91-93. Henceforth referred to as \textit{Purchas
his Pilgrimes}.\(^ {152}\) Bovill, \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}, p. 116.


\(^{154}\) Many European historians argue that Abd el-Malek was poisoned by the Turks.\(\text{\textit{Bovill, The}
\textit{Battle of Alcazar}, p. 133}\) The vast majority of Arab historians, on the other hand, doubt it.\(\text{\textit{Al-
Tārīkh al-Maghrīb al-\textless Arabī}, p. 186}}\)

\(^{155}\) Bovill, \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}, p. 121.

disadvantages of Sebastian’s party, the tide was out so only few could have survived. Thus, those who were not killed by the Moors were drowned in the river. Out of the scores of thousands who joined the battle of Alcazar, only two hundred, more or less, were lucky enough to be taken captives, and not butchered.\textsuperscript{157} For the grave consequences, and the large numbers that were killed, the battle of Alcazar was described by Yoklavich as a “holocaust.”\textsuperscript{158}

The battle ended disastrously with the loss of thousands of the followers of Sebastian and el-Mutawakel and those who survived were taken prisoners. Abd el-Malek, Sebastian and el-Mutawakel perished in the battle. The outcome was a catastrophe, the death of three kings, Abd el-Malek (though he died from illness), Sebastian and al-Mutawakel, as well as twenty six thousand soldiers were killed. Hence, this battle was named as “the battle of the three kings”\textsuperscript{159}

### II: Sources of the play

This was the historical background against which Peele wrote his account of the actual battle. Peele’s account of the conflict does not differ significantly from the historical accounts he seemed to have based his story on; rather he literally copied his sources. Concerning the sources from which Peele got the tale of the battle of Al-Kasr el-Kebir, it is more than one source. Writing as early as the 1870s, Brinsley Nicholson pointed out that Peele based the greater part of his play on the Latin translation of history of the battle by Freigius and that he sometimes, “merely” copied the words of Freigius.\textsuperscript{160} On the other hand, Thorleif Larsen stated that it is “impossible” to prove whether Peele used the Latin or the French accounts of the battle of Alcazar.\textsuperscript{161} Warner G. Rice, writing in 1943 concluded that Peele “must have” read the English account of the story of the battle in Polemon’s \textit{The Second parte of the Booke of Battailes, 1587}.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{157} For Polemon those who saved their souls in this battle were less than two hundred.\textit{(The Second booke}, p. 81) The unknown author of \textit{Dolorous Discourse} stated that \textquote{\textemdash only 80. or 100., persons at the most sauid them selues by flight.\textquote} (Sig. BiI.) For Bovill, those who survived the battle and were able to reach the coast were less than one hundred. (\textit{Alcazar}, p.143) See also Yahyā, \textit{Tārīkh Al-Maghrib Al-Kabīr}, p. 39 and Witchou and Hussein Haider (trans.), \textit{Marakat wadi Al-Makhazin}, p. 193.

\textsuperscript{158} Yoklavich, \textit{Life and Works of George Peele}, p. 229.


\textsuperscript{162} Rice unfolded this story in his article in the \textit{MLN}, 58, (1943) under the title of: “A Principal source of \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}.”
Yoklavich, in turn, upon undertaking a comparison between the French and the English translations concluded that his reading of the three texts clearly confirms Rice’s assertion that Peele followed the English account of *The Second Booke of Battailes*. Thus, for Rice, Yoklavich, and many other critics (such as Braunmuller, Ashley, Tokson, Jones, and Purcell), Peele must have read Polemon’s account of the battle. Moreover, Yoklavich goes further by stating that Peele, in many sections of his play, followed Polemon’s prose account of the battle “almost word by word”. The proof that Yoklavich gives us to confirm his point of view that Peele certainly read Polemon’s translation is that it is only the English translation by Polemon that referred explicitly, and precisely to the number of the soldiers, and victuals, that Sebastian brought with him to Barbary. Peele mentions the same story: Abdelmelec asks Celybyn to tell him about the preparations taken by the enemy and he replied:

[Sebastian] mustering of his men before the wals,
He found he had two thousand armed horse,
And fourteen thousand men that serve on foot,
Three thousand pioncers, and thousand cochmen,
Besides a number almost numberlesse
Of drugs, Negroes, slaves and Muliters,
Horse-boies, landresses and curtizans,
And fifteen hundred waggons full of stuffe
For noble men, brought vp in delicate.
(Act III, iv, 1018-1089, my parentheses)

I will not dispute the worthy findings of Rice and Yoklavich but rather I build on these and at the same time I add my own contribution in this regard. What I would like to reiterate here is that Peele, certainly, read Polemon’s *The Second parte of the booke of Battailes*. Not only does Peele tell the same story and use the very same words but he also commits the same spelling mistakes to be found in Polemon’s account. The clearest example of this is the fact that Peele, maybe unknowingly, takes Muly Mahamet to be Muly Hamet and vice versa. The villain in Polemon’s account is named as Muly Mahamet (sometimes Mahomet) and Muly Hamet respectively. In Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar*, Abdelmelec asks his brother Muly Hamet, not Mahamet, to lead the right battalion of the army: Hamet my brother with a thousand shot…/Shall make the right wing of the battle vp (Act IV, i,1133-1136). Even Mahamet Seth, the name Peele used to

164 Chew suggested that Peele had access to the French, or the Portuguese, versions of *The Second booke of Battailes*, (*The crescent and the Rose*, p. 526 ff).
167 Ibid, in pages 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 80, 81 and 82, the villain is named as Muly Mahamet yet in pages 74, 75, 76 and 83 he is referred to as Muly Hamet.
refer to Abdelmelec's younger brother, had its origin in Polemon's account in the form of a spelling mistake which reads as follows "Muley Mahamet Set [that is set] three cut throte villains for to dispatch him [his brother Abdulmenen]" to kill him to clear the way for his son, Muly Mahamet.\textsuperscript{168} However, this does not mean that Peele followed his sources blindly. He took the story, theme, incidents and names but he brilliantly moulded all these into an appealing drama. Among the major differences Peele diverged from his sources are: his objective portrayal of Moorish characters, the anti-Spanish element and the introduction of female characters into the play.

What I would like to add here is that, in addition to the written accounts of the battle, it is more likely that Peele had benefited from oral sources about the battle that were circulated in England at that time. First of all, the story of the battle prevailed in the European tradition at that time.\textsuperscript{169} Moreover, I would like to propose that he might have known the story of the battle from one of the merchants who travelled to Barbary or from one of the handful soldiers who had taken part in the battle but were lucky enough to escape their life and were able to come back to England.\textsuperscript{170} It was not difficult, I would argue here, for Peele (being a dramatist and poet with court connections, writing pageants for the Mayors and merchants of London) to come across the story of the battle at least from someone who knew the story. There are many stories that support this contention of mine here. First of all, Captain Drake, in 1577, with his fleet anchored in Safi, a port near Marrakesh. The Moors, according to Matar, took the English team to be the “forerunners” of the Portuguese soldiers who would assist Mulai el-Mutawakel, (Peele’s Muly Mahamet).\textsuperscript{171} Abd el-Malek wanted to know the whereabouts of the strangers at his bay. So, one of Drake’s team (John Fry) was kidnapped and questioned by the Moors. When proved to be a friend, John Fry was released and was given a present for his master (Drake) as a token of the friendly relations between England and

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, p. 66, my parentheses.
\textsuperscript{169} Yoklavich, though stating that Peele might have “certainly” made use of Polemon’s translation of the story of the battle of Alcazar, concludes that Peele is not particularly indebted to one specific source, on the battle, than others; rather \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}, to quote Yoklavich’s words, was “created out of a vast store of common knowledge that Peele shared with his contemporaries (p. 231). Larsen came to the same conclusion, but many years earlier than Yoklavich. Larsen mentions that we “may conclude from the great interest which the battle had aroused in England only ten years before and from the ephemeral literature which it produced that the main facts concerning it were widely known in Peele’s day.” (“The Historical and Legendary background of Peele’s \textit{The Battle of Alcazar},” p 186)
\textsuperscript{170} M. Christopher Lyster was a follower of Stuckley who fought along with the Portuguese forces in the battle of Alcazar. He was taken captive by the Moors and had to spend eight years of captivity in Barbary. He managed to escape and came back to England in 1586, just two years before the making of Peele’s \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}. ( This story was mentioned in Hakluyt’s \textit{Principal Navigations}, vol. iv, p. 163)
\textsuperscript{171} Matar, \textit{Turks, Moors and Englishmen}, p. 47.
Morocco.\textsuperscript{172} Peele knew and had friendly relations with captains Sir Norris and Drake and Hakluyt. This can be inferred from the fact that Peele was invited to attend the wedding of the daughter of Lord Norris.\textsuperscript{173} In the same vein, Richard Hakluyt, the Elizabethan renowned travel accounts collector, was among those Peele had connections with and I would propose here that Peele might have had the story for the battle of Alcazar through Hakluyt or one of his circle.\textsuperscript{174} Peele was a member of the Christ Church amongst many other prominent members who included Richard Hakluyt, Richard Carew, William Camden and Sir Philip Sidney.\textsuperscript{175} Peele’s father, James Peele, described himself as a ‘Citizien and Salter of London, Clercke of Christes Hospitall, practizer and teacher of the same’.\textsuperscript{176} James Peele dedicated his first book on accountancy, \textit{The maner and fourme how to kepe a perfecte reconyng, after the order of the moste worthie and notable accompte, of debitour and creditour}, to Sir William Densell, governor of the Company of Merchant Adventurers.\textsuperscript{177} Peele’s involvement in the mercantile activities of 1570s and 1580s, I would assume here, must have been positive. The pageants he wrote in the 1580s and the 1590s for the London Mayor and merchants shows would prove my point here. In this regard, Peele was commissioned to write the London Mayor pageant. He did and his characters included a “soldier” and a “sailor”.\textsuperscript{178} Moreover, the story of the battle of Alcazar was not available to just the elite and middle class nor was only common in England but it was known in many, almost all, European countries. There were Latin, Spanish, Portuguese, and French as well as English accounts of this bloody battle. The reason behind this is the fact that thousands of Europeans, from almost the whole continent, took part on behalf of one of the main parties of the encounter.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{172} Bovill, \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}, pp 72-73.
\textsuperscript{174} Eldred Jones referred to Hakluyt’s influence, directly or indirectly, on dramatists in the Elizabethan period. (Jones, \textit{Othello’s Countrymen}, pp 15-26)
\textsuperscript{175} Horne, \textit{The Life and Minor Works of George Peele}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{177} DNB,\textsuperscript{http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56446}. (site visited on 12/10/2007)
\textsuperscript{179} Polemon, \textit{The Second booke of Battailes}, p. 72. Bovill dated the custom of recruiting European mercenaries in Africa back to the twelfth century. He, in this regard, stated, “ Italian, French, Castilians, English, and Germans were to be found serving in the armies of various African Sultans, notably at Marrakech, Tlemcen, Bugie, and Tunis. They were regularly recruited in Europe by arrangements with the Christian monarchs concerned and with the full
III: Peele’s Moors

In Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar*, the usual stereotypical imaging of the Moor that prevailed during the sixteenth, the seventeenth, and the eighteenth centuries, is absent. Rather, there is a galaxy of Moors: nobles or villains or white, tawny or black. Thus, the noble Moor (Abdelmelec) and the villain one (Muly Mahamet) are present in one single play. Peele, one can say, was among the very fewest earliest dramatists to recognize the difference between the various categories of blackmoors and the one who offered an independent objective portrayal of the Moors; a representation void of the cultural and religious prejudice prevailing in his time.\(^{180}\) From the very beginning of *The Battle of Alcazar*, Peele’s Presenter gives his audience the clues with which they might distinguish, love or hate, one Moor or the other: the story of the villain Moore, Muly [Ma]Hamet\(^{181}\), usurper, and the noble Moore, Abdelmelec, the rightful king:

> Honor the spurre that pricks the princely minde,
> To followe rule and clime the stately chaire,
> With great desire inflames the Portugall,
> An honorable and courageous king,
> To vndertake dreadfull warre,
> And aide with christian armes the barbarous moore,
> The Negro Muly Hamet that with-holds
> The kindome from his vnclle Abdilmelec,
> Whom Abdallas wronged,
> And in his throne istals this cruell sone,
> That now usurps vpon this prince,
> This brave Barbarian Lord Muly Molocco.
> (Act I, i, 1-15)

From these lines, the reader might detect the line the drama would adopt: cursing one Moorish side, (Muly Mahamet and his associates) while exalting the other Moorish side (Muly Abdelmelec and his acquaintances). Thus, Muly Mahamet is described as “that Negro Muly Mahamet” who usurped the throne of his uncle “This brave barbarian Lord Muly Molocco [Abdelmelec].” The colour of the cursed Moor is stressed. He is described as being:

approval of the holy see.” [Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, pp 99- 100]
\(^{181}\) Peele, only in the first few pages, following literally Polemon’s account, mistook Muly Hamet, to be the villain Moor. All quotations from the play come from the Quarto version of 1594, reprinted by the Malone Society in 1907. Original spelling and punctuations are strictly followed.
Blacke in his looke, and in his deeds,  
And in his shirt stained with a cloud of gore  
Presents himselfe with naked sword in his hand,  
Accompanied as now you may behold,  
With deuils coted in the shapes of men.  
(Act I, i, 19-23)

The blackness of Muly Mahamet stressed in *The Battle of Alcazar* corresponds with the historical accounts written about him. Polemon described Muly Mahamet as a “Negro” and Bovill stated that el-Mutawakel was of black skin and hence he was called the “Black Sultan”.

Muly Mahamet is seen by his uncle Abdelmelec, as a traitor whom his father (Abdallas) had nominated as the new king of Barbary neglecting the law their father (Muly Mahamet Xeque) had decreed that his sons should succeed him one after the other according to their age:

Our grandsire Mulizaref was the first,  
From him well wot ye Mahamet Xeque,  
Who in his life time made a perfect lawe,  
Confirmed with generall voice of all his peeres  
That in his kingdome should successively  
His sonnes succeed. Abdullas was the first  
Eldest of faire Abdelmenen the seconde,  
And we the rest my brother and my selfe,  
Abdullas raigned his time. But see the change,  
He labours to inuest his sonne in all,  
To disanull the lawe our father made,  
And dis-inherite vs his brethren,  
And in his life time wrongfully proclaims,  
His sonne for king that now contends with vs,  
Therefore I craue to obtaine my right  
That Muly Mahamet the traitor holdes  
Traitor and bloodie tyrant both at once.  
That murthered his yonger brethren both,  
(Act I, i, 143-160)

After his father’s death, Muly Mahamet, who was at that time in Fesse acting as the king there, comes to, Marooco (Marrakesh) to proclaim himself as the king of Barbary.

---

182 Polemon, *The Second booke of Battailes*, pp 72-73. Both Jones and Tokson take the Moor to be of black skin and a Negro mother but Tokson names him as Mulai Mohamed while Jones mistakes the villain to be Muly Hamet, not Muly Mahamet. (Jones, *Othello’s Countrymen*, pp 14, 43 and Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man*, p. 71) This fact has been stressed also in Arabic sources. Al-Ghūnaymī, for example, refers to the fact that Mulai Mohamed el-Mutawakel was born of a “slave Negro mother” [Mawsū‘āt, p. 157].

183 According to Polemon, the death of Muly Abdallas was concealed for three days lest any of his brothers, Abdelmelec and Ahmad who at that time were in Turkey fearing that their brother, Muly Abdallas, would kill them both to clear the way for his son to the throne of Barbary, might come back soon to the country and claim himself as the new king. Polemon, *The Second Booke*, p. 67.
He acted as a king for only a few months when his uncles (Abdelmelec and Mahamet Seth) ousted him. When the Moor’s son tells him about the preparations for war on Abdelmelec’s side, and the great aid he received from the Turkish Sultan, Muly Mahamet, unequivocally expresses his bloody and egoistic attitude:

Awaie, and let me heare no more of this,  
Why boy, are we successours of the great Abdilmelec\textsuperscript{184}  
Descend from the Arabian Muly Zarif,  
And shall we be afraid of Bassas and of bugs,  
Rawe head and bloudie bone?  
Boy, seest here this semitarie by my side,  
Sith they begin to bath in blond,  
Bloud be the theame wheron our time shall tread,  
Such slaughter with my weapon shall I make,  
As through the streame and bloudie chanels deepe,  
Our Moores shall saile in ships and pinnaces,  
From Tanger shore vnto the gates of Fesse.  

(Act I, ii, 261-272)

His little son (who is ten years old) is no less bloody than the one who begot him. He answers his father in the bloodiest words ever in the play “And of those slaughtered bodies shall thy sonne,/ A huge towre erect like Nermods frame”. (Act I, ii, 275-276)

By the end of Scene I, the first round in the war for the crown between Abdelmelec and Muly Mahamet comes to an end. Muly Mahamet is defeated and he takes refuge in the uninhabited mountains of Morocco. Fleeing the wrath of his uncle, Muly Mahamet now “liues forlorne among the mountaine shrubs,/And makes his food the flesh of sausage beasts.” (Act II, i, 342-343) Living in barren lands and eating sour shrubs make the Moor curse all the world around him praying for death and destruction to fall upon his enemies: Faint all the world, consume and be accurst,/Since my state faints and is accurst. (Act II, ii, 533-535) Muly Mahamet declines the generous offer made by Sebastian but the latter, an ambitious young king who had had intentions to invade Barbary, shows patience towards Muly Mahamet and sends him another messenger with the same offer to assist him against his uncle and the Turks. Now, Muly Mahamet, in history as in drama, has to accept Sebastian’s aid, though he had rejected it twice before, to support him in his war to gain his throne back. When the second round of the bloody contest for the crown of Barbary; that is the battle of Alcazar, comes to an end and Sebastian and Muly Mahamet were defeated by Abdelemec and Muly Hamet, Mahamet Seth, the villain in The Battle of Alcazar, flees the field for the second, and last, time:

\textsuperscript{184} Yoklavich: Abdallas
Villaine, a horse.
Oh my Lord, if you returne you die.
Villaine I saie, give a horse to flie,
To swimme the riuier villaine, and to flie.
(Act V, i, 1387-1390)

Typical of a villain Moor, in spite of his articulated bloody intentions and deeds Muly Mahamet is unreservedly a coward. Thus, when a follower of his brings him the news that he has to flee the wrath of his uncle Abdelmelec, and Amurath’s, who manages to defeat his army his response betrays a typical coward:

Villain, what dread sound of death & flight
Is this, wherewith thou dost afflict our eares?
But if there be no safetie to abide
The fauor, fortune, and sucesse of warre.
Away in hast, roule on chariot wheeles
Restlesse, till I be safely set in shade
Of some vnhanted place, some blasted groue
Of deadly hue, or dismall cypress tree,
Farre from the light or comfort of the Sunne,
There to curse heauen, and he that heaues me hence,
To seeke as Eneie at Cecropes gate,
And pine the thought and terriour of mishaps,
Away.
(Act I, ii, 292-304)

To his bad luck, he was not, even, able to flee the battleground and save himself. He fell down from his horse and drowns in the river being unable to swim.\textsuperscript{185}

As a typical Moor, Muly Mahamet is fated to failure while other characters in the play, the white ones, should prevail. The unlucky “cowardly Muly... flees from a military defeat, falls from his horse, and drowns basely in a stream. His body is to be stuffed with straw for display (his confederate Sebastian, on the other hand, is to be given a hero’s burial).”\textsuperscript{186}

Thus, Muly Mahamet is not only a villain but a coward as well. His villainy, and cowardice, is not manifested in the battlefield fighting his enemies but in bloodthirsty speeches and soliloquies ranted on the stage, not through action. Like the majority of his fellow Moors, Muly Mahamet should have been valiant, but Muly Mahamet is an exception of this rule.\textsuperscript{187} He is deprived of any signs of bravery or knighthood and from beginning to end he acts dishonourably and cowardly. What adds to the negative image of Muly Mahamet is that Peele, according to Tokson, does not refer to the colour of

\textsuperscript{185} Polemon, \textit{The Second booke of Battailes}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{186} Tokson, \textit{The Popular Image of the Black Man}, p. 118. The fact that Muly Mahamet’s body is stuffed with straw coincides with Polemon’s account of the battle, [p 82.]
\textsuperscript{187} According to Tokson, “physical bravery was certainly attributed to them [blacks] as a dominant trait \textit{The Popular Image of the Black Man}, p. 122, my parentheses.
Abdelmelec (who is supposed to be a Moor) to make some sort of balance between the good and the bad Moors. Had Peele stressed the blackness of Abdelmelec there could have been some sort of balance in the portrayal of the character of Muly Mahamet. There is a clear contrast between Muly Mahamet and Abdelmelec with the first one seen as pagan and blasphemous who curses God, and fate, and the second is religious and grateful.

This gloomy image of the Moor, Muly Mahamet, I would agree here with Tokson, is due to the fact that Peele chose to abide closely by the historical accounts of the play: “[Muly Mahamet’s] historical background behavior evidently gave Peele little opportunity to dramatize him as a butcher except through the device of pompous oratory that works to show him bloody minded but perhaps cowardly.” The villainous nature of Muly Mahamet in Polemon’s account is fully adopted by Peele.

The historical Abd el-Malek is not so much different from the dramatic Abdelmelec portrayed by Peele. Abd el-Malek was described as clever and an intelligent leader and military man. He is a multi-lingual who could speak Spanish, Italian, as well as Turkish and Arabic. As a young man, Abd El-Malek has to flee his home country to the Ottoman Empire to seek safety there under the protection of the Turkish Sultan since his elder brother, Abdullah al-Ghalib, intended to kill him and his other brothers to secure the throne of Morocco for his son; Mohamed el-Mutawakel. His stay in the Ottoman Empire had a very positive impact on Abd el-Malek. He learns, according to Bovill, the military techniques of the Turks. Again, it was there where he had his political insights as well as his information about the West. Abd el-Malek, as Bovill put it, was aware of the European political scene: the conflict between England and Spain and the dichotomy of Catholicism and Protestantism. As for England, Abd el-Malek had “a friendly feeling which, although traditional with the Saadis, was attributed to the simplicity of the protestant faith which was naturally less repellent to a Muslim than the

---

189 Ibid, p. 71. Peele, for Tokson, followed Polemon “quite closely for details and characterization, including the condemnation of Mulai Mohamed, the usurper (the Muly Mahamet of Peele’s play) and Polemon’s admiration for Mulai confederates, Sebastian and Stukley.” (The Popular Image of the Black Man, p. 71)
190 Jones, too, took Muly Mahamet not be a “man of action”. The Moor, for Jones, was given only two positive acts: his ability to lure Sebastian to fight his war for him and his caring attitude to bring food, in this case lion’s meat, to his hungry wife Jones, Othello’s Countrymen, p. 45.
193 Bovill, The Battle of Alcazar, p. 34.
194 Ibid, p 38.
more elaborate Catholic ritual.\textsuperscript{195} Among his European fads, Abd el-Malek enjoyed music as well as “acquired a taste for European sports.”\textsuperscript{196} No wonder then, many of his counsellors at his court were European, English, French or Spanish.\textsuperscript{197} Most important, he was so kind towards Christians, of whom, according to Polemon, he loved the Spanish most:

although he [Abd el-Malek] professed the religion of Mahamet, yet he so loved Christians, and of them the Spaniardes, that I cannot expresse with wordes the love and good-will which he shewed towards many captives & prisoners. For he suffered the[m] to returne into Spain, being dismissed without ransome, and in this munificence …liberalitie he had set at libertie above 200. within … 3 yeres that he raigned.\textsuperscript{198} Abd el-Malek was so kind to European captives who were doomed to be taken captives in Barbary, either in border clashes between the Moors and the Spanish or the Portuguese or in piratical attacks by Moorish pirates. Abd el-Malek was praised in many European countries for his generosity with European captives. Bovill’s words, in this regard, run as follows:

The Shereef [Abd el-Malek] gave practical expression to his liking for Europeans in many ways. He earned wide respect in Europe by his generous treatment of the many Christians captives who fell into the hands of his marauding corsairs. They were charitably treated and protected from undue hardship. During his brief reign he released large numbers free of ransom- on a single occasion as many as two hundred. He also built a hospital for Europeans in Marrakech, close to the principal mosque. This magnanimity was as surprising to Europe as it was bewildering to his co-religionists to whom these infidel associates naturally did not commend their shereef…”\textsuperscript{199}

In return, Abd el Malek was so loved by many Europeans that he was one of the fewest, if not the only one, that was invoked in preaching.\textsuperscript{200} The Christian Church, according to Bovill, acknowledged Abd el-Malek’s benevolent deeds in an act of gratitude. So, in 1577 the Preaching Friar composed a panegyric of Abd el-Malek that read: “May our Lord God keep him in peace and may he increase his powers and dominions for years to come, may He grant him perpetual victories, may He raise him to the highest position, for the honour of God who lives and reigns world without end.”\textsuperscript{201} This was the historical Abd el-Malek, what about the Abdelmelec portrayed by Peele? There are no big differences, one can say, between the historical Abd el-Malek and the Peelian literary Abdelmelec. Peele copied the character of Abdelmelec from Polemon,

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid, pp 38 – 39.
\textsuperscript{198} Polemon, \textit{The Second booke of Battailes}, p. 82, my parentheses.
\textsuperscript{199} Bovill, \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}, p. 39, my parenthesis.
\textsuperscript{200} Bovill, \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}, pp 39-40.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid, pp 39-40.
just adding or neglecting few dimensions to his character. Abdelmelec represents a contrast to his nephew, Muly Mahamet: if Muly is a usurper Abdelmelec is a defender of his right, if Muly is presented by Peele as a heathen who curses fate and blasphemes against God, Abdelmelec is a committed believer who abides by the laws of God invoking heavenly providence quite often. The very first words uttered by Abdelmelec show him as a religious and grateful one:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Alhaile Argerd Zareo and yee Moores, ...} \\
\text{Throw vp they trembling hands to heauens throne} \\
\text{Pay to thy God due thankes, and thankes to him} \\
\text{That strengthens thee with mighty gracious armes,} \\
\text{Against the proud usurper of thy right,} \\
\text{\hspace{1em} (Act I, i, 71-77)}
\end{align*}
\]

Again, when he defeats his nephew in the first round of the bloody contest for the crown of Barbary, Abdelmelec did not forget to thank God, and Amurath, for this victory:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Here finde we time to breath, and now begin} \\
\text{To paie thy due and duties thou doest owe,} \\
\text{To heaven and earth, to Gods and Amurath.} \\
\text{\hspace{1em} (Act II, i, 372 – 374)}
\end{align*}
\]

In the second round of the battle, Abdelmelec does not crave to fight Sebastian who joined the party of his nephew. Abdelmelec, in history as well as in drama, was reluctant to fight Sebastian and his Christian forces. He, according to Yoklavich, did everything at his hand to “avoid battle, and to persuade Sebastian to return home, for he realized that the boy had been misled by foolish ambitions and by the lies of Mohammad, who flattered Sebastian into believing that Abd el-Malek’s army would revolt once the Portuguese were in the field.”

Abdelmelec knew that the war between him and his nephew, Muly Mahamet, will not be an easy one for either party should the king of Portugal join the usurper. He foresaw the tragic consequences that might result from such a potential fight. So, he tried to solve the problem through political means. Abdelmelec, according to Polemon, was:

---

202 Yoklavich, Life and Works, p. 229. This corresponds with Polemon who stated that “Abdelmelec determined not to ioyne in battaille, except the Portugall did first desire it.” (Polemon, The Second booke of Battailes, p. 76), my parentheses.
admonished, and advertised of all these things [news about preparations in the camp of his enemy], and what the king of Portugall entended against him: he was very sorrowfull therefore, not so much because he feared the King of Portugall his forces, as for that he being well affected towards men of the Christian Religion, did foresee in minde that Africa would be the grave of the King of Portugall, yea, though he brought with him thrise so great an Armie as he had.*

Peele’s handling of the same point is not different. The words of Peele’s Abdelmelec sound similar to the historical Abd el-Malek:

But for I haue my selfe a souldier bin,
I haue in pitte to the Portugal
Sent secret messengers to counsel him.
As for the aide of Spaine whereof they hope’d,
To craue that in a quarrel so vnjust,
He that intitled is the Catholike king,
Would not assist a carelesse christian prince,
And as by letters we let to know,
Our offer of the seuen holdes we made,
He thankfully recines with all conditions,
Differing in minde farre from all his wordes
And praises and praises to king of Sebastian,
As we would wish, or you may Lords desire.

(Act III, ii, 905 – 918)

Thus, he clears himself of any guilt against Sebastian:

Sebastian see in time vnto thy selfe,
If thou and thine misled doe thriue amisse,
Guiltlesse is Abdilmelec of thy bloud.

(Act III, ii, 924 – 926)

Sebastian, tempted by the deceit of Muly Mahamet, does not pay heed to Abdelmelec’s proposal of peace and insists on joining the war. Abdelmelec’s message to Sebastian had so great effect on the morale of many Sebastian’s captains to the extent that they counselled their king to consider retreating to Larissa or Tangier. They doubted their ability to confront the Moorish side with its massive, as they put it, troops:

A hugie companie of inuading Moores,
And they my lord, as thicke as winters haile,
Will fall vpon our heads vnawares,
Best then betimes t’auoid this gloomie storme,
It is vaine to striue with such a streame.

(Act IV, ii, 1183 – 1187)

---

203 Polemon, *The Second booke of Battailes*, p. 72. Cf. Bovill who argued that Sebastian’s force, as well as those of Muly Mahamet, was much smaller (a “quarter the size”), and ill-trained, than those of Abdelmelec. (Bovill, *The Battle of Alcazar*, p. 114)

204 Yoklavich: receives.
Yet the stubborn king decided to go for the war under the pretext that Abdelmelec’s soldiers, as he was told by Muly Mahamet, would revolt against him as soon as the battle starts. This, in drama as well as in history, represents the turning point. The strong-headed Sebastian had to relent somehow when he was advised by his captains to retreat to a safe area; Larissa, or Tangier. Abdelmelec, as Polemon put it, would not care a lot should Sebastian contended himself with Larissa. However, as the Portuguese were negotiating the idea that they would better go to Larissa, Muly Mahamet came in with his trick that the followers of Abdelmelec would desert him for their side:

*For now is all the armie resolute,
To leaue the traitor helplesse in the fight
And flie to me as to their rightfull prince,
Some horse-men haue already lead the waie,
And vow the like for their companions,
The host is full of tumult and of feare.*

(Act IV, ii, 1202 – 1208)

Earlier, even before coming to Barbary, Sebastian knew, according to Polemon, that Abdelmelec surpassed him in the number soldiers, yet he decided to go for war. The young king rose to the “bait” of Muly Mahamet. In the play, only hours before the battle, when some of his captains advised him that it is better to withdraw themselves he rebuked them:

---

205 There was a possibility that some followers of Abdelmelec’s, or even those of Muly Mahamet, would forsake him to join the other party. That is because soldiers came from different backgrounds and ethnicities (Arabs, Berbers, Turks, or foreigners) and hence it was natural they might change sides so easily. Polemon, in this regard, states that the first round of the battle for the crown of Barbary was lost for Abdelmelec’s side due to the fact that “one Dugall, who being Captaine of Andalousians, reuolted from Mahamet to Abdelmelc with two thousand verie choice harquebusiers.”[p. 68].

206 Polemon, *The Second booke of Battailes*, p. 73.

207 Polemon’s account reads:

*For the Catholic king was not ignorant, how the king of Marocco surpasse in strength…power,…how skilful, expert,… valiant a warriour he was, and how great power and provision, so great an enterprise required, whereof he knew that the Porugall was yet[sic] fully unfurnished. But …[the] king of Portugal remained constant in his purpose…”(p. 71)

208 Sebastian, according to Yoklavich, “ambitious to be Christ’s champion against Islam, rose to the bait when Mohammed requested aid”. (Yoklavich, *Life and Works*, p. 228)
I am ashamed to think that such as you,  
Whose deeds haue bin renwomed [sic] heretofore,  
Should slacke in such an act of consequence,  
We come to fight, and fighting vow to die,  
Or else to win the thing for which we came,  
Because Abdilmelec as pittyng vs,  
Sends messages to counsell quietnes,  
You stand amaz’d and thinke it sound advise,  
As if our enemie would wish vs anie good,  
No, let him know we scorne his curtesie,  
And will resist his forces what so ere.  
Cast feare aside, my selfe will leade the way,  
And make a passge with my conquering sord  
Knee deepe in bloud of these accursed Moores,  
And they that loue my honor follow me.  

(Act IV, ii, 1157 – 1171)

Is there any difference here between the bloody Moor and the bloody Sebastian? One cannot see many. Sebastian, here, is not so much less bloody than Muly Mahamet. This passage, no doubt, shows Sebastian, who is sometimes seen as a tragic hero, as no less evil as Muly Mahamet, the villain of the play.

To conclude here I would like to argue that Peele introduced to the English stage the first round Moorish characters; good or bad. Peele followed the sources he got his stories from so as long as they tallied with his political point of view and diverged from these when it did not. This is clear when we compare Peele’s The Battle of Alcazar and Polemon’s historical account of the incident. First of all, Polemon’s account of the battle is pro-Spanish.  

In Polemon’s narrative about the history of the battle of Alcazar we manifestly detect many anti- Islamic and anti- Arab elements. At the very beginning of his account of the battle, early in the second paragraph, Polemon describes Muly Mahamet Xeque, the founder of the family to which Abdelmelec and Muly Mahamet belong, as “a certaine Moore of the Mahometicall supristitiõ, called Muley Mahamet Xeque. His father, Muley Xarif, being accompted in his countrie of Mecha in Arabia, the chief man of the Moores (as he that was descended of the bloud… line of the damned and cursed false Prophet Mahomet)”. As for Arabs, Polemon spoke of them as of being depraved and greedy and that most of them are robbers. Of all Abdelmelc’s soldiers, it were these “Alarabes, whom hee little trusted, as he that was not ignoraunt that they were full of falsehoode, nor gaue their mindes to anie thing else than to gette

---

209 Polemon’s translation of the Latin edition is a translation of a translation, of a translation. Polemon’s English text is taken from the Latin translation of Thomas Freigius. Freigius translation itself is a translation of a French translation dated 1579 which is taken from the original Spanish account of the battle written by one Luis Neito; a Spaniard who is said by Larsen to have survived the battle of Alcazar.(T. Larsen, The Historical and Legendary background of Peele’s The Battle of Alcazar” RSC, p. 187 ff)

booties, and to rob they cared not whom.” On the other hand, rarely we can detect in Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* a sense of bias against, or a misrepresentation of Arabs or Muslims. At some points in the play Peele succumbed, knowingly or unknowingly, to the then popular belief that confused Moors for believers in multiple gods. So more than one Moorish character in *The Battle of Alcazar* invokes Latin and pagan gods and some of them show awareness of places and things Moors are not usually familiar with. Abdelmelec, for example, compares his soldiers to “the guard of Merimdos, that kept Achilles tent” (Act I, i, 85-86). Again Abdelmelec speaks, not of One God, but of “Gods” that will “poure down showers of sharp reuenge” against his nephew, the Moor (Act I, i, 162). Is Abdelmelec, the Arabian, expected to know much about Merimdos or Achilles? Muly Mahamet, his younger son, and Muly Hamet (or Mahamet Seth), all speak of Gods and planets; something a believing Moor should not do. The following quotation tells about something a Moor is not supposed to be familiar with:

Rubin these sights to Abelmunens ghost,
Haue pearst by this to Plutos graue below,
The bels of Pluto ring reuenge amaine,
(Act I, i, 188 – 190)

However, in *The Battle of Alcazar*, Arab or Muslim characters, good or bad, kind or cruel, human or inhuman, benevolent or egotistic, are seen as literary figures not as real ones representing a race or a religious group. Peele, unlike many of his contemporaries, did not intend to stigmatize them. Some characters, of course, are evil but this is not because Peele intends to introduce them in such a manner but because they are viewed by their counterparts to be as such. Thus, it is not expected that Abdelmelec would praise his nephew Muly Mahamet (the one who usurped his throne) neither would Muly Mahamet to speak of his uncle (Abdelmelec) in princely words.

Is there an anti-Arab or anti-Muslim sentiment in *The Battle of Alcazar*? My answer is simply “no”. On the contrary, Turks and Arabs, especially the latter, are badly treated in Polemon’s account of the battle of Alcazar while they are depicted neutrally in Peele’s play. The reason for this sort of double (or contradictory) representation of the Spanish and Catholics, on one hand, and the Turks, Arabs and Muslims, on the other hand, is that Polemon’s account or to be accurate Luis Nieto’s account (in his *Relacion de las Guerrasde Berberia*, the same source from which we got the Latin, French and English translations) was pro-Spanish and pro-Catholic, anti-Turkish, anti-Arab and anti-Muslim. Peele, on the contrary, was anti-Spanish and pro-Moorish; or at least neutral.

---

211 Ibid, p. 74.
One clear example of this binary is the way in which Peele depicted two of his characters in the play; mainly captain Stukley and Muly Mahamet Seth.

Peele, I can say here, did not intend to misrepresent the black-Moorish characters in his play. Moorish characters in The Battle of Alcazar are brilliantly depicted by Peele. They are divided into two parties: those of Abdelmeleec's party, the noble, and those of Muly Mahamet, the villain. The first group is favoured by both Peele and his Presenter while the other group is scolded with the worst possible terms by Peele, the Presenter and by members of the opponent Moorish faction. Peele, as a political writer, is seen in favour of the camp of Abdelmeleec, the party that England backed and had friendly relationships with at that time.212 Tracing how Muly Mahamet was described by his foes, and the Presenter, and how he viewed his enemies, would reveal that Peele did not intend to misrepresent him. Muly Mahamet was described by the Presenter as “barbarous Moore”, (Act I, i, 9) “Negro” (Act I, i, 10) “cruell sonne”, (Act I, i, 13) “black in his looke, and bloudie in his deeds, /And in his shirt stained with a cloud of gore, /Presents himselfe with naked sword in hand/accompanied.../ with deuils coted in the shapes of men”, (Act I, i, 19-23) “unbelieving Moore”, (Act I, i, 46) “accursed Moore”, (Act I, i, 54) “unhappie traitor king”, (Act I, i, 56) “Negro moore”, (Act II, i, 310) “vsurper”, (Act II, i, 315) “traitor to kinne and kinde, to Gods and men”, (Act II, i, 320) “barbarous Moore”, (Act II, i, 340) “this cursed Moore”, (Act II, iv, 803) “this haplesse heathen prince”, (Act IV, i, 1060) “this murther of prognie”, (Act IV, i, 1062) “this cursed king”, (Act IV, i, 1064) and “this foule ambitious Moore” (Act V, i, 1259). Muly Mahamet was labeled by his uncle, Abdelmeleec, as “the proud vsurper”, (Act I, i, 77) “tyrant traitor”, (Act I, i, 129) “traitor and bloodie tyrant both at once” (Act I, i, 159) and “this Negro moore” (Act II, ii, 902). His younger uncle, Muly Mahamet Seth, took him to be “this traitor tyrant” (Act I, i, 201) and “the traitous Moor” (Act V, i, 1530). Muly Mahamet was described by Zareo as this ambitious Negro moore” (Act III, ii, 921). Mahamet’s confederates, on the other hand, praised him. So he was named by Sebastian as “Lord Mahamet” (Act III, iv, 987) and “Brave Moore” (Act III, iv, 998). But, later, when he realized that he was fooled by Muly Mahamet Sebastian described him as “False hearted Mahamet” (Act V, i, 1381). Stukely, in his turn, spoke of the Moor as “Lord Mahamet” (Act III, iv, 1043). Governor of Tanger, though supposedly belonging to his camp, described Muly Mahamet as “this haplesse king” (Act III, iii, 939) “this lustie Moore, /Bearing a princely heart vnvanquishable” (Act III, iii, 941-942) and “this manly Moore” (Act III, iii, 972). Lastly, Muly Mahamet was described by anonymous Captain of Sebastian’s army as “this manly Moore”. (Act III, iii, 949)

212 Cf. Matar, in Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery, pp 47-49.
Muly Mahamet, in his turn, spoke of his uncle, Abdelmelec, as “the traitor helplesse” (Act IV, ii, 1204), “barbarous Moore” (Act IV, ii, 1236) and “traitor king” (Act IV, ii, 1243). Again, he ranked some of his followers as “Negros”. When his wife told him that she is so hungry, he went to the woods and brought her lioness’s flesh on his sword:

Into the shades then faire Calyplois,
And make thy sonne and Negros here good cheere
Feede and be fat that we may meete the foe
With strength and terror to reuenge our wrong.
(Act II, iii, 615-618)

Again, what supports my suggestion that Peele did not intend to mock, or misrepresent, his Moorish characters is the fact that Mulai Ahmed al-Mansour (Polemon’s Muly Hamet and Peele’s Muly Mahamet Seth) is criticized bitterly in Polemon’ Second Booke Of Battailes while praised, or at least not attacked, in The Battle of Alcazar. Unlike his elder brother Abdelmelec, Muly Hamet was portrayed by Polemon in the worst possible way. He is described by Polemon as black in colour and in heart, unskillful at arms and coward. Polemon’s words run as follows “he was younger then Abdelmelec, being about xxix. Or xxx. Years of age: of stature meane, of bodie weake, of coulour so blacke, that he was accompted of many for a Negro or black Moore. He was of a perverse nature, he would never speak the trueth, he did all things subtelly and deceitfully.”

Muly Hamet is the opposite of his elder brother Abdelmelec who is, in Polemon’s words, brave, skilfull at arms, wise and kind, especially to Christians. Unlike Abdelmelec, Muly Hamet, hated Christians to the extent that “he would kil either by famine or nakednesse, those that he caught. [If he did them any good at all] he did it against the heart, in a manner unwillingly, that he might make them the more readie and cheerful to endaunger themselves for him.”

Moreover, Polemon tells a funny story about the new King; Muly Hamet. After the end of the bloody battle of Alcazar, with the battlefield full of dead bodies, dignitaries, gentlemen as well as ordinary soldiers, and when Muly Hamet took the place of the new ruler, then come onto him some noblemen from Portugal offering him “ten Ducats if he would vouchsafe to send” the corpse of king Sebastian to Tanger, which belonged to Portugal at that time, to be buried there. But the new King answers them that it is not convenient that he would

213 Peele mistook Muly Hamet to be Abdelmelec's nephew. Had Polemon meant Muly Mahamet, el-Mutawakel, he would be right since the latter, as has been noted earlier, was of black skin and he, as put by Bovill, hated the Christians most.

“sell” the body of a dead man, yet he told them that he would give them the corpse, for free, if they “would give him Tanger or Arzil”. 215

On the contrary, the portrayal of Muly Hamet (Muly Mahamet Seth) in Peele’s play is unquestionably different from the image of Muly Hamet in Polemon. Peele, of course, would not to portray Muly Mahamet Seth in the same way in which Muly Hamet is fantasized in Polemon’s story. How could Peele, the one who wrote pageants, plays and poems praising the wisdom of the Queen, depict Mulai Ahmed al-Mansour one of Queen Elizabeth’s closest allies, literally in the same way, or terms, that Polemon had done with Muly Hamet? It was this Mulai Ahmed al-Mansour (Muly Hamet) that had a very good relationship with Queen Elizabeth to the extent that he is, as noted earlier, supposed to take part in the Norris and Drake expedition to put Don Antonio back on the throne of Portugal.

The reception of *The Battle of Alcazar* in the Arab world

As for the reception of *The Battle of Alcazar* in the Arab world, in spite of the fact that there is a huge literature on the historical events that led to the battle, Arab critics and academia have just recently begun to recognize the importance of the play. The sort of attention the play has received in the Arab world springs, I presume, from the fact that the play tackles an important event in the history of North Africa: the triumph of the Moors over the Portuguese. The pro-Moorish attitude by Peele and his objective representation of the Moors contributed to the publicity of the play in the Arab world; especially in North Africa.

*The Battle of Alcazar* gives the reader an idea about the then strong and distinguished relations between England and Morocco. The play was written during what may be termed the golden era of the Anglo-Moroccan alliance whose initial foundations were laid by the two renowned sovereigns: Queen Elizabeth and King Ahmed al-Mansour. During this period, England needed to have good relations with Morocco because the latter enjoys a superb geographical position; something that would enable England to expand its commercial ambitions and challenge the then Portuguese-Spanish hegemony on the Atlantic trade. Morocco, on the other hand, was in dire need for some ally that would provide her with weaponry and help her in its fight against the Spanish and the Portuguese; England, and only England, could be such an ally. Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* reflects the warm Anglo-Moroccan ties.

Most recently, *The Battle of Alcazar* has received some attention from Arab scholars in the last few years. In Morocco, presumably for national reasons, Moroccan academics have shown interest in the play. Apart from scant references here or there in Arabic books and periodicals, some articles have been written on the play and it has been recently edited by Khalid Bekkaoui; a Moroccan scholar who has engaged himself in the field of Anglo-Moroccan studies. Bekkaoui has edited many of the Elizabethan plays that have something to do with Morocco and the Moors; amongst these is *The Battle of Alcazar.*

Bekkaoui’s views on the plays have been already incorporated in the text of the chapter but something can be added here. Before Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar,* Bekkaoui argues, English playwrights make:

> only scattered and brief references to Morocco, vaguely projecting it as a terribly alien and exotic geography and a site for crusading exploits without really exploring it as setting for the action. The Moroccans, on the other hand, are projected as black-complexioned Moors and are invariably and indiscriminately lumped together with Saracens, Turks, Black Africans, and sometimes, even American Indians.”

The importance of *The Battle of Alcazar* lies in the fact that, apart from focusing on the Moroccan-Portuguese conflict in 1578, it is the first play in English to bring “Morocco onto the English stage.” When it comes to the representation of Moors, Bekkaoui hails Peele as the first British playwright to have broken away from the “tradition of exoticising and denigrating the Moroccans...[by representing his Moors in an authentic geographical space, not in a fictitious and legendary land or the world of fables and fabulous creature common in the works of his predecessors.”

Mohamed Laamiri and Karim Bejjit are among those who have shown interest in *The Battle of Alcazar.* The play has been included in an enthusiastic project that aims at studying English plays with Moroccan theme. The aim of this project, according to one of the key players in this ambitious programme, is to evaluate the status of plays that play on the Moroccan theme within the “English canon and encourage researchers to use these plays to study British historical and cultural encounters with Morocco.”

---

216 Bekkaoui’s writings on *Lust’s Dominion* and *The Fair Maid of the West* will be invoked in due course.


220 Mohamed Laamiri, “Barbary in British travel texts”, a presented in a conference held at the University of Exeter 14-17 September 2002 under the title of *The Movement of People and Ideas between Britain and the Maghreb.* This article has been published in Temimi and Omri (eds.) *The Movement of People and Ideas between Britain and the Maghreb,* pp 67-90. See also Karim Bejjit, “Encountering the infidels: Restoration images of Moors” Working Papers on the web, <www.history-journals.de> (site visited on 31/04/2006).

However, no Arabic translation of the play has been undertaken yet; or at least I am not aware of any published translation of the play. Both Nehad Selaiha and Sameh Fekry Hanna have confirmed to me via email that they are not aware of any Arabic translation of the play. In spite of the fact that there are hundreds of history books originally in Arabic or translated into Arabic from European languages, I have not been able to trace a single translation, or an adaption, of the play.

Conclusion

I propose in this chapter that the image of Moors in Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* was politically motivated than anything else. I started by examining the play against the historical and political background against which it was written. In the play, I argue, Peele tallied with the political givens of the period, i.e., the favourable attitude towards the Moors of North Africa; especially those from Morocco. Peele’s involvement in the political and mercantile affairs of London in 1570s and the 1580s seemed to influence the way he presented his Moors. Peele’s father, I indicated, was a merchant and Peele used to write pageants for merchants and to the mayor of London. This is what encouraged me to proclaim that Peele might have had the chance to have access to an oral account of the story of the battle of Alcazar. When it comes to image of the Moors, I argued that Peele is among the fewest Elizabethan dramatists to present the Moors in a favourable way. Peele, I argued, introduced his readers and audience to the good and the bad Moors.

Selaiha is a Professor of English at the Academy of Arts, Cairo, and a columnist in *Al-Ahram*, an Egyptian daily newspaper. She is the wife of Mohamed Enani, one of the highly accredited Shakespearian translators. Sameh Fekry Hanna is a Shakespearean scholar who had a PhD from Manchester University on the translations of the plays of Shakespeare in the Arab world. He is a lecturer at the Academy of Arts, Cairo, who is currently teaching at the University of Manchester. On January 18 2008 Sameh Fekry Hanna wrote to me “Dear Mohamed, I’m not aware of any Arabic translations of these three plays [*The Battle of Alcazar*, *Lust’s Dominion* and *The Fair Maid of the West*]”, <samfekry@hotmail.com>, January 2008, “Re-translation”, parenthesizes mine). On February 16 2008, Nehad Selaiha wrote to me:

Dear Mohamed,

As far as I am aware, none of the plays by Peele, Dekker or Heywood have been done into Arabic. But I need to ask around to be absolutely sure. This may take some time. As for Othello, I have four Arabic translations, 3 in classical Arabic by Mutran Khalil Mutran, Gabra Ibrahim Gabra and Mohammed Enany, and one in colloquial (Egyptian) Arabic By Mustafa Safwan. There is also an adaptation in the Egyptian vernacular by No'man Ashour. I shall keep you informed of any new information I can get on the subject. The best of luck. Nehad Selaiha.” (nselaiha@hotmail.com, February 16 2008, “Re-Othello translation”, grammar, spelling and punctuation original”).
Chapter 2

THE MOORS OF SPAIN IN THOMAS DEKKER’S LUST’S DOMINION

This chapter deals with the image of Moors in Lust’s Dominion. The play was written by Thomas Dekker in collaboration with Day and Haughton and it was first acted in 1599. Lust’s Dominion was first published anonymously in 1675 and in later edition Thomas Dekker was acknowledged as the author of the play.223 Lust’s Dominion tells the story of a Moorish brave leader, Eleazar, who wickedly planned to usurp the throne of Spain. In a bid to avenge what he took to be injustices inflicted upon him and his late father (King of Barbary) the Moor manipulates different sorts of intrigues with the aim of wreaking havoc on Spain and the Spaniards. The hellish machinations of the Moor are discovered and suppressed in due time and he and his fellow Moors are banished from Spain by the end of the play.

What I try to establish in this chapter is that by the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, the favourable image of the Moors of North Africa became blurred. The golden days of the intimate relationship between Queen Elizabeth and Mulai Ahmed al-Mansour were coming to an end. However, in spite of the fact that the image of the Moors in Lust’s Dominion is somehow sober it should be taken in conjunction with that of the Spaniards who are represented in a more bitter way.

Contextually, I scrutinize Lust’s Dominion against the historical and political background against which it was written, i.e., the expulsion of Moors from Spain and the anti-foreign sentiment prevailing in the late Elizabethan age. In this regard, it should be noted here that riots and uprisings against foreigners and aliens, especially in the late Elizabethan age, were more frequent than during the reign of King James I.224 Lust’s Dominion reveals its author[s] sense of the political and historical atmosphere in their day. If The Battle of Alcazar is based on historical and political accounts, the givens of a real battle, Lust’s Dominion shares the same fate, yet not at the same level. In other words, if the story of The Battle of Alcazar is founded on the actual account of the battle of al- Kasr al-Kabir, Lust’s Dominion is concerned with the real historic tough measures of the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in the sixteenth and the

223 In this first edition, the play was ascribed to Marlowe but later edition acknowledged Dekker as the author.
early seventeenth century. The background against which the play will be read is a historical-political one. The historical and political givens of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries will be seen as highly crucial in discussing the play. The tension between England and Spain and the anti-foreign sentiment characteristic of the 1590s to the 1600s are to be taken as two indispensable themes of the play.

Authorship problems associated with the play will be briefly invoked. It should be noted here that authorship problems were characteristic of Elizabethan drama. Though the play was written by two other collaborators (Day and Haughton) Dekker has been considered as the major player in the process of writing, or revising, the play and hence he will be taken as primary author.\(^{225}\) I will also discuss the sources of the play.

In my analysis of the Moorish characters, I would be following the same approach I adopted in the first chapter. In other words, I would be concerned with how the Moorish characters speak about themselves, how they see others and how they are viewed by others, their friends and their enemies. The Moors, in Spain or in Barbary, were perceived as heretics who needed to be saved. It is in this context that *Lust’s Dominion* will be discussed. Dekker, in this regard, did not invent his Moorish characters out of vacuum. Rather, he responded to, and built on, the anti-Moorish sentiment prevailing in Medieval and Renaissance Europe. Dekker, in many of his works, showed no mercy to those who were different from him, politically or religiously. An anti-Muslim sentiment may be seen in many of Dekker’s works, even his prose writings. Julia Gasper, in this regard, argued that Dekker was very patriotic and Protestant.\(^{226}\)

By the end of the chapter, I refer to the reception of *Lust’s Dominion* in the Arab world. I will be arguing that though Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion* has seen a considerable attention in the last few years. When it comes to the reception of Dekker’s works in the Arab world, I will argue that Dekker is known to a greater extent in the Arab world than Peele or Heywood.

Historically speaking, *Lust’s Dominion*, as is the case with *The Battle of Alcazar*, is related to conflict between the Spanish, and the Portuguese, and the Moors but this time on European soil. In other words, *Lust’s Dominion* tackles the idea of the Moorish presence in Spain and attempts made by the Spaniards to expel their conquerors from the lands they had occupied for many centuries. What is of more importance here is the fact that the Moor’s father in Dekker’s Play was a Moroccan Prince whom the Spaniards killed and took his son, Eleazar, as a prisoner. This incident coincides with real

\(^{225}\) A brief digression on the problem of authorship in *Lust’s Dominion* will follow.

Skirmishes between Spain and Barbary or between Portugal and Barbary were not unusual. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Spain and Portugal occupied more than one Moorish port on the Atlantic in an attempt to control world trade at that time. It happened also that Spain had taken many Moorish princes captive when they invaded Moorish cities and ports. Again, some Moorish princes, due to harsh familial conflicts, as has been noted in the first chapter, took refuge in the courts of the Spanish king.

Thus, *Lust’s Dominion* will be viewed in the light of the historical and political background in which it was written: the conflict between the Moors and the Spaniards, on one hand, and how this was related to the rivalry between Spain and England during the Elizabethan age and how this resulted in many thousands of foreign refugees and aliens flooding the Elizabethan capital, on the other hand.

The assumption behind this chapter is that the image of the Moor, though it was more of a misrepresentation than of an objective representation, should be seen in connection with other nationalities (aliens, strangers, foreigners living in England in the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century) or adversary Spaniards and French who were also ridiculed in like manner. At that time, anyone who was not English (Spanish, French, Flemish, Venetian, or Italian) was a stranger, a foreigner, or an alien. It was not only the Moors, or the Turks, nor even the Spaniards or the French, that were mocked it was also English dissident Catholics. In Elizabethan England, English and Scottish rebels were nicknamed by Sir Thomas Gargrave as “our Moors”. Sir Thomas Gargrave, wrote to Sir William Cecil on 4 January 1570 about the Duke of Alva’s plan of taking up soldiers with the aim of shipping to “some say for Spain, to assist the King against the Moors, who win country daily; but most say it is to assist our Moors in England, who should not have begun before spring”. In April of the same year sir Francis Englefield wrote to the Duchess of Feria saying “our Queen fears the French will send some aid to Scotland, to join the English and the Scots, and enter England. They do not fear this King or Duke, their cart being more than fully laden with the moors at home and Turks abroad.”

---

227 See chapter one on accounts of the clashes between the Kingdoms of Morocco and Fez and Spain and Portugal and how many Moroccan Princes were taken captives, or sought refuge, in Spain.


229 It was a common practice in Morocco at that time that failed contenders for the throne would seek the help of Spain or Portugal. It happened with al-Watasi as well as with Saadi families. This has been discussed in some detail in chapter one.


231 For various accounts see, A. J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners*.


233 *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, Addenda*, 1566-79, p. 286
Those whom the Elizabethans used to loathe belonged to countries that were not in friendly relations with England or those who practised a different religion (Muslims or Jews) or a different sect (Catholics). Among all these strangers or foreigners, Moors (and Spaniards) are the ones that this chapter is concerned with. The image of both Moors and Spaniards in *Lust’s Dominion*, as well as in many other Elizabethan plays, is not, at all, a favourable one. Both were negatively portrayed on the London stage, though on different levels. In both cases, the political background played a significant role in shaping the image of the Moor or the Spaniard. One of the factors that influenced the shaping of the image of one nation, argues Cruickshank, is the “state of diplomatic relationship between the two”. Elizabethan hatred of the Spanish, as Lindabury put it, was ‘instinctive’. The tempo of the enmity or love between England and Spain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fluctuated from good to bad or from worse to better according to the political givens of the time. This political atmosphere was reflected in the plays of the time. Dekker and Webster were the two names that came to Don Cruickshank’s mind when he thought of examples of writers in whose writings the Spaniards were ill-treated or misrepresented.

As for the Moors, they were loathed more for their religion than colour or for the policies adopted by their countrymen. Here one must refer to an existent difference between the ways the Queen, and to a great extent those merchants and ambassadors that had connections with Barbary, used to think of the Moors and the way in which men of letters presented them. While Queen Elizabeth sent delegations to the Barbary Kings and Ottoman Sultans, some dramatists presented the Moors and the Turks in a far worse

---


236 Early in sixteenth century, Ferdinand and Isabella sought to have friendly relations with England so that they both may make an alliance against France. Hence, Katherine of Aragon was married to Prince Arthur in 1501 and then to King Henry VIII in 1509. The marriage proved to be of effect in lessening the scale of hostilities between the two countries. Yet when Henry divorced Katherine the tension between the two realms ensued. Later, after Henry’s death, King Philip II of Spain married Mary Tudor; something which intensified the tense relations between England and Spain. *Parallel Lives*, p.195) A few years later, with the accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne of England, Philip, in an attempt to improve the relations between the two countries, proposed to marry Queen Elizabeth. However, the match was not successful.(Allison Weir, *Elizabeth the Queen* (London: Pimlico, 1998), pp 22, 24-25, 52,53) When Elizabeth supported the Huguenots in France in 1562-1563, permitted Drake to attack Spanish ships and sent aids to the Dutch rebels, Philip responded with tough measures against the Queen to avenge himself. From here on the hostile relationship between England and Spain, which became more related to the persons of the Queen and the King, did not cease but with the death of Philip, in 1598, and Elizabeth, in 1603. In 1604, King James I tried to reconcile with the Spanish side. He was ready to offer some concessions to English Catholics at home with the aim of improving the relations with Spain. *Parallel Lives*, pp 195-196

The majority of the English people at this time, it seems, did not digest the idea of tolerating, or befriending, the Moors. The following story may support my contention here. On 15 October, in 1600, when the Moorish delegation was about to go back home to Barbary, John Chamberlain was reported to have said that “the barbarians … are going home; our merchants and marines will not take them to Turkey, thinking it is scandalous to be too familiar with infidels; yet it is an honour for remote nations to meet and admire the glory of the Queen of Sheba.”

However, there was an interest in Barbary and its Moors in the sixteenth century. For many reasons, commercial as well as political, Britons were concerned about what was going on in Barbary. Many Britons were taken captive to work as slaves in Africa by Moorish pirates. Many Moorish refugees fled to England and some other European countries because of the harsh policies of the Inquisition adopted in sixteenth century Spain. Moreover, Queen Elizabeth of England was in friendly relationship with both Barbary and the Ottoman Empire. Merchants used to travel to and from the Orient bringing gold, sugar and saltpetre and exporting cloth, arms and wood. Morocco and its Moors, to use the words of Khalid Bekkaoui, “excited a powerful fascination on Renaissance playwrights and audiences alike, as evidenced by the significant number of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays which use Moorish themes, settings and figures.”

The English people used to see many Moors in London and its suburbs: either as ambassadors and merchants from Fez and Morocco or as refugees expelled from the Iberian Peninsula. The relationship between the kingdom of Morocco and England during the Elizabethan age, as has been indicated in the first chapter, was so friendly that the Moroccans proposed a joint, pre-emptive, attack against Spain. The Moorish delegation arrived in England in 1600 and stayed for six months negotiating bilateral relations and an alliance against Spain, the archetypal foe of both England and Morocco. Therefore, the Elizabethan people were familiar with the sighting of Moors in their capital and towns. Bekkaoui, in this regard, says, “the Elizabethan theatregoers were already familiar with Moorish figures, but the visit gave them the opportunity to see real Moors, and it is impossible to imagine that the Moorish presence in London did not influence theatrical depictions of them.” This does not mean, however, that the ambassador visit of Sidi Abd el-Wahid and his retinue to England and their meeting with Queen Elizabeth, ushered in an era of massive Moorish presence in English drama.

---

238 Sha’ban, “The Mohammedan world”, p. 40.
239 Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, p. 478.
243 Bekkaoui (ed.), Lust's Dominion, p. 18.
Many plays involving Moorish themes and presenting Moorish characters were written before the visit, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Tamburlaine*, *The Battle of Alcazar*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. The English were used to seeing many Moors not only in London but also in the English ports as pirates taken captive for committing piratical acts against their fellows.244

Yet, the ambassadorial visit to London was not void of an influence on the way the Moors were presented on the stage. It has been seen as the spark that ushered in the appearance of many plays with Moorish characters as the main players, sometimes tragic heroes, on the Elizabethan stage. The visit has been taken to be the source of more than one Elizabethan play, particularly *Lust’s Dominion* and *Othello*.245 Though a Moorish element was present in the Elizabethan drama even before such a visit with some Moorish stereotypes such as those presented in *The Battle of Alcazar*, *Titus Andronicus*, or *The Jew of Malta*, the actual encounter with real Moors, argues Bekkaoui, “must have helped reinforce and propagate such images and stereotypes.”246 It must be noted here that the visit, may be due to the long stay of the guests, had a negative effect on the way Londoners viewed the Moors. The hosts got bored with their guests’ behaviour: the way they slaughtered their animals at home and how tight-fisted the guests were towards the poor; not giving any alms.247

### I: Historical background

In 711, the Moors conquered Spain and quite easily the Moorish leader Tariq Ibn Ziad and his forces crushed Spanish defenses and took control of the major Spanish strongholds.248 City after city and town after town fell under the Moors who kept

---

244 On the attacks and counter attacks between the Moors and the Europeans see: Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain*, pp 1-20; Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen*, chapter one “Turks and Moors in England” and chapter two “Soldiers, Pirates, and captives” pp 19-82.


246 Bekkaoui (ed.), *Lust’s Dominion*, p. 18.


248 Gibraltar is a variation of the name of this Moorish fighter. It refers to the place he crossed on his way to conquer Spain, Jabal Tariq. The main sources behind the historical background represented here include, among many others, Ahmad ibn al-Maqqari, *Naft al-Ṭīb min Ghūsn Al-Andalus Al-Raṭḥ and Azhār Al-Riyyāḏ fi Akhār Iyaḍ* (al-Maqqar’s [known also as al-Makkar]) was translated by Pascual de Gayangos under the title of: *The History of the Mohammedan Dynasties in Spain* (New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1964); Muhammad ibn Iyās, *Dawlat Al-Islām fī Al-Andalus: Nihayāt Al-Andalus wa Tārīkh al-<Arab Al-Mūtansrīn* [History of the Muslim Presence in Andalus: The Fall of Andalus and the History of Moriscos], vol. 7 (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-<āmāh Li al-Kitāb, 2003). Henceforth referred to as *Nihayāt Al-Andalus*. 64
advancing till they were stopped by the French at the battle of Poiters (known in Arabic history as the battle of Balaat Al-Shuhadaa [the battlefield of the martyrs]). For eight centuries the Spaniards had to live under the yoke of their Muslim invaders. It was only from the eleventh century on that thriving attempts to reconquer parts controlled by Moors had begun to bear fruit. An active process of reconquest began as early as 1085 and the native Spanish were able to recover city after city from Muslim captors. The Reconquista war reached its peak in 1492 with the fall of Granada, the last Moorish stronghold to the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella.

In 1489, only three years before the fall of Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella (the campaign continued from 1482-1492), the Ottoman Sultan complained to the Pope in Rome of the inhuman treatment of Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula on the eve of the reconquest of Granada. The Sultan warned that he had many Christians living freely in his domains and that if violations against Muslims would not come to an end he would be “obliged to make reprisals on them”.249 The reply came that they, Spaniards, were “only recovering their own [lands] and that the Moors in their territories enjoyed full liberty of person and religion.”250 Soon, after the surrender of the Moors to the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella, polemics emerged concerning the fate of the defeated party. According to the terms of the surrender treaty between the Moors and Ferdinand, the former were given the freedom to worship, to use their language, use Islamic law (sharia) or to wear their national dress.251 The proponents of converting the Moors were of two parties: those of Ferdinand and Cardinal Hernando de Talavera, who advocated peaceful and gradual conversion of the Moors, and those of Isabella and Cardinal Ximenez de Cisneros, who called for immediate conversion or expulsion of the Moors. Talavera’s maxim was “We must adopt their works of charity, and they our Faith.”252 For a few years Talavera had been working hard to convert the Moors by preaching and

---

249 The contemporaneous Egyptian historian Ibn ‘Iyas recorded that an Andalusian delegation arrived at Cairo as early as 1487 asking for the help of the Sultan of Egypt. They told the Sultan about their miseries in Spain and the injustices they were suffering from and the Sultan responded by sending an envoy to the Pope and to Ferdinand and Isabella asking them to stop their aggressions against his fellow Muslims living now as a minority in Spain and Portugal. The sultan stated that Christian subjects in Egypt and Palestine live a decent life under his rule. He warned the addressees that should they not stop humiliating his Muslim fellows he would wreak havoc on Christian subjects at home and would even destroy Christian holy places and churches, amongst which the tomb of Christ itself. (Ibn Iyas, Tarikh Masr [History of Egypt] (Cairo) vol. 2, pp 216-217, 230, 246. cited also in <Anān , Nihayāt Al-Andalus, p. 221.


252 Quoted in Elliott, Imperial Spain, p. 51.
reasoning. Isabella and the zealous clergy were not happy with Talavera’s peaceful approach and a new cardinal, Ximenez de Cisneros, was sent to speed up the process. Ximenez did not fail his masters. It was said that he was able to convert more than three thousand Moors to Christianity on one single day.\textsuperscript{253} Cisneros’s tough measures infuriated the Moors and the result was the first Alpujarras rebellion in the late 1499 and the early 1500.\textsuperscript{254} The revolt was easily crushed by Ferdinand and his troops. The Moors were disarmed and the “pulpits used by their alfaquíes [religious jurists] were torn down, their Korans were burnt and orders given to instruct them completely in the faith….”\textsuperscript{255}

The first edict to expel all the Moors from Spain was issued but it was not enforced. The Spaniards, one may presume, were not able, or willing, to enforce the decree. That the clergy and the monarchy were eager to convert or expel the Moors, yet on different scales, was undoubted. But while the clergy pressed for the immediate conversion or expulsion the rulers thought that it was more convenient to slow down the speed of the process. The logic behind this, as Lea, Meyerson, and Chejne noticed, is that religious concerns clashed with monarchial, mainly economic, ones.\textsuperscript{256} Meyerson, in this regard, states “Mudejarism survived, not out of deference to an ideal of tolerance, but because the Muslims were valuable to the Crown as a source of taxation and as the agricultural and industrial substrata of local economies.”\textsuperscript{257} Consequently, the fates of the Moors, and the Moriscos, living in the Iberian Peninsula upon the Reconquest differed according to the time and place in which they lived. Thus, like the Jews, when there was need for them they were tolerated yet when it was easy to get rid of them no one defended them. When they constituted a considerable percentage of the labour the landlords sided with them but when they became a minority and there were no major problems in removing them they were done with. Therefore, the Moriscos had to live in a whimsical political atmosphere, to be tolerated at one point in time and persecuted at another. King Philip II of Spain (1555-1598) tried to pursue a policy of moderation toward the Moriscos but could “hardly afford to antagonize the local clergy and papacy” who used to point out to

\textsuperscript{253} Ximens, according to Anan, gave orders to burn Arabic books and it was reported that thousands of books were burnt. (<\textit{Anan}, \textit{Nihayāt Al-Andalus}, p. 316)

\textsuperscript{254} Elliott, J. H., \textit{Imperial Spain}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{255} Lea, \textit{The Moriscos of Spain}, p. 95, my parentheses. According to Stanley Lane-Poole, the Spaniards ransacked and burnet the Moorish King al-Hakam’s library which was said to have stocked about four thousand books. (Lane-Pool, \textit{The Moors in Spain} (London: Darf Publishers Limited, 1984, first published 1887), p. 155.


the dangers of Moorish piracy, the danger of Protestantism and the threat of the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{258}

Although the clergy pressed for the immediate expulsion of the Moriscos, Philip II was unwilling to adhere to harsher measures against them. When he opted for tougher measures the outcome was the Alpujarras rebellion in which around 60,000 Spanish lives were lost.\textsuperscript{259} After the Alpujarras’ revolt, to quote the words of Chejne, the “two communities [the Moriscos and the Spaniards] could no longer function, and a call for expulsion was set in motion.”\textsuperscript{260} In a memorandum [there were more than one] written by the Bishop of Segorbe, dated 30 July, 1587, the Bishop attributed all vice on earth to the Moriscos and he concluded that they were heretics and they were “worse than the Jews, who were expelled for lesser crimes. Thus they should be expelled.”\textsuperscript{261}

In a memorandum [there were more than one] written by the Bishop of Segorbe, dated 30 July, 1587, the Bishop attributed all vice on earth to the Moriscos and he concluded that they were heretics and they were “worse than the Jews, who were expelled for lesser crimes. Thus they should be expelled.”\textsuperscript{261}

In 1566-67, a new edict was issued ordering the Moriscos to abandon their traditional habits. It seemed, at last, that the clergy and the monarchy, by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, came to share identical points of view towards the Moriscos. The Moriscos pleaded for the suspension of the decree but, this time, they failed. The attempts to put the edict into effect by force signaled the beginning of the second Alpujarras rebellion.\textsuperscript{262} On the day of All Saints of 1570, Don John of Austria wreaked havoc on the remaining Moriscos sheltering in Alpujarrars mountainous area. Al last, the Morisco rebellion was duly subdued by the Spaniards.\textsuperscript{263} The Moriscos had to convert or go back to Africa from where they originally came: ‘heathen’ Barbary.

It was Philip III, influenced by his courtiers, wife, and the Duke of Lerma, who was inclined to speed up the pace of the expulsion process. The clergy pushed for expelling the Moors for many years. Calls were renewed at the accession of Philip III in 1598, and in 1609 he issued a royal decree calling for expulsion of the Moors, and by extension Moriscos.\textsuperscript{264} From 1609 to 1614 around half million of the Moriscos were deported from


\textsuperscript{259} Bovill, \textit{The Battle of Alcazar}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{260} Chejne, \textit{The Moriscos}, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{261} Ibid, p. 12.


\textsuperscript{263} Lane-Poole, \textit{The Moors in Spain}, p. 278.

\textsuperscript{264} Ibid, p. 13. The expulsion of the Moors coincided with the heated familial fight for the throne of Morocco that started just after the death of Ahmed Al-Mansour. One of the two contenders for the royal throne of morocco, Abu Abdallah al-Ma’moun (known also as El-Sheikh) sought the help of the Spanish in his war against his brother Zidan. What enhanced the expulsion of the Moors from Spain is that it was reported that they sent a message to Zidan in which they told him that if he decides to invade Spain they would be able to provide him with “one hundred
Andalusia, Murcia, Aragon, Castile and other cities. The total of those expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in between 1492 and 1610 reached “three million Moors”. Therefore, in the play, *Lust’s Dominion*, as well as in history, Philip III decreed the expulsion of Moors from Spain.

Thus, the whole Morisco population, to use the words of Chejne, was put in a tight spot: were a Morisco to say that he was a committed Christian, no one would believe him and no credence would be given to him; were he to act as a devout Muslim, he would be put to the stake. A Morisco, Chejne added, lived a dual life: his secret life as a Muslim observing all Islamic rituals and the outward way of life he had to show before his Christian masters. In spite of the fact that thousands of the Moriscos converted to Christianity the majority of them remained Muslims at heart. The Spaniards knew it. It is no wonder then that the Bishop of Segorbe, in 1587, stated that though the Moriscos professed Christianity on the surface they were too Moorish at heart: they still used Arabic, fasted Ramadan, slaughtered their animals, circumcised their children, practiced polygamy and divorce, organized revolts, confederated with the enemies of Spain, or held in contempt the Church and Trinity. Ironically enough, when the Moriscos were deported to Africa, mainly the Barbary States, they were not welcomed back home. By and large, Chejne argues, they were not “welcomed, even in the Islamic countries of North Africa.” This, however, contradicts what the majority of Arab historians have gone for regarding the reaction of the Arabs to the expulsion of their fellow Moors from Spain. In fact, the reaction toward the return of the Moors to the Muslim world differed from one place to the other. The Moriscos were put in a critical situation, mistrusted by their fellow Spaniards and ridiculed by their Muslim hosts, the former taking them to be “little Moors” or “New Christians’ while the latter labeling them as the “Castilian Christians”. What made things worse for these returning Moricos, argued Abd el-Mājīd al-Qadūrī, is that they used to think that they are more civilized than their fellow native Moors to the extent that some of them showed contempt for the Moroccan people and their culture. Moreover, some of them started to express their regret that they thousand fighter”.


Lane-Poole, *The Moors in Spain*, p. 279.


Ibid, pp 11-12.


migrated to North Africa with one of them asking the Moroccan Mofti a question that has become characteristic of the Morisco revulsion of the new fate they had experienced in North Africa “from here [Morocco] we need to migrate to there [Spain] not from there to here”272. Only in the kingdom of Morocco did Moisicos find some solace and enjoyed some sort of tolerance.273 According to Kuriem, the majority of the Moriscos who were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula resettled in Tetuan [in Morocco] from which they assembled their forces and started a holy piratical war against European navies.274

If the common people, the clergy, or the monarchy had different views concerning the expulsion of the Moors, or Moriscos, they all held an identical point of view on the matter of the Moors, or Moriscos, thinking of them as “unclean,” inferior, pagan and diabolic agents playing with the master devil. Clerics and writers (as well as rulers) of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as may be gathered from Chejne’s words, believed that the Moriscos, and by extension the Moors, “lacked purity of blood… they considered the Moriscos worshipers of an evil religion, paying more lip service to the Christian faith after conversion by force.”275 King Ferdinand I, though Moors and Moriscos were tolerated to an extent in provinces under his rule, thought of them, mainly the former, as being diabolic. He is reported to have said, on knowing that the Moors, with the approval of the authorities, were congregating in the church to perform their prayers on some of their holy days:

Not with great astonishment… we have learned of the tolerance which until now has been given in allowing the Moors of the said kingdoms (Aragon, Castile and Valencia) to enter the church of the Virgen María de la Rapita, which is established and built within the limits of that city of Tortsa, to ululate and to venerate the festivals and things required by their Mahometan sect and diabolic custom….276

Though King Ferdinand tolerated the Moors, and the Moriscos, in his domain, he took the rites of the Moors to be “unclean” that he ordained that the church should be given a “symbolic cleansing” to remove the impurities done by Muslim worshippers. Ferdinand’s dislike of Muslims, Meyerson noticed, did not spring from a “scorn for the Muslims as a distinct race, for there was little or no difference in the physiognomies of

272 Ibid, pp 85-86. The question was “is it permissible for Moriscos to escape the harsh Spanish Inquisition and migrate to North Africa?” Cf. Muhāmmad Ibn Azouz Hakim distinguishes between the Moriscos who migrated to the south of Morocco and those who migrated to the north of Morocco. Azouz argues that those who settled in the south joined the Moroccan army and hence they had won enmities with the locals while those who lived the North did not suffer from any discrimination. (Muhāmmad Ibn Azouz Hākim, “Awlād Al-Naqṣīs: al-'usrah Al-Saʿdīyyah al-lati ḥakamat Titwān” [The sons of al-Naqṣīs and the Saidian family who ruled over Tetuan] in Al-Mūrsīkīyūn fi al-Maghrib [Moriscos in the Maghrib], pp 93-94.
Spanish Muslims and Christians, but in a disdain for the religion that defined the Mudejar’s ethnicity.\textsuperscript{277}

The English, too, hated the Moors because they were involved in piratical activities against their fellow Britons and a huge number of them, who had been expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, were endangering them in their means of livelihood. The Elizabethans, according to Brereton, “hated nothing worse than Jews, except the Moors.”\textsuperscript{278} The abhorrence of the Moors in Spain, and other European countries, was exported to England. From Spanish hatred of the Moors, reinforced by the common Christian hatred of Mohammedans and by experiences of piratical depredations, as Chew put it, “came the Elizabethan emphasis upon the cruelty of these people and upon their blackness.”\textsuperscript{279}

Moors, and Moriscos, on the other hand, held similar racially prejudiced views of the Spaniards nicknaming them as “Rum” (Romans), “Ifranja”, “Firanjah,” “al-Firanj,” or “Ajem,” all of the last categories to mean “foreigners”. Sometimes they referred to the Christians as the “worshippers of the Cross,” the “eaters of pork” or “kufar” or “kafirs” (infidels or pagans).\textsuperscript{280} Again, if the Spaniards thought of the Moriscos, or the Moors, as “unclean”, the latter took the Spaniards to be “dirty” and “unclean” too. In a ballad written by Mohammad bin Mohammad bin Daud, a Morisco and the one who was described as the chief agitator of the Alpujarras rebellion, we read:

\begin{quote}
Listen, while I tell the story of sad Andaulsia’s fate-
Peerless once and world –renowned in all that makes a nation great;
Prostrate now and compassed round by heretics with cruel force
We, her sons, like driven sheep, or horsemen on unbridled horse.
Torture is our daily portion, subtle craft our sole resource…
We are forced to worship with them in their Christian rites unclean,
To adore their painted idols, mockery of the great Unseen.
No one dares to make remonstrance, no one dares to speak a word;
Who can tell the anguish wrought on us, the faithful of the Lord?\textsuperscript{281}
\end{quote}

A sense of mutual disdain was a dominating scene in the Moorish-Spanish relationship. Had the Spaniards not expelled the Moriscos from Spain the future of Spain would have been, surely, different. Lea’s words, in this regard, are as follows:

\textsuperscript{277} Meyerson, The Muslims of Valencia, 46.
\textsuperscript{278} Brereton (ed.), Lust’s Dominion; or The Lascivious Queen (Uystruyst: Louvian Liberarie Universitaire, 1931) Materials for the Study of Old English Drama Series, vol. v, p. xxxii.
\textsuperscript{279} Chew, The Crescent and the Rose, p. 521.
\textsuperscript{280} Chejne, The Moriscos, pp 75 6, and 193.
\textsuperscript{281} This ballad was published as an appendix in Lea’s The Moriscos of Spain, pp 434-37. See also Chejne’s “Morisco Education and Literature” in The Moriscos, pp 31-51.
Had these arrangements [between Ferdinand and Isabella and the Moriscos] been preserved inviolate the future of Spain would have been wholly different: kindly intercourse would have amalgamated the races; in time Mohematanism would have died out, and, supreme in the arts of war and peace, the prosperity and power of the Spanish kingdoms would have been enduring.”

That is the reason many Spanish rulers were hesitant in expelling the Moriscos. Sending away thousands of people, most of them skilful in their jobs, physicians or artisans was not an easy job. They were skilful artisans who paid taxes to the state. Ortiz Dominguez, the Spanish writer, described the process of expelling the Moriscos as a “human hemorrhage [sic]” and “an impressive loss of vitality”. From 711 until the fall of Grenada in 1492, Muslim rulers set an example of a moderate caliphate where: Muslims, Jews, and Christians coexisted and lived side by side for centuries. Under Muslim rule, Spain became the centre of learning and science to which many Europeans travelled to seek knowledge:

For nearly eight centuries under the Mohammedan rulers, Spain set to all Europe a shining example of a civilized and enlightened State. Her fertile provinces, rendered doubly prolific by the industry and engineering skill of her conquerors, bore fruit to an hundredfold. Cities innumerable sprang up in the rich valleys of the Guadelequivir and Guadian whose names... still commemorate the vanished glories of their past. Art, literature, and science prospered... students flocked from France and Germany and England to drink from the fountain of learning which flowed only in the cities of the Moors. The surgeons and doctors of Andalusia were in the vanguard of science... Mathematics, astronomy and botany, history, philology and jurisprudence were to be mastered in Spain, and Spain alone.

Once the Spaniards, and the Portuguese, reconquered their lands city after the other, non-Christians were expelled from their realm on the pretext that their blood was not pure. They embarked on a crusade of converting or expelling the Jews and then the Moors. Those who did not convert were killed or expelled. The glory of Spain, according to Poole, started to fade away and it never came back.

In addition to crystallizing the presumed wickedness of the Moors (and Spaniards) in the Continent, Lust’s Dominion refers to the problems foreigners and aliens may cause at home. Historically speaking, in the last decade of the sixteenth and the first decade of the seventeenth century foreigners, strangers and refugees represented what may be

---

282 Lea, *The Moriscos of Spain*, p. 22, my parentheses. This same idea had been expressed many centuries earlier (in the thirteenth century) by Roger Bacon who argued that once theologians and Western writers managed to understand the Koran and refute it Islam will “wither away”. (Cited in David Blanks and Michael Frassetto (eds.), *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, p. 61)

283 Quoted in Chejne, *The Moriscos*, p. 15.

284 Lane-Poole, *The Moors in Spain*, pp vii-viii.

285 Lane-Poole’s words run as follows: The Moors were banished; for awhile Christian Spain shore, like the Moon, with a borrowed light; then came the eclipse, and in that darkness Spain has grovelled ever since.” Lane-Poole, *The Moors in Spain*, p. 280.
classified as a ‘thorn’ in the side of the government and the English public. The majority of foreigners in Elizabethan London were the Dutch and the Flemings. In the census of 1567, as K. G. Hunter noted, there were 2730 foreigners in London out of whom the Dutch counted 2030. There was also in Norwich about 4,000 Flemings in addition to many others scattered in many other cities. In 1573, the number of aliens in London grew so high that it was said to have reached 60,000.\footnote{G. K. Hunter, “Elizabethans and Foreigners” in Shakespeare Survey, no. 17 (1964), p. 45. For Hoenselaars, there were 2,730 aliens in London according to the census of 1567. By 1580, the number increased to 6,462 but by 1583 the number decreased to 5,559. Hoenselaars argues that the number of aliens in Elizabethan London was 2.5 percent out of the total 120,000. He was of the idea that the number of foreigners and aliens in Elizabethan London was small compared to the fuss associated with the anti-foreign sentiment prevailing at that time (Hoenselaars: Images of Englishmen and Foreigners, p. 249).}

The consensus among critics is that they, these aliens and strangers, were seen as a threat to the safety of the natives.\footnote{Among the few critics who do not see that the foreigners did not pose a threat to the English is G. K. Hunter. Ania Loomba, however, argues that Hunter’s argument is “disproved” (Ania Loomba, Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama, Manchester University Press, 1989, p. 43.)}


Harping on the same theme [the anti-foreign theme] \textit{Sir Thomas More}, a play of doubted authorship, was written between 1592 and 1593.\footnote{William Long, “Precious Few” in David Kastan, A Companion to Shakespeare, pp 418-19.}

Thomas Dekker himself is among those who are said to have had a hand in writing the play.\footnote{W. W. Greg (ed.), The Book of Sir Thomas More, The Malone Society, London, 1911, reprinted by Oxford University Press, 1961, p. xxxiv.}

Since its birth, \textit{Lust’s Dominion} was fated to be associated with the political scene, when first acted, presumably in 1599-1600, or when first published, in 1657. Thus in 1599-1600 \textit{Lust’s Dominion} was associated with the Moors’ question both in Spain and England. Here, it should be noted that the setting of the play is Spain, not England. In 1657, \textit{Lust’s Dominion} was connected to the Cromwell attempt to take the royal throne, as well as the anti-Spanish sentiment.\footnote{For a fuller account see, Charles Cathcart, “Lust’s Dominion, or the Lascivious Queen: authorship, date and revision”, The Review of English Studies, vol. 52, no. 207 (2001), pp 360-375 and also “You will crown him king that slew your king’: \textit{Lust’s Dominion} and Oliver Cromwell”, <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/lion_ref_abell> (site visited on 21/05/2002).} In both cases, the publishing or the acting of \textit{Lust’s Dominion} may be said to be politically motivated. On one hand, the English people in the 1590s were worried about who would succeed the Queen. The relationship between England and Spain, on one hand, and between England and France, on the other, was mostly hostile. Even after the defeat of the Armada, Catholic Spain posed a real threat to Protestant England. Troubles in the Iberian Peninsula obliged thousands of refugees, mainly Moors, to flee with the majority of Moors choosing to go back to North Africa and parts of the Ottoman Empire, while a few hundred ended up in France or in
England from which the majority of those Moors managed to travel to North Africa.\footnote{See footnotes 264, 265 and 266, \textit{Passim}. The refugees who came to England seeking for shelter during the Elizabethan Age included the Dutch, Flemings, Greeks, Huguenots and Moors. (For more information see: George Price, \textit{Thomas Dekker} (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 19. For Greek refugees, in particular, see Chew, \textit{The Crescent and the Rose}, p. 136 and for Moorish refugees see the various accounts in Chejne, \textit{The Moriscos}; Bekkaoui, \textit{Signs of Speculative Resistance}, pp 77-82 and Bekkaoui (ed.), \textit{Lust's Dominion}, the introduction.)} The number of Moors who lived in England in the Elizabethan age varies from one historian to the other and depends on whether one takes them to be a segment of the wider black race. Judging by Intiaz Habib standards, the number of Moors who lived in or visited England during the Elizabethan age is slightly bigger than that of those blacks who came or were brought to England during the same period. In a seminal study, Habib traces the black presence in Elizabethan England with more emphasis on black people who settled in England (and Scotland) from 1500 to 1677.\footnote{Intiaz Habib, \textit{Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677, Imprints of the Invisible} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), particularly chapter 2 entitled “Elizabethan London Black Records: “The Writing of Absence”, pp 63-119.} He does not include those blacks who worked as slaves in the court of the Queen or the households of her noblemen. Habib’s survey of the number of blacks who lived in London during the reign of Queen Elizabeth that lasted for forty five years refers to “89 citations of black people, with at least 45 black individuals of variable ethnic transparency appearing in them …47 male…[and] 49 female….”\footnote{Ibib, p. 115, parentheses mine.} During the same period, Habib records forty one citations for blacks who lived outside London.\footnote{Ibib, p. 235.} It must be noted here that Habib’s study is mainly concerned with tracing the presence of blacks, not Moors, in Elizabethan England in spite of the fact that his survey includes some Moors. This is clear from the fact that Habib ignored, among other citations, the visits by three Moorish ambassadorial delegations to England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

\section*{II: Authorship}

\textit{Lust's Dominion}, as is the case with many plays of the period, does not lack authorship problems. The play was first published anonymously in 1657. A second, and a third, edition followed in 1658 with the name of “Christopher Marlowe” as the author. Subsequent editions were published with all editors taking it to be written by Marlowe.\footnote{J. Le Gay Brereton (ed.), \textit{Lust's Dominion}, the introduction.} Thus, the authorship of \textit{Lust’s Dominion} went undoubted until Collier came with his idea that the play is not, and cannot be, written by Marlowe. The reason Collier (and those who followed him) gave us is that the collaborative authors based the story of
the death of King Philip II on real accounts concerning the death of the Spanish king. Hence, Marlowe who died in 1593 cannot be the author of *Lust's Dominion*. Collier associated the play with *The Spanish Moor's Tragedy*, a play Dekker wrote for the Admiral’s men in 1559?/1600 in collaboration with John Day, and William Haughton and for which they were paid three pounds as a part payment. One may argue, in this concern, that Marlowe’s authorship of the play may not be confirmed or excluded only on the grounds that the play told the story of King Philip of Spain who died in 1598 while Marlowe himself died five years earlier than the king. The reason behind this, Brereton argues, is the death scene in the play might have been added later in one of the revision that the play went through, especially when we keep in mind that the play was subjected to more than one revision from the period of its first appearance in 1599/1600 to its first publication in 1657. In either case, the story that the play presents, Brereton concludes, is a “frantic perversion of history. Even if LD [that is *Lust's Dominion*] be not a revision of an earlier play, it is probable that the identification of the King with England’s fallen enemy was a catchpenny afterthought.” Brereton argues that *Lust’s Dominion* was not based on the story of the death of King Philip II of Spain but, rather, on “events connected with the relations of Portugal and Spain in the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella.”

For Ayres, *Lust’s Dominion* was written in 1600 and it continually suffered from revision. The first revision was said to have occurred in the 1610s where the last two lines of the play calling for the expulsion of the Moors have been added to the text. These two lines read: And for this Barbarous Moor, and his black train,/ Let all Moors be banished from Spain.’(Act V, iii, 183-184) Aware of the fact that his theory may be susceptible to criticism, Ayres gives four quotations to support his idea that the play has undertake a revision in, or after, the 1610s to cope with the gunpowder plot. The first of these four contemporaneous accidents is Eleazar’s anticipation that the Queen’s: amorous flames/ Shall blow up the old King, consume his Sons,/ And make all Spain a bonefire. (Act I, i, 194-196) Secondly, Eleazar’s scheme to ascend the throne of Spain

297 The tract telling the story of the death of King Philip of Spain, was published in an English translation in 1599 under the title: *A briefe and trve Declaration of the Sickness, last Wordes, and death of the King of Spaine, Philip, the Seconde of that Name, who died in his Abbey of S. Laurence at Escuriall, seuen miles from Madrill, in a Spanish letter, and translated into English according to the trve Copie, Printed at London by Eden, Bollifant,1599.*
299 Brereton (ed.), *Lust’s Dominion*, p. 154, my parentheses.
whatever the means he may adopt, even the gunpowder option, is contemplated: undermine the chamber where they lie,/ And by the violent strength of gunpowder,/ Blow up the Castle.(Act II, iii, 157-159) Third, Eleazar threatens the court with what is more than gunpowder:

underground
A villain that for me will dig to hell,
Stands with a burning limstock in his fist,
Who firing gunpowder, up in the air
Shall fling your torn and mangled carcasses.
(Act, IV, ii, 191-195)

Fourth, Eleazar is seen as warning Cardinal Mendoza of being killed by gunpowder:

Oh! Have you found it, have you smelt
The train of powder that must blow you up,
Up into the air, what air? Why this, a breath,
Look you, in this time may a King meet death;
An eye to’t, check it, check it.
(Act IV, iii, 71-75)

Most recently, Charles Cathcart, too, writing about the continual changes that the play went through, argued that the gunpowder story may have been added to the play in a later revision. He, moreover, found an analogy between the theme of Lust’s Dominion and the allegedly Cromwellian attempts to take the throne of England in the 1650s. Cathcart referred to many similarities between Eleazar and Cromwell: both were ambitious and both wanted to be enthroned on the royal seat of a kingdom.303

Writing in the early twentieth century, S. R. Golding declined to identify Lust’s Dominion with The Spanish Moor’s Tragedy noting that Lust’s Dominion does not reveal many similarities that critics assign with the works of Haughton, Day, and Marston, Golding, and, later Ayres came to conclude that the play should had been based on an earlier edition written by someone else and that the task of these authors was just to revise it.304 The partial payment of three pounds that was paid by Henslowe to Dekker, Day and Haughton has been given by those who declined to attribute the play to Dekker and his collaborators as an evidence with which they may substantiate their points of view. Dekker was so known to have had undertaken so many revisions of scores of plays that Ben Jonson ridiculed him in his Poetaster as a ‘dresser’ of plays.305 My argument

303 Charles Cathcart “You will crown him king that slew your king”: Lust’s Dominion and Oliver Cromwell.”, http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/lion_ref_abell.
here is that it is right to assume that Lust’s Dominion and The Spanish Moor’s Tragedy are one and the same play. The reason behind is that the title The Spanish Moor’s Tragedy never matches any of Dekker’s plays but Lust’s Dominion. The closest, plausible, match is The Noble Spanish Soldier, which cannot be taken as a possible title for The Spanish Moor’s Tragedy since the main character in The Noble Spanish Soldier is a native Spaniard and not a fugitive Moor.

Therefore, judging from a bibliographic point of view, we cannot say whether the play is, or is not, Marlowe’s in spite of the fact that the Marlovian touch is felt throughout the play. In this regard, of the majority of critics who wrote on Lust’s Dominion, those who took the play to be Marlowe’s or Dekker’s and his collaborators, argue that even if the play is not by Marlowe the one who wrote it copied Marlowe.306 The Marlovian element in Lust’s Dominion, it is true, is undeniable and those who attributed the play when it first appeared, and for more than two centuries later, had their very justifiable reasons to do so.307 Lust’ Dominion shares many similarities with the identified works of Marlowe, notably Dr Faustus and The Jew of Malta. However, I would presume, this is not solid evidence according to which we can identify the play with Marlowe. My reasoning is that Lust’s Dominion does lack Marlowe’s mighty hand, vitality, originality or vividness that can be seen in his acknowledged works. Again, there are many flaws concerning the plot and characterization of the play. There are many contradictions in the plot, as well as in the characterization, of the play; something which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The assumption behind this chapter is that Lust’s Dominion in its 1657 edition, as the majority of critics agree, is a revision of an older play, The Spanish Moor’s Tragedy, and that Dekker is one of four collaborators who were commissioned to undertake such a revision.

III: Sources of the play

No particular book (anecdote or tale) has been determined as the main factor behind the making of the play. Recently, Bekkaoui has argued that Leo Africanus’s book about the history of Africa may be taken as a legitimate source of Lust’s Dominion. Bekkaoui,


307 The most striking example, for me, that shows the influence of Marlowe on the author can be seen in the following quotation: This musick I prepar’d to please thine ears,/ Love me and thou shall hear no other sounds,/ Lo here’s a banquest set with mine own hands;/ Love me, and thus I’ le feast thee like a queen. (Lust’s Dominion, Act III, ii, 30-33) Does not this sound very similar to Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to his beloved”?
moreover, goes further saying that the play is based on the biography of Leo himself.\footnote{308} The facts that Eleazar and Leo were both Moroccan Muslims who were taken captive by Christian Europeans and that both converted to Christianity and spent the rest of their lives in Europe are taken by Bekkaoui as supporting evidence to shore up his claim.\footnote{309} However, it seems to me rather difficult to grasp the idea that Leo Africanus’ book about Africa, at least in its English form, is the source of 

_Lust's Dominion_. First of all, the English translation was first published in 1600 while 

_Lust's Dominion_, according to the majority of critics, was written in 1599/1600. Even if the play was written in 1600, not 1599, the few months of the year 1600, in which the book was published and during which the Moorish delegation stayed in London, do not seem to give enough room to the authors to write the story. This does not, in any way, exclude the possibility that Dekker, or any of his collaborators, might have read the Latin version of Leo’s book. For some this may sound as no more than a plausible hypothesis. In fact, 

_Lust's Dominion_, it should be noted, shares many striking similarities with the accounts about Moors included in Leo’s accounts about the Moors. However, the very same ideas about the Moors reiterated in 

_Lust's Dominion_ can be seen several hundred years earlier, in Sir John Mandeville’s _Travels_ and a few years before the English translation of Leo’s account of Africa, in Hakluyt’s _Principal Navigations_. Having read Sir Mandeville’s _Travels_ and Hakluyt’s _Principal Navigations_, I have found striking analogies, concerning the image of the Moors, between both accounts, especially the former, and 

_Lust's Dominion_. Accounts about the Moor, a distinction between the black Moor, (usually from the Saharan Africa) and the tawny Moor, mostly from Barbary, was sometimes made and often not, as harsh, uncivilized, heathen, proud, or jealous can be found in abundance in Sir Mandeville’s _Travels_ and Hakluyt’s _Principal Navigations_. But what one can say here is that though Leo Africanus may be taken as one of the sources from which Dekker and his collaborators got the story, yet it is not the only source that inspired the author[s] to write the play. One may argue that the author[s] based the themes of the play on the information that were available at the time in travel, history and theology books as well as on the plays that preceded 

_Lust's Dominion_; notably _Titus Andronicus_ and _Tamburlaine_. In addition, the play shares many typical

\footnote{308} John Pory translated Leo’s book into English in 1600, to commemorate (as he stated in the introduction, the ambassadorial visit of the Moroccan Ambassador to England). The title of the book is: _The Historie and Description of Africa_. The book was written originally in Arabic in 1526 (Bekkaoui (ed.), _Lust's Dominion_, pp 20-62). It was translated by Leo himself into Italian under the title: _Historie_. The Italian version of the book, according to Thoraya Obaid, was published six times between 1550 and 1613. Leo’s _Historie_ was translated into French and Latin in 1556. The Latin version was published four times between 1550s and 1632. (Obaid, The Moor Figure in English Renaissance Drama, p. 189)

\footnote{309} Bekkaoui (ed.), _Lust's Dominion_, pp 22-23.
features of Elizabethan discourse about Moors and Spaniards. There was no scarcity of information, as Louis Wann noticed, about the Orient: its people, religions or habits. In addition, there were many ballads, poems, pamphlets and plays that told the story of Moorish, black or African characters. There was an interest in the orient, Wann noted, because it was so mighty and hence many would appreciate the play or the ballad, that told stories about these exotic, heathen, and powerful people. It was not a mere desire for novelty that, wrote Wann, “prompted this interest in the Orient. It was an active and lively interest in a powerful people”.

No wonder then that during the period from 1586-1611 thirty two plays containing Oriental characters, either as minor or main characters, were written. Verbal accounts of those travellers and merchants who went to the Orient, I would argue, must not be excluded as a highly potential source of Lust’s Dominion either, and, of course, many other Elizabethan plays.

Stories about the fascinating and fabulous Orient, with its Moors, Turks, blacks; peoples whose heads are in their chests; women whose breasts are as long as that of an udder of an animal or polygamous men those who keep scores of wives and as many concubines as they can [or cannot] tolerate [one expects] must have appealed to the audience at that time. As one might expect, accounts of the Orient, written by many different people, a rich merchant trading with Barbary or the Ottoman Empire, an ambassador, a pilgrim, or a prisoner taken captive, and treated badly, by pirates, were divergent, and often unbelievable. When back home all were expected to tell the story the way they liked: few told their story in an objective way, for example Edward Pococke, while the majority mixed facts with imagination. These different stories, as Wann and Sha’ban found, were exploited in the plays written during the Elizabethan period.

Playwrights, argues Sha’ban, did not have enough time, or one can say did not try, to distinguish what is right and what is wrong in the writings of the travellers. The aim was to write something exotic about an exotic world.

---

311 Ibid. p. 446.
312 The statics are Wann’s, Ibid, p. 426. Wann, however, took The Spanish Moor’s Tragedy and Lust’s Dominion to be two different plays.
314 Sha’ban, “The Mohammedan world”, p. 58. Written accounts about travels to the Orient date back to the early fifteenth century. One of these earliest accounts is Sir John Mandeville’s Travels, sometimes known as The Travels. In spite of the fact that there is so much scepticism concerning its author’s authenticity, the travels were supposed to be undertaken during the years 1322-1332?. The Travels was written originally in French (in spite of the fact that the traveller was said to be an English gentleman) and it was available in almost in all European languages. It was translated for the first time into English in 1496. (For more information see: C. W. R. D. Moseley (ed.), The Travels of Sir John Mandeville (London, Penguin, 1983, the introduction) Writing on the influence of the book on contemporary writers, Eldred Jones states that it “fired the imagination of ordinary intelligent people about the continent [Africa] and its people. Many of the commonest notions which were held about the continent by Elizabethans can be traced.

78
IV: The Moors of Spain

The Moor in *Lust's Dominion* belongs to a category of Moors that is called “Moriscos” i.e. one of hundreds of thousands of new Moorish generations born or reared in Spain and who willingly or not converted to Christianity. Bekkaoui’s classification of the Moriscos as the “Moors of Andalusia” is new and appropriate. Due to the tough measures of the Inquisition active in sixteenth century Spain, thousands of Moors (and Jews) had to convert verbally but at their homes they practised their own religion; Islam or Judaism. Though born and reared on the Spanish soil Moors were seldom trusted, respected, or treated in a human way. The Spaniards, as well as their fellow English, came to associate all sorts of evil with the Moors. Moriscos (or “New Christians” as they were called) though thousands of them converted to Christianity either by preaching or by force never attained the status of the “Old Christians”. They, according to Bovill, had been “compulsorily accepted into the Christian faith long before Philip’s [II] accession. Compulsion had done little to weaken their adherence to Islam, and they still paid tribute to the Shereef of Fez who year by year sent his envoys to Spain to collect it.” No wonder then that they had been mistrusted and taken to be confederates with enemies of Spain. They were usually viewed as being a “fifth column” spying on the Spanish for the interest of the enemies of Spain, be they the Ottomans, North Africans or others.

Moorish characters in *Lust’s Dominion* are different from the ones we have seen in the chapter on *The Battle of Alcazar*. Peele, as has been emphasized earlier, introduced back to the book.”[Eldred Jones, *Othello’s Countrymen*, p. 5, my parentheses) Richard Hakluyt’s *Principal Navigations* was one the most (sort of reliable) sources for stories about the Orient. In 1582, Hakluyt’s *Divers voyages touching the discovery of America* was published. The first quarto of his masterpiece *Principal Navigations* came out in 1589-90 and the first voluminous *Principal Navigations* was published in 1598-1600.(See Jack Beeching (ed.), *Voyages and Discoveries*, the introduction) The words “Moors” and Moriscos” (sometimes Turks, Muslims and Saracens) were used interchangeably, only a few could distinguish between these various groups. The word “Moor” is usually used to refer to Muslims of North Africa while “Moriscos” refers to those Moors living in areas under the control of the Spaniards. Moors living in Castile, Aragon, Cordova, or any part in the Iberian Peninsula, came to be labelled as “Moriscos” after the recovery of these cities from Arab conquerors. (Fadl, *Malḥamat al-Maghāzī al-Mūriskyyah*, pp 13-14 ) Bekkaoui criticizes fellow critics of failing to distinguish between Moors in general and what he terms “Moors of Andalusia”. Bekkaoui (ed.), *Lust’s Dominion*, p. 6. Lea used the word “Moriscos” to refer “New Christians” while Chejne, Meyerson and Bekkaoui took it to mean “little Moors”. For full accounts see: Henry Charles Lea, *The Moriscos of Spain*; Meyerson, the *Muslims of Valencia*; Chejne, *The Moriscos*; Bekkaoui, *Signs of Spectacular Resistance* and Bekkaoui (ed.), *Lust’s Dominion*. Bovill, *The Battle of Alcazar*, p. 2, my parentheses. Chejne, *The Moriscos*, p. 8 and Bekkaoui, *Signs of Spectacular Resistance*, p. 51.
his readers to the noble and the villainous Moors while in Lust’s Dominion we have only
the devilish, villainous and bloody Moors. If Peele’s play abided by the historical and
political lines of his day, Dekker’s Lust’s Dominion does not. The Moor in Lust’s
Dominion is more of the legendary heathen, vengeful, Moors whom the English folk
used to see throughout the medieval drama where playwrights used to introduce the
devil as black. Thus, the play may be seen as a manifestation of what the English people
used to think of the Moors at that time. Accounts of the black Moors in Lust’s Dominion,
one may say, reflect the mainstream point of view the English and Europeans in general,
held about the blacks and the Negroes in medieval and Renaissance times. These
accounts date back as early as the fourteenth century, and earlier, in the travellers’ tales
about black Moors and Negroes.

The Elizabethans had many reasons to hate the Moors. In piratical acts, they had
taken thousands of their fellow countrymen as captives and were pressing hard at their
shores. Prayers were said in Churches and donations were collected to redeem those
loved ones from the hands of the heathen Moors. Everyone was aware of what was
going on and everyone bore the Moorish and Turkish pirates ill feelings toward the
perpetrators; the Moors and the Turks. However, there were not many Moors from
Barbary to fit as typical villains whom playwrights may use in their plays. The Moors
who lived in London in Elizabethan England were either those who fled the harsh
policies of the Inquisition, Moors from Barbary who were taken captive by the Spanish
and forced to work as galley-slaves but managed to escape, or ambassadors and
merchants who came to trade with their English counterparts under the auspices of her
Majesty the Queen of England and his Majesty the King of Morocco. The author[s] of
Lust’s Dominion chose Spain to be their setting and Spanish Moors as their villains.
Spain was the scene where the devils (the Spanish and the Moors); the enemies of
England and the Queen, played against one another. Eleazar could not have plotted
against Queen Elizabeth. Some Moors who fled the tyranny of the Spanish Inquisition
found a safe haven in the Queen’s land.\footnote{The Queen had thousands of her citizens held captive in the Barbary States and it would be
useful if she could exchange these Moors for her captives. Bernard Harris argues that by
expelling the Moors from England Queen Elizabeth seemed to have had hit two birds with one
stone: she pleased both the king of Spain and the king of Barbary. (Bernard Harris, A Portrait of
a Moor, Shakespeare Survey, no. 11 (1978), pp 89-96)}

\textit{Lust’s Dominion} is perhaps, Bekkaoui argues, the first English play with a Spanish
Moor as its main character, a protagonist if one may say so.\footnote{Bekkaoui, Signs of Spectacular Resistance, p. 77.} Eleazar is given the
biggest part in the play in spite of the fact that he fails and suffers a humiliated defeat at
the hands of his Spanish counterparts by the end of the play. Of high importance here,
from my point of view, is the Spanish setting of the play. The playground of *Lust’s Dominion*, or the theatre on which Eleazar performs his tricks and shows, is exclusively Spain and the players include Moors as well as Spaniards, has nothing at all with England. The villainous Moors are plotting against Catholic Spain and not Protestant England. There is no Presenter here, unlike *The Battle of Alcazar*, to connect the story and retell it to the English audience or to give advice to his English folk to beware of the devil Moors. Unlike Spain, England, Matar notes, did not develop the national epic in which the Moors were damned and done with.\(^{322}\)

In my analysis of Moorish characters in *Lust’s Dominion*, I would be following the same approach I have adopted in the first chapter. In other words, I will be concerned not only with how Moorish characters are represented but also how they are seen by others, how they think of themselves and how they take others to be. Here, the Moor will be viewed in relation to the other characters in the play. The most important question that the chapter will try to give an answer to is: did the author succeed in impersonating the character of the Moor, the Catholic Friars or the Spanish King or not?

To begin with, here is a quick survey of how Spaniards saw Eleazar; his enemies as well as his confederates. King Philip introduces Eleazar to his son Prince Philip as “Both wise and warlike, yet beware him/ Ambition wings his spirit, keep him down”. (Act I, i, 66-67) Prince Philip, the Moor’s archetypal enemy, describes him as a ‘base slave,’ (Act II, sc. i, 55) a ‘damned Moor,’ (Act IV, iv, 10) a ‘black divel’ (Act IV, i, 24), ‘thou true stamp’d son of hel’,/Thy pedigree is written in thy face’ (Act IV, iv, 39-40) and a ‘hedge-hog’. (Act V, ii, 55) Knowing about the plot of Eleazar and his mother to declare him a bastard, Prince Philip condemns them both:

\[
\text{Thou [mother] left’st me to the mercy of a Moor,}
\text{That hath damnation dyed upon his flesh;}
\text{’T was well; thou Mother did’st unmotherly}
\text{Betray thy son to false bastardy.}
\text{(Act V, ii, 19-22, my parentheses)}
\]

Most of the minor characters perceive Eleazar in the same way. Thus, the King of Portugal sees Eleazar as an ‘ambitious Moor’ (Act IV, i, 2) whom he associates with:

\[^{322}\text{Matar argues that drama played the role that national epic did in other European countries. (Turks, Moors, and Englishmen, p. 14)}\]
the devil and the darker world:
The Moor’s a Devill, never did horrid feind
Compel’d by som Magicians mighty charm,
Break through the prisons of the solid earth,
With more strange horror, then this Prince of hell,
This damned Negro Lyon-like doth rush,
Through all, and spite of all knit opposition.323
(Act IV, ii, 29-34)

Friar Cole also tells Eleazar ‘Seeing your face, we thought of hell’. (Act II, ii, 124)
Alvero, his father in law, who sympathised with him from the beginning calling him by
‘my son’ [and the one who] defended him against the edict of banishment decreed by the
Cardinal, describes him as a ‘Divel’ once he knows about his evil nature and evil
stratagems against Spain. (Act III, ii, 243) Roderigo speaks of Eleazar as ‘this black
fiend’ (Act III, ii, 177) and a ‘villain and base born fugitive’. (Act III, sc. II, 252)
Christefero, an ambivalent character who sometimes was introduced by the author as a
follower of Eleazar and on some other times as a follower of his enemies camp, sees
Eleazar as a ‘bloody tyrant, an usurping slave’. (Act III, ii, 254) Hortenzo, Isabella’s
love, paints Eleazar as ‘that mold of hel’ (Act V, ii, 36) while Isabella herself, scorning
the Moor’s offer of love, challenges him “I fear thee not /Inhumane slave, but to thy face
defie/ Thy lust, thy love, thy barbarous villainy.” (Act V, ii, 106-108) At the end of the
play, when all knew about the evil doings of the Moor they all describe him as the
‘Moor, Divell, toad, serpent’ (Act V, ii, 44) and ‘worese then damnation, fiend, monster
of men’. (Act V, ii, 75) The Cardinal, Mendoza, speaks of Eleazar as ‘that fiend; That
damned Moor, that Devil, that Lucifer’ (Act II, i, 51-52), ‘this divel’ (Act IV, i, 34) and
‘more then a Divel’ (Act V, ii, 28). Yet, the pious Cardinal agrees, upon agreeing with the
Queen mother whom he loves passionately, to join the camp of Eleazar and the Queen in
their war against Prince Philip. After being trapped by Eleazar and the Queen to have
confessed that he is the real father of bastard Philip, the Cardinal describes Eleazar as
‘damned slave’ and the Queen as a ‘strumpet’. (Act V, i, 163, 140)

This was how the opponents of the Moor see him. His confederates saw a different
Eleazar. Eleazar, in fact, has got only a few partners who loved and supported him when
need be, yet he ends up as the enemy of all characters in the play; including the one

323 Eleazar, as a typical Moor, should be associated with the devil and world of magic. He, too, is
similar to Faustus in that both are versed in the damned art of magic. Eleazar has a big library
containing many voluminous sources on the art of magic. He taunts his attendants, Zarack and
Baltazar “Zarack and Baltazar come hither, see, / Survey my library. I study, I, /Whil’st you two
sleep.” (Act IV, iii, 63-64) For more information on the relationship between Moors and the
devil and the darker world see Tokson “The Devil and the Moor” and “The Rites of Satan” in
her The Popular Image of the Black Man, Lea, The Moriscos of Spain, p. 47, Chejne, The
Moriscos, pp 26-27; Barthelemy, Black Face Maligned Race, pp 1-18 and Matar, Islam in
Britain, p. 94.
who loved him passionately (the Queen Mother) and the one who showed loyalty to him until the very end (his henchman, Balthazar). The Queen Mother is the most loyal of all Eleazar’s partners. In the very first scene of the play, the Queen leaves her deathbed husband to come to Eleazar to steal some kisses, or more, from her Moor. No wonder then if she calls him ‘My gracious Lord’ (Act I, i, 3) ‘Gentle Eleazar’ (Act I, i, 7) and ‘my love’. (Act I, i, 29) However, the Moor declines the old Queen’s love tokens calling her a ‘strumpet’ and a ‘harlot’ more than once in the play, yet the more he shuns or insults her the more she grows furious about her love for him. The Queen agrees to do anything the Moor asks her even killing her son, the heir to the throne of Spain. She recommends him to the current King of Spain, Ferdinand, as the ‘trustly Moor’ (Act II, iii, 117) whom he should entrust with the mission of bringing rebellious Philip from Portugal to effect justice against him. When Eleazar betrays the Queen at the end of the play refusing to share the throne of Spain with her and calling her a ‘strumpet’, the Queen knows the reality of the Moor she has been foolishly in love with for many years addresses Eleazar as ‘Thou villain! What intendst thou, savage slave?’ (Act V, i, 163) Now, she begins to see him in the way others do: a ‘Divel’. (Act V, i, 184) Becoming aware of the true intentions of the Moor, the Queen accuses him, though too late, of killing her son, King Ferdinand. The Queen gives us two, contradictory, pictures of the Moor: a dreamy positive one of the one whom she loved dearly and a markedly negative one of the one whom she came to see as a treacherous and murderous avenger.

King Ferdinand, like his mother, describes Eleazar, though intentionally, in two different ways: a ‘sweet friend’ whom he defended against the Cardinal just to be in a position to cuckold him and a ‘bloody foreign Moor’ whose wife he, as the king of Spain, has the right to sleep with because Eleazar is not a Spaniard. Trying to persuade virtuous Maria, the only moral Spanish character in the play, to agree to his lustful desire, Ferdinand gives his rationale as follows:

Thy husband is no Spaniard, thou are one,  
So is Fernando, then for countrie sake,  
Let me not spare thee: on thy husbands face  
Eternal night in gloomy shades doth dwel.  
(Act III, ii 20-23)

Having surveyed how Eleazar was portrayed by different characters in the play, let us see how he thinks of himself and how he values others. First of all, it is worth mentioning that almost all Moorish characters, not only in Lust’s Dominion, were fully aware of the way others think of them. Being of a darker complexion means that one
should expect others to rank him as inferior and more often than not, as an agent of hell and the darker world. Eleazar is no exception, so he admits:

I cannot ride through the Castilian streets
But thousand eies through windows, and through doors
Throw killing lookings at me, and every slave
At Eleazar darts a finger out,
And every hissing tongue cries, There’s the Moor,
That’s he that makes a Cuckold of our King,
There go is the Minion of the Spanish Queen;
That’s the black Prince of Divels, there go’s hee
That on smooth boies, on Masks and Revillings
Spends the Revenues of the King of Spain.
(Act I, i, 84-92)

He knows that others expect him, and his fellows, to act rudely so his advice to his two slaves, Zarack and Baltazar, whom he instructs to kill the two Friars, is: ‘Your cheeks are black, let not your souls look white’. (Act II, ii, 81) Yet, unlike many Moorish characters who usually feel offended by their blackness, Eleazar is proud of his colour. He extols ‘by the proud complexion of my cheeks, /Tan’ e from the kisses of the amorous sun’ (Act III, ii, 164-165) taking so much pride in himself ‘Although my flesh be tawny, in my veins,/Runs blood as red, and royal as the best/And proud’st in Spain’. (Act I, i, 154-155) Wronged by the Spaniards, who killed his father and took him as a prisoner of war when they invaded Barbary, Eleazar thanks Providence for making him black, and not white, so that he will not blush to take his revenge against his enemies:

Ha, ha, I thank thee provident creation,
That seeing in moulding me thou did’st intend,
I should prove villain, thanks to thee and nature
That skilful workman; thanks for my face,
Thanks that I have not wit to blush.
(Act II, ii, 65-69)

How Eleazar, and his fellow Moors, value their Spanish counterparts is worthy of a note here. If the Spaniards take themselves to be superior to the Moors, Eleazar, and his slaves, take them to be inferior and no more than a heap of dung whom he does not fear the bravest among them. Thus when the Queen Mother hurries to Eleazar to warn him to escape because the angry Spaniards are coming to kill him, he replies:

84
This py’d Camelion, this beast multitude,  
Whose power consists in number, pride in threats;  
Yet melt like snow when Majestie shine forth.  
This heap of fouls, who crowding in huge swarms  
Stood at our Court gates like a heap of dung,  
Reeking and shouting contagious breath out.  
(Act III, iv, 23-27)

He also speaks of the ‘damned Mendoza’ (Act III, iii, 31) describing King Philip of Spain as a ‘tyrant’ and a ‘tame jade’ (Act I, i, 161-162) and nicknaming Prince Philip as the ‘bastard of Spain’ (Act IV, i, 38) His minions, Zarack and Baltazar, while taking pride in their ‘amiable farces’, speak so rudely about the Spaniards. Baltazar, for example, describes Friar Cole as that ‘black villain Friar Cole’ (Act III, iii, 16) and Zarack brands the Friar as a ‘louzy Friar’. (Act III, iii, 22) How Eleazar sees the Queen Mother, and how each of them is as bad as the other, is worthy of a digression here.

For Eleazar, the Queen Mother is no more than a ‘strumpet’ whom he uses as a means through which he can take his revenge against the Spaniards. The Queen agrees to do whatever her ‘love’, the Moor, may ask her, even it comes to killing her own son. If Eleazar is evil the Queen, then, is the twin of evil. The Moor is so cunning and the words he utters may be interpreted differently by other characters in the play; only the audience and the readership, not the Queen, Alvero, or Maria (his innocent wife), know what the Moor means by certain words. He can be compared to the cunning Iago whose villainy led to Othello’s downfall. He does not tell his victims in a direct way what they would, or would not, do. Rather, he hints at something and suggests that the other party will be in no position to act: how, for example, could a mother kill her own son? When he tells the Queen about his desire to get rid of all those who may stand against him she enquires how and he answers that there are more than a thousand stratagems. He touches the psychological element in a woman when he, in an attempt to entice her to act, accuses her of being “cold” and “dare not do”. (Act II, ii, 11-12) To agitate her further to act, he tells her she is a woman and women usually have soft hearts and so it would be difficult for a woman to kill her son. But the Queen’s answer comes as “He [her son] shall die” and by “this [her] hand” right now if Eleazar may “give consent”. (Act II, ii, 20-24, parentheses mine) After agreeing to the idea of murdering her son, the Queen wants to be paid back by her accomplice. She asks him if he, in turn, can kill his wife and Eleazar answers “Had I a thousand wives, down go they all:/ She dies, I’ le cut her off.” (Act II, ii, 154-155) While Eleazar prays for the stars and begs fate and opportunity to help him the Queen does the same. Thus Eleazar contemplates:
I’ll follow you; now purple villainy,  
Sit like a Roab imperially on my back,  
That under thee I closelyer may contrive  
My vengeance….  
Sweet opportunity I’le bind myself  
To thee in a base apprentice-hood so long,  
Till on thy naked scalp grow hair as thick  
As mine, and all hands shal lay hold on thee:  
If thou wilt lend me but thy rusty sithe,  
To cut down all that stand within my wrongs,  
And my revenge.  
(Act I, i, 172-192)

The Queen, too, invokes the power of darkness of night, comparing it to the complexion of her Moor, to help her get rid of the main obstacle in her way to enjoy by herself the company of her love:

Fair eldest child of love, thou spotlesse night,  
Empresse of silence, and the Queen of sleep;  
Who with thy black cheeks pure complexion,  
Make’st lovers eyes enamoured of thy beauty:  
Thou art like my Moor, therefore will I adore thee  
For lending me this opportunity…[to kill the innocent Maria; the Moor’s wife]  
(Act III, i, 1-6, my parentheses)

Hence, both Eleazar and the Queen are equally despicable. King Fernando, too, belongs to the evil camp along with his mother, brother and some other Spanish comrades. When the lustful Queen asks her son, King Fernando (the King of Spain) to send what she describes as the ‘trusty Moor’ (Eleazar) to go to Portugal to fetch the rebellious Philip, the three of them, Eleazar, the Queen and King Fernando, it is a golden opportunity to get rid of their enemies: Eleazar by removing the primary source that denies him a safe passage to the throne of Spain, the Queen by killing the Moor’s wife so that she may have the Moor for her own proper sole use, and by sending the Moor to Portugal Fernando aims to have the chance to cuckold him in his absence. Both Eleazar and the Queen know that the King intends to send Eleazar to Portugal so that he will be in a position to go to his castle where he can flirt with the Moor’s wife. Thus Fernando reveals “Whil’st thou persu’st the traitors that are fled,/ Fernando means to warm thy marriage bed.” (Act II, iii, 139-140) The Moor knows that the King wants to cuckold him while he is away but he, unexpected of a Moor who may kill or be killed to defend his honour, pays no heed saying “I know he means to Cuckold me that night,/ Yet do I know no means to hinder it.” (Act II, iii, 142) However, in another place, Eleazar says, when he sees Fernando and Maria entering together:
now the World is chang’d you see;
Though I seem dead to you, here lives a fire,
No more, here comes the King, and my Maria;
The Spaniard loves my wife, she swears to me,
Shee’s chast as the white Moon, well if she be.
Well too if shee be not, I care not, I,
I’le climb up by that love to dignitye.

(Act I, ii, 206-212)

The last two quotations betray one of the many contradictions in representing the character of the Moor. Beside the various discrepancies in the play, contradictions in the representation of Moorish characters may be worthy to note here. Eleazar meets all the requirements of a typical black villain. What is more is that Eleazar is represented in two incompatible versions of a Moor: courageous and coward, jealous and cuckold, and cunning and naive. Thus, though he is a brave fighter who subdued many of his enemies, Eleazar acts in a proper villain manner. As a Moor, Eleazar is supposed to be jealous but in the play he endorses the idea that his wife’s honour may be defamed by Fernando so as long as this will allow him to achieve his goal of taking revenge against his Spanish enemies. Though he is so clever and cunning than many other Moors (notably Othello), to the extent that he was on the brink of wreaking havoc on his Spanish enemies, Eleazar is caught at the end of the play in such a naive way it beggars belief.

In Lust’s Dominion, through the medium of irony, the audience and the readership will see two Eleazars: the surface Eleazar and the hidden Eleazar. Eleazar may be compared to the diabolic Iago whose evil schemes led the simple Moor (Othello) to kill his innocent wife (Desdemona). The surface Eleazar is the one seen by many characters in the play, the Queen Maria, or Alvero and the hidden, or the real, Eleazar is detected by some other characters in the play as well as by the audience and readers. The surface Eleazar is present when Eleazar is in a weak position. He has to play the role of a defenceless, hushed Moor who knows his subordinate status in the society in which he lives. Thus, for example, when Alvero comes to enquire about the Queen Mother at the Moor’s court the latter, ironically, replies “The Queen with me, with me a Moor, a Devill/ A slave of Barbary, a dog”. (Act I, i, 151-152) Yet it was the same Eleazar, who rejects the edict of his banishment decreed by Cardinal Mendoza challenging who may ever try to expel him by force, or even spurn him:

Who spurns the Moor,
Do; spurn me! and this confounding arm of wrath
Shal like a thunderbolt breaking the clouds
Divide his body from his soul. Stand back.

(Act II, i, 6-10)
Not so long later, when he kills King Fernando whom he accuses of cuckolding him, Eleazar challenges the Spanish crowd who dare articulate that the traitor Moor, Eleazar, must die for murdering their king:

In his brest
That dares but dart a finger at the Moor,
I’ le bury this Sharp steel yet reeking warm,
With the unchaste blood of that lecher King,
That threw my wife in an untimely grave.

(Act III, ii, 170-174)

Even, when Roderigo asks those Spanish men present to cry treason, Eleazar threatens anyone who would ever dare open his mouth that “He that first opens his lips, I’ le drive his words/ Down his wide throat upon my rapiers point.” (Act III, ii, 180-181) He reminds them that they are now at his castle, with its well-fortified gates and walls, and that his men may murder them all if they kill him, or even if a drop of his blood is spilt. Later, at the end of the play, when the Queen hurries to Eleazar to warn him about the angry mobs who are approaching his castle with some of them shouting “kill the Moor” while others shouting “kill the bastard” advising her lover to escape, Eleazar is confident that he will win the crowd to his side. At the end of the play Eleazar comes to curse everything he may have admired earlier, even his colour. More than once throughout the play Eleazar has shown himself as being proud of his black complexion yet his creator[s] denied him even this tiny privilege. Being the cause of Isabella’a dislike of him, the Moor curses his blackness wishing to have been born white:

… why did this colour,
Dart in my flesh so far? oh! would my face,
Were of Hortenzo’s fashion, else would yours
Were as black as mine is.

(Act V, i, 272-275)

It is of paramount importance to note here that the scenes in which that Eleazar is portrayed in contradictory ways are among the highly doubted ones in the play with the majority of these scenes considered to be of deeply doubted authorship. The two contradictory images of Eleazar as a coward in one scene and a hero challenging all Spaniards in two other scenes, presented in Act I, scene I; Act II, scene I and Act III, scene II are attributed to the collaborative hands responsible for writing the play. The coward, submissive Eleazar is, according to the majority of critics, Dekkerian while the proud, challenging Eleazar is mainly ascribed to Day, or to an unknown author. The weak Eleazar, (seen in Act I, scene I) who dare not walk in the streets of Castile and the
one who denies, when asked by Alvero, that the Queen may be with him in his court: how come that the Queen of Spain keep the company of a Moor, a dog, exclaims Eleazar. This helpless Moor is mainly Dekker’s. This scene is among the fewest number of scenes to be attributed to Dekker by the majority of critics. Thus, Fleay, Brereton and Oliphant took it be thoroughly Dekkerian in tone with only Greg doubting it to be Dekker’s. The defiant, challenging, Moor (seen in Act II, scene II and Act III, scene II), on the other hand, is taken by the majority of critics to be Day’s. Thus, the audacious Moor, presented in Act II, scene I, who challenges Prince Philip, and the Spanish crowd, or anyone who may ‘spurn’ the Moor partially is Dekker’s. Both Fleay and Brereton took this scene to be Dekker’s with Greg doubting it to be his while Oliphant attributed it to a “writer not found elsewhere in the play; apparently an earlier writer.” The defiant Moor (seen in Act III, scene II), who kills King Fernando for allegedly dishonouring the Moor’s wife is not at all Dekker’s. No critic takes it to be written exclusively by Dekker. Fleay ascribed this scene to Day, Brereton took it be written jointly by Dekker and Day with Greg considering it to be of doubted authorship to Day and Oliphant not ascribing it to any one of the four collaborators. Act V, scene I, of controversial authorship as well, represents one and the last inconsistent portrayal of the Moor that contrasts with an earlier one. Early in the play, that is in Act I, scene I, the Moor is presented as proud of his blackness swearing “upon my beauty” (Act I, I, 193) and the one who thanks Providence for making him black, yet he is the same one who comes at the end of the play to curse his fate for being black, and not white, since it was his blackness that stood as an obstacle in his way to marry Isabella, the white Princess. Taking so much pride in his black complexion in the beginning, the Moor has to denounce his blackness wishing to have been born white or Isabella to be as black as him.

When it comes to Eleazar’s religion, I think that he is one of those Moriscos who publicly pronounce Christianity but in his heart of hearts he is keen to do all that he can to avenge himself and his tribe against the Spaniards. Eleazar’s religion signifies one of the contradictions among the many to be found throughout the play. Though he is supposed to be a Muslim, or a Morisco, a Muslim turned Christian in spite of the fact he is seen in most cases as hiding Islam behind his outward Christianity, Eleazar is portrayed as a heathen or the one who worships Indian gods. A Muslim must believe

---

327 For Sha’aban Eleazar is a Muslim (“The Mohammedan world in English Literature”, p. 153) but for Bekkaoui he is a convert Christian who was taken captive by the Spaniards and then christened. (Signs of Spectacular Resistance, pp 80, 92) Taking Eleazar to be a Muslim,
in only One Almighty God but the Elizabethan Eleazar is a Mahometan who worships Mahomet and [more than once] may as well consider some plants, the sun or the moon, to be gods whom he may invoke. No wonder then that Eleazar swears by “heavens great Star, which Indians do adore” (Act III, ii, 244) and by his “all Indian gods” (Act IV, ii, 85) or that he consecrates all his murders and heinous deeds to “Saint Revenge”, not “Sheikh Revenge”, if there are any. Though a Muslim, Eleazar distinguishes himself in fighting against the Turks naming the Turke as a “Pure Divell, and allowes enough to fat/The sides of villainy” (Act I, ii, 176-177) D’Amico’s idea concerning the religion of the Moor is worth quoting here:

Like Aaron, he (Eleazar) is in fact more of the irreligious cynic scoffing at superstition than a follower of Islam…his devilishness is qualified by the play’s strong anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish tone, for if Eleazar is the black devil, he is found in the company of a number of white devils. Even in 1599-1600…an Elizabethan audience might have harbored stronger prejudice against Spanish Catholics than against a Barbarian prince.328

It should be noted here that the two scenes in which the Moor is confused with the Indian, (that is Act III, sc. ii, and Act IV, sc. ii) are among those of doubted authorship to Dekker. Fleay, in this concern, took both scenes to be Day’s, Greg doubted both to be Dekker’s or Day’s, Brereton took Act III, scene II to be written by Dekker or Day and Act IV, scene II to be exclusively Dekker’s while Oliphant did not ascribe both scenes to any one of the four collaborators.329

However, contradictions in Lust’s Dominion are not only related to the representation of Eleazar but touch also the characterization of the two Catholic Friars, Crab and Cole, and the plot itself. In this concern, Bowers noted that there is a sort of duplication regarding the character of the two Friars. The two Friars, hypocritically, speak about Prince Philip in a very bad language. Friar Cole describes him as a “bastard” while Crab calls him a “dastard” and both rank his faction as “how villainous and strong” and “how monstrous and huge!... the faction of Philip is”. (Act III, iii, 51, 56) Moreover, they lie to the Spanish crowd claiming that it was Philip who killed their King, Fernando, describing the new King, the Moorish Eleazar, as a “Noble King,” a

D’Amico argues that the negative representation of the Moor in Lust’s Dominion “owes more to his blackness than to his religion, more to his violently vengeful complexion than to any explicit identification with Islam” though. (The Moor in English Renaissance Drama, p. 107) Tokson, however, argues that blacks, whether Muslim or heathen, were put in one basket: as worshippers of the sun and forces of evil. He states that the idea that the black man “worshipped God through the prophet Mohamed or prayed to the sun and the moon made little difference to men who recognized Christianity as the only possible truth.” (Tokson, The Popular Image of the Black Man, p. 137)

328 D’Amico, The Moor in English Renaissance Drama, p. 107, my parentheses.

“valiant Gentleman” a “fair black gentleman” and an “honourable gentleman”. (Act III, iii, 68-75) At an early stage in the play the Friars agree to spread the news that Prince Philip is a bastard but later it is the same Friars who risk their own life to save the prince and the Cardinal.330

As for the dramatic flaws in the play, Lust’s Dominion suffers from many structural weak spots. The end of the play is not compatible with the beginning or the middle of the play. There are many illogical and abrupt changes in the characterization or in the sequence of events in the play. How the cunning Eleazar came to be snared in the trap he has planned for his opponents, by allowing Philip and Hortenzo, who are in fact disguised as his two attendants (Zarack and Baltazar), to shackle his hands as if they were playing their roles, in his intended play of manacling the Cardinal and Philip, may be taken as illogic end to the play and a dramatic flaw on behalf of its author. What has been said concerning the characters of the two Friars may apply too to Eleazar and Zarack. Ironically enough, it is Zarack, and not Baltazar, who happens to betray his master. It was Baltazar, not Zarack, who hesitated to kill the Friar.

In this regard, Dekker has been criticized as being unable to “put together a plot”.331 One of Dekker’s greatest weaknesses, argues Hunt, is that he “nowhere exhibits skill in the invention of plots”.332 In a period of thirty-four years, Dekker wrote sixty-four plays. From 1598-1602 alone he is known to have written or collaborated in forty-four plays for Henslowe.333

Having stressed these irregularities in the structure of the play or in characterization, I would like to conclude by assessing the status of Eleazar in the play: is he a degraded villain who wanted to wreak havoc on Spain or a victim of the ruthless Spaniards? In other words, is he a villain or a tragic hero? There is a tiny difference between a villain and a tragic hero. Though both may commit many heinous crimes or be involved in illegal acts, the first commits a crime out of ambition while the other does it out of revenge. A villain, more often than not, is a Machiavellian.334 Eleazar was taken captive by the Spaniards who killed his father, King of Barbary, and brought him as a slave to Spain. He was brought on Spanish soil and excelled in his war with the Spaniards waged against the Turks. He, then, was ranked as a fit match to one of the girls of a high-class

333 Brereton described Dekker as one of the active providers of Henslowe. (p. xxi)

91
Spanish family. Yet, he was not to be an equal to a native Spaniard. As soon as the old King Philip dies, Cardinal Mendoza issues a decree to banish Eleazar to beg with Indian slaves. The Moor now thinks seriously of taking his revenge against those who offended him; rather against proud Spain itself. He wants to avenge himself against Prince Philip because he humiliated him, against the Cardinal because he ordered his banishment from Spain and against the Nobles of Spain because they agreed to the Cardinal’s edict to banish him. So, Eleazar decides to spare no one:

By one, and one, I’ le ship you all to hell.
Spain I will drown thee with thine own proud blood,
Then make an ark of carcasses: farwell;
Revenge and I will sail in a blood to hell.
(Act II, iii, 189-192)

He will not be satisfied unless Spain is destroyed “The Moor cries blood and fire, and that shall burn/ Till Castile like proud Troy to Cinders turn”. (Act III, ii, 216-217) In effecting his revenge against Spain and the Spaniards, Eleazar kills King Fernando, orders the murder of the two Friars, manages to have Prince Philip named as a bastard. He was about to get rid of the Queen Mother, the Cardinal and Philip in one shot. He was only one step further from securing the royal throne of Spain for himself and forever. Had only Isabella accepted his offer of marriage, or had not he been betrayed by one of his henchmen, Zarack, Eleazar might have had his revenge full against his oppressors. But, Eleazar, as a damned Moor, was not expected to prosper on European soil let alone overcome his, superior, European counterparts. As all the other Moorish characters in Elizabethan drama, and after, the Moor has to fail, in a humiliating way, at the end of his encounter with Europeans: being killed, committing suicide, or being converted to the true religion, Christianity.

Is Eleazar, then, a villain or a victim of Spanish injustice? For Boyer, and D’Amico, just to give some examples, Eleazar is a villain. Yet, D’Amico argues that Eleazar is no more villain than, for example, the Spanish Cardinal. Bekkaoui, on the other hand, takes Eleazar to be a victim of his Spanish oppressors. Eleazar, Bekkaoui goes on, is not a devil “by nature as by necessity”. Despite his villainy, criminality and inhumanity, Bekkaoui still could see good sides in Eleazar. Comparing him to the Spaniard characters in the play, Bekkaoui even ranks Eleazar as being “far more benevolent” than his Spanish counterparts. The evidence Bekkaoui introduces to support his idea is that

335 Ibid, p. 111.
336 Bekkaoui, Signs of Speculative Resistance, pp 82-83.
337 Ibid, p. 89.
Eleazar, first, was horrified to hear the news that the Queen will not hesitate to kill her son should he act as an obstacle to her love for him. Secondly, Eleazar refuses to fight Philip when the latter had his sword broken. When the chance comes to Eleazar to fight Philip with his broken sword he refuses to do so on the ground that it is not chivalrous of a Moorish Prince to fight a man with a broken sword. It would be illuminating, Bekkaoui concludes, to “stress while the Moor refuses to strike Philip since he is disarmed, when Philip is offered the opportunity, he murders Eleazar who is not only disarmed but actually in chains…he does seem to be less cruel than the Spaniards”. In both cases, Bekkaoui takes Eleazar’s words to be true and his intentions to be above suspicion; something I went against earlier in my argument.

Though Boyer argues that the Aaron type in Lust’s Dominion, that is Eleazar, is “pushed forward as a protagonist” he does not take him to be a tragic hero. Bekkaoui may be the only critic to have argued that Eleazar may rise to the status of a tragic hero. For Bekkaoui, Eleazar challenges the stereotyped image of Moors. He succeeds, though he is killed at the end, in taking his revenge against his oppressors and manages to take control of the scene in Spain for a time. What is more is that Eleazar, from Bekkaoui’s point of view, though committing many crimes he is not immersed into evil and he can control the degree of his immersion in evil. Eleazar, argues Bekkaoui, “definitely remains self-conscious and totally in control of the demonic forces he has set loose. Eleazar is ironically detached from evil.”

Much of Bekkaoui’s criticism on Eleazar sounds general and, to an extent, one-sided. He takes Eleazar’s words on their face value while, in fact, these, I presume, should be interpreted according to their dramatic context. Thus, for example, it would be rather naïve if one, as I have argued earlier, were to think that Eleazar was horrified to hear the news that the Queen Mother agreed to kill her son for his sake or that he declined to fight Prince Philip because the latter had a broken sword; simply because this contradicts the course of the play and the scenario set by Eleazar to avenge himself against all that is Spanish. The prudent reader can detect a lot of irony in Eleazar’s words.

Combined with an anti-Moorish element in Lust’s Dominion there is, however, a stark anti-Spanish sentiment felt throughout the play. Thus the author[s] of Lust’s Dominion, if one can say so, hit two birds, rather two ravens, the Spanish and the Moors, with one stone, a play. It was expected, one may presume, that such a play condemning both parties would appeal to the Elizabethan audience. Though the relationship between

---

341 See Boyer, The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 109.
343 Bekkaoui, Signs of Speculative Resistance, p. 90.
England and Morocco at that time was at its peak with proposals of invading Spain or attacking Spanish strongholds throughout the Atlantic being discussed, and merchants moving to and from Morocco, yet the majority of the English people, very clearly, did not tolerate the Moors whom they took to be infidels, or at best, heretics and enemies of Christ. Receiving gifts from Morocco or the Ottoman Empire, be it a Barbary horse, a scimitar, a sword, or Turkish carpets, or sending presents to the Turkish Sultan or the Moroccan king, an Organ, fine English cloth, or a watch did not mean that the Queen liked the king of Morocco or the Sultan of the Turks in spite of the fact that she was accused by her European adversaries, especially the Pope in Rome, of being a ‘confederate’ with the Turks against her brethren Christians. It may be convenient here, in this regard, to tell the story of Sir Henry Lello, the Queen’s ambassador to the Great Turk in Constantinople, and Thomas Dallam who was sent by the Queen to present a gift, an organ, to the Sultan. Sir Henry Lello’s advice to Dallam was:

Yow ar [sic] come hether wythe a presente from our gratious Quene, not to an ordenarie prince or kinge, but to a mightie monarke of the world, but better had it bene for yow yf had bene sente to any Christian prince, for then should yow have bene sure to have recaved for yor paines a greate rewarde; but yow must consider what he is unto whom yow have broughte this presente, a monarke but an infidell, and the grande Enemye to all Christians. What we or any other Christians can bring unto him he dothe thinke that we do it in dutie in feare of him, or in hope of som greate favoue we expeckte at his hands.

Queen Elizabeth herself would have preferred to ally with Christian allies than with the Turks or the Moors but she had been obliged, by the pressure from the Spaniards and the French, to opt for the latter. When asked to support the Christian alliance against the Turks, Queen Elizabeth was reported to have told the French ambassador that the best way to defeat the Turks is that all European princes would forget their religious differences and unite with one another “not to make a league against him [the Turk] in appearance only” while in fact plotting against and doing harm to one another.

To conclude here, I would like to state that that Lust's Dominion is a true manifestation of the political Elizabethan agenda and the way the Elizabethans used to think of the ‘others’. In other words, the anti-Moorish element in the play is coupled with an anti-Spanish one. The English, as Hunter notes, thought of themselves as superior not only to the blacks, Negroes, Moors, but also to many of their fellow Europeans: the French, the Dutch, or the Italians. This sense of superiority was reflected

344 Matur, Turks, Moors, and Englishmen, p. 20.
345 Cited in Sha’ban, “The Mohammedan world in English literature”, pp 39-40, parentheses mine. This is the opinion of the English ambassador to the Turkish Sultan. I think it is not so difficult, then, to guess what would the opinion of the majority of the public.
346 Cited in Sha’ban, “The Mohammedan World in English Literature”, p. 29, my parentheses.
in many plays written during the period. *The Life and Death of Captain Jack Straw* (1593?), *Sir Thomas More* (1596?), or *Englishmen for my money: or a woman will have her will* (1598) are given by Hunter as examples of this sense of supremacy over the others.347

**The reception of Lust’s Dominion in the Arab world**

As for the reception of *Lust’s Dominion* in the Arab world, the play deals with a topic that touches chords with Arab readers: the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula from the early eighth till the early seventeenth century; the legendary triumph of Tariq Ibn Ziad and his forces over the Gothic kings in 711 and the humiliating defeat and surrender of Boabdil (the last Muslim ruler of Andalusia) in 1492. There is a huge literature on the Muslim presence in Spain and Portugal by Arab and Andalusian historians yet *Lust’s Dominion* has only begun to receive due attention of Arab scholars.348 Most recently the play has been edited by an Arab scholar.349 Though Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* has been translated into Arabic since as early as the 1980s, I am not aware of any Arabic translation of *Lust’s Dominion*.350 Dekker’s comedy, *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, received a considerable attention in Ali Ahmed Mahmoud’s survey of the renowned English dramatists. The worth of *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* was a full-length chapter in which the author studied the play in relation to the political and literary givens of its time.351 *Lust’s Dominion* has been at the centre of attention of many Arab scholars who included, among many, Khalid Bekkaoui, Karim Bejjit, and Khalid Marouch. Bekkaoui has been writing intensively on the relationship between Britain and Morocco, Orientalism and Post-Colonialism and the image of Moors and Arabs in English literature. Bekkaoui has produced the most intensive and thorough study that has ever been written on the play. He studied the play in the light of Orientalism and Post-Colonialism. Bekkaoui’s reading of *Lust’s Dominion* sometimes endorses Edward

347 Hunter, “‘Elizabethans and Foreigners”’ p. 43. See also Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners*, p. 49.

348 Primary sources on the history of Moors in Andalusia and their expulsion from the whole Iberian Peninsula by 1610 are too many to be counted here. The most prominent among these include: Al-Maqqari, *Naṭḥ al-Tib min Ghūsn Al-Andalus Al-Raṭḥib* and *Azhūr Al-Riyyāḍ fi Akhbār ‘Iyaḍ*; Ibn Iyas, *Bada‘< Al-Zūḥūr fi waqa‘< Al-Dūḥūr* and *<Anān, Nihayāt Al-Andalus wa Tārīkh al-<Arab Al-Mūtansrîn.*

349 Khalid Bekkaoui (ed.), *Lust’s Dominion.*

350 *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* was translated into Arabic by Khalid Hasabrabū in 1986. (Khalid Hasabrabū (trans.), *<Ūltat Al-‘Iskāfī [The Shoemaker’s Holiday]* Al-Masraḥ al-‘Alāmī Series, issue 205 (Kuwait: Ministry of Information, 1986).

Said’s Orientalism and at other times opposes it. For Bekkaoui, “racial stereotyping” is strongly felt throughout the play.\textsuperscript{352}

Eleazar, the villain in \textit{Lust’s Dominion} is an extension of the Moorish villains that appeared earlier on the London stage i.e. Muly [Ma]Hamet and Aaron.\textsuperscript{353} Bekkaoui, moreover, has found an analogy between what was going on in Spain and what the author wanted to say to his audience: that the Moors are the cause of the plight of Spain, draining the revenues of the country, and that this is what they are doing here in England.\textsuperscript{354} Dekker, argues Bekkaoui, wrote \textit{Lust’s Dominion} to endorse the expulsion of the Moors from England, as well as from Spain. Coincidently, it was only two years later that Queen Elizabeth issued a decree ordering that all blackamoors and Negroes should be expelled from her realm.\textsuperscript{355} Strange enough is the idea proposed by Bekkaoui in which he claims that the Queen had done so to encourage the Spanish Inquisitor to go ahead with the expulsion of the Moors from Spain. What one can say here is that, keeping the political givens of the period in mind, Queen Elizabeth would not spare a chance to upset the Spanish King[s] let alone aiding him [in case she could].

\textbf{Conclusion}

What I propose in this chapter is that the representation of Moorish characters, mainly Eleazar, in \textit{Lust’s Dominion} is different from all the other plays examined in this thesis. Though agreeing that the image of the Moor in \textit{Lust’s Dominion} is not a sympathetic one, I have argued that it should be viewed in accordance with the image of any of England’s ‘Others’, Spanish, French, Turks, or even Irish or English dissidents. In this chapter, I argued that the Moors were not in a worse position than the Spaniards or the French. Rather, they were in many cases in far better stance than other ‘strangers,’ ‘aliens,’ or ‘foreigners’ of Elizabethan England. The friendly relations between England and Barbary in the Elizabethan age seem to have resulted in a positive influence concerning the representation of Moorish characters on the London theatre. Writing on the relationship between England and Barbary during the Elizabethan age, D’Amico argues that though the commercial and diplomatic ties between the two countries “could not wash the Moor white, they might make him look better than a Spaniard”. Only a few years after the death of Queen Elizabeth of England and King Ahmed al-Mansour of Barbary, the picture of the Moor, as we will see in chapter three, came to blur.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bekkaoui (ed.), \textit{Lust’s Dominion}.
\item Bekkaoui, \textit{Signs of Spectacular Resistance}, p. 78.
\item Khalid Bekkaoui (ed.), \textit{Lust’s Dominion}, p. 19.
\item Bekkaoui, \textit{Signs of Speculative Resistance}, pp 78-81.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
In Lust’s Dominion, the Moors are as bad as their fellow Spaniards. Eleazar commits horrible crimes against Spain in an attempt to avenge himself and his father whom the Spaniards had killed. Zarack and Baltazar help Eleazar take his revenge but later Zarack betrays his master killing his Moorish mate, Baltazar, instead of killing Philip and Hortenzo. The Spaniards, in turn, are no less dreadful than the Moors. The Queen Mother of Spain is involved in an illicit relationship with the Moor. She leaves her husband, the King of Spain, in his death-bed to go to the Moor to steal some moments of forbidden pleasure with him. She accepts, moreover, to kill her own son to pave the way for the very same Moor to ascend the royal throne of Spain. King Fernando lusts after the wife of the Moor. Fernando knew that the Moor had an unholy liaison with his mother, the Queen of Spain, but he ignores that so as long as it would help him get closer to the one he loved, Maria. All the Catholic Spanish religious men, the Cardinal and the two Friars, act improperly throughout the play. The Cardinal is in love with the Queen Mother, so he does not hesitate to join the the Moor, who was set against Prince Philip, upon the request of the Queen.

In a nutshell, Eleazar is just as wicked as any other Spanish character in the play, except Maria, Alvero and, to an extent, Hortenzo. Even Isabella is not sublime in that she used a despicable trick, using her beauty to tempt Zarack, the Moor, to set her Hortenzo, and her brother, Prince Philip, free. It may be of importance here to note that when Isabella asked the Moor to save her lover and her brother the lover came first. Her heartfelt demand was “Set my Hortenzo free/ And I’ le like anything.” (Act V, ii, 88-89) Eleazar is as vile and lustful as the Queen of Spain who left her husband on his deathbed and came to the Moor to steal some moments of illicit pleasure. The Queen is ready to forfeit everything Spanish for “one sweet kisse” from her Moor. (Act I, i, 33) He is as treacherous as the young King Fernando, Cardinal Mendoza or the two Friars who agree to pronounce Prince Philip as a bastard son of the late King Philip.
Chapter 3

THE DEVIL MOOR AND THE NOBLE MOOR IN THE FAIR MAID OF THE WEST

This chapter is concerned with the image of Moors in Thomas Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West*, Part I and Part II. Part I was written sometime between 1590s and 1610s while Part II was written in the early 1630s.\(^{356}\) The historical and political background of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries seems to have a considerable effect on the way Heywood presented his Moors. This will be illustrated at an early stage in this chapter. Joseph Courtland has undertaken a cultural study of *The Fair Maid of the West*. Courtland’s study, unfortunately, covers only Part I. Courtland studies the play in relation to the historical and political givens of the 1600s, focusing on the trade crisis that hit England in 1600s and the then sustained alliance between England and Morocco starting in 1590s and the 1600s. When it comes to the cultural element in *The Fair Maid of the West*, Courtland argues that the play reflects a colonial element; “colonial other and heroic self”.\(^{357}\) Most recently, Claire Jowitt examined the play in her study on travel drama in the Elizabethan period.\(^{358}\) Jowitt argues that that play (in the light of its allegorical connotations) is a representation of the impact of the rule of a female monarch on the project of “empire”.\(^{359}\) For Jowitt, Heywood meant via the medium of allegory to portray Bess Bridges as representing Queen Elizabeth.

In my reading of the play, I will be referring to the historical relationship of the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth centuries. In this regard, I will concentrate on the piratical acts that the Moorish pirates inflicted on British home water and mainland and the counter attacks waged by British pirates under the rule of James I and Charles I. I will be arguing that a change in the tone of the relationship between England and Morocco was reflected in and Part I and Part II of the play. To argue that Heywood had intentionally changed his point of view when it comes to representing the Moors, I would be stating that a two-decade (or more) gap between the writing of the first and the second part had an effect on the making of the play.

Then, I will be probing the potential sources that Heywood might have consulted or have come across when writing the play. In this regard, I will be referring to the fact that

---

\(^{356}\) This will be discussed in some detail in the section on authorship.


\(^{358}\) Claire Jowitt, *Voyage Drama and Gender Politics, 1589-1642, Real and Imaginative Worlds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

\(^{359}\) Ibid, p. 8.
Heywood might have had access to some specific travel accounts that gave him the clues from which he got the story of the play.

The image of Moors in *The Fair Maid of the West* in the first and in the second parts of the play are divergent and, sometimes, contradictory. I would be arguing in this regard that the change in the political atmosphere between England and Morocco (and the Muslim world in general) from friendship to animosity has taken its toll on the way Heywood represented his Moors in the first and the second part of his play. What this chapter would manifest is that Heywood, like many of his contemporaries, abided by the political givens of his time when writing the first part, before 1603, and the second part, in the 1630s. The Moors that Heywood introduces to his readers and audience in the first and second part are different and the tone the play adopts is not identical in the two parts. In Part I, the Moors are real people of flesh and blood while, on the other hand, the Moors in the second part are villains rather than ordinary human beings. In Part I, the play ends with the Moorish King Mullisheg behaving in a favourable and benevolent manner but in Part II he closes his eyes to a promise he took earlier not to mistreat the English.

Among other themes, the play tells of the victory of English gallantry against Moorish and Spanish treachery and cowardice and the triumph of English Protestantism against ‘heathenish’ Mohammetanism and ‘idolatrous’ Catholicism. The heroine of the play is a virgin who is set by the author as a shining example of the Queen of England and is given her nickname, Bess. The brave young Bess manages to fool the cunning King of Barbary while Spencer, her lover, teaches his countrymen lessons in bravery and adherence to one’s values. No wonder then that Spencer’s acts inspire the Moorish Caid to convert to Christianity.

The importance of including *The Fair Maid of the West* in this study lies in the fact that it is among the few plays written in the Elizabethan period that juxtaposes England rather than Spain, Venice, or Malta, with Barbary. Many Elizabethan playwrights who portrayed Moors in their dramas (or Africans in general) more often than not had other European or African cities as settings for their plays. The reason was that England, compared to many other European countries, had little to do with Barbary though the English had close commercial and political relations with the kingdoms of Morocco and Fez in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and that Britons suffered a lot from Moorish piracy from the late sixteenth century to the beginnings of the eighteenth century. Unlike England, Spain, for example, was occupied by the Moors for nearly eight centuries while many other European countries, Italy, Portugal, or France, in particular those nearer to the Atlantic, were haunted by the spectre of Barbary, and
Turkish, corsairs highly active in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. No wonder, then, that Barbary, Malta, Spain, or Greece served as optimal settings for plays such as The Battle of Alcazar, The Jew of Malta, Lust’s Dominion, and Othello.

In relation to the image of the Moor in Elizabethan drama, the first two chapters did not have so much to do with Englishmen and England, simply because those Europeans whom these plays presented as having rounds with the Moors were mainly Portuguese, in the first chapter, Spaniards, in the second chapter, and Venetians, in the fourth chapter. Those few English nationals who joined Sebastian, the young King of Portugal, in his bid to aid Mulai Mohammed el-Sheikh, the debauched King of Fez at the battle of Alcazar el-Kebir, were neither sent nor supported by the Queen of England. The most prominent figure among those English bands of soldiers who joined Sebastian, Captain Thomas Stuckley, was a notorious Catholic dissident rather than a loyal, Protestant, subject of the Queen. Back in England, his fellowmen might have viewed his downfall in the hot desert of Africa as a punishment from God for the disobedience and disloyalty he had shown against the Queen and for his endeavour to join and aid the Irish rebels’ revolt against the Queen.360

This chapter assumes that Heywood’s upbringing in the house of a clergyman had an effect on his writings. Thomas Heywood was born in/or around 1573 in Lincolnshire. His father was a “rector” in a local church.361 Heywood seems to have had strong beliefs in his Englishness and Christianity.362 A patriotic and a moralist tone is felt in Heywood’s writings. This is clearly manifested in The Fair Maid of the West where English values and morals, such as bravery, forgiveness, and chastity, win over Moorish or Spanish villainy, lewdness, and cowardice.363 No wonder then that Heywood is described by

360 The story of the battle of al-Kasr al-Kabīr has been discussed in detail in chapter 1.
363 Heywood shows interest in the idea of Christian ‘forgiveness’, compared to the mercilessness of others, in many of his works. In King Edward IV, Parts I and II, and in A Woman Killed with Kindness, for example, a husband’s forgiveness wins over revenge. In King Edward, Part I, King Edward mingles in disguise with the folk and manages to win Jane Shore, a goldsmith’s wife, for a mistress. In Part II, after the death of King Edward, the new King, Richard III, does not give the kind of attention Jane used to get from the late King. By the end of the play, Mathew, Jane’s husband, forgives her, and so does Elizabeth, Edward’s widow. In A Woman Killed with Kindness, Anne Acton, who is married to John Frankford, betrays her husband with his best friend, Wendoll. The deceived husband discovers the illegal affair between his close friend and wife and banishes her instead of killing her or taking revenge against her. Anne, realizing her horrible mistake against her loyal husband, starves herself to death. On her deathbed, to her condolence, the erring wife is lucky enough to receive her husband’s forgiveness.
Mowbray Velte as a ‘moralist’. Through his plays, as Velte noted, the “frank, kindly, patriotic and religious nature of the man [Heywood] is revealed”. The Fair Maid of the West, the play to be discussed in this chapter, has been counted by D’Amico as a “standard variation in the anti-Islamic polemic.” In plays as well as in pageants Heywood stood firm in his support of his Queen and country. He confirms his sense of pride in his countrymen and religious beliefs. In The Fair Maid of the West, as well as in If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Heywood shows a fascination with Queen Elizabeth. The heroine of The Fair Maid of the West is meant by Heywood to act as a kind of “diplomatic representative of the English queen whose nameshe bears.”

Heywood, regretfully, has never been taken seriously and his works have seldom received the sort of attention that has been given to many of his contemporaries. The majority of critics who have written on Elizabethan drama have little, or nothing, to say about Heywood or his works. What is more, in spite the fact that many of Heywood’s writings had a lot to do with pirates and sailors, Harold Watson, did not take any of Heywood’s works to be of sufficient quality to be included in his book on sailors and English literature. Watson reluctantly endorsed Heywood’s Fortune by Land and Sea, in his study yet not for its merit but, as he put it, because it “does very poorly what The Tempest does well.” The worth of The Fair Maid in Watson’s study was just a footnote at the very end of chapter IV. This footnote reads as follows: Heywood’s The Fair Maid of the West should perhaps be mentioned in a chapter on Elizabethan nautical drama, since it contains mariners and scenes at sea. Save for one command, “Board! Board! Amain for England” IV, iv, the presentation is entirely colorless.” It may not be partial to argue that Watson was unfair in neglecting Heywood’s works that deal with the sea

365 Ibid, p. 13, my brackets.
366 D’Amico, The Moor in English Renaissance Drama, p.81
367 One example that combines all of these is If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Parts I and II, where Heywood stoutly defends Queen Elizabeth and praises her victory over the Spaniards in the Armada.
370 Watson, The Sailor in English Fiction and Drama, p. 74. Watson divided the plays dealing with sailors and the sea into two main categories: The Tempest school (those plays that resemble The Tempest in the representation of sailors) and the humorous school (those plays that resemble the sailor represented in Ben Jonson’s drama), pp 70-71.
371 Watson, The Sailor in English Fiction and Drama, pp 97 & 212
and seamen even though they are of an inferior quality. This study, on the other hand, will discuss what other critics did not, or declined to, discuss. More emphasis will be given, as is the case with earlier chapters, to the historical and cultural backgrounds and how these are manifested in the play.

The play starts with two captains from Plymouth who are reflecting on the destination of, and motive behind, an eminent sea voyage. The two captains agree to have their dinner, and drinks, at a local tavern owned by a beautiful ‘wench’ by the name of Bess Bridges. Meanwhile, Spencer, a well-off merchant, comes along with Goodlack, his friend. The two captains insist on being served by Bess and Spencer, her lover, asks them to behave and to act like gentlemen. A quarrel ensues in which Spencer kills one of the two captains, Carrol. Spencer escapes for his life but not before managing to secure a farewell meeting with his beloved Bess.

At Fayal, mediating between two quarreling captains Spencer is seriously injured. Unable to join the English crew who are to leave shortly for England, Spencer commands Goodlack to carry his ‘will’ in which he bestowed five hundred pounds a year on Bess on condition that she is proved faithful to her Spencer and has not turned a whore. If she is involved in a relation with any other man she forfeits her legacy from Spencer and loses all the money and wealth promised in his will. Just before sailing to England, the English receive the news that one ‘Spencer’ has recently died of a mortal wound and the English take him to be their ‘Spencer’. To his good luck, a local surgeon manages to dress his wound and Spencer’s life is saved. Spencer, though frail, wishes that he would be able to travel to England to be nearer to his Bess and his saviour surgeon councils him and tells him of a ship heading for ‘Mamorah’ in Barbary where it will be easier for him to take another ship to England.

Back home, Goodlack brings the news to Bess that Spencer is dead. Putting Bess to the toughest, and vilest, exams Bess proves herself honest, chaste and faithful to her lover and as a result is entitled to get her annual allowance set in Spencer’s will. Instead of buying jewelry, luxurious dress, or building a house for herself, Bess decides to use Spencer’s (and hers) money to prepare a ship in which she will go to Fayal to bring the body of her dead lover to give it a ‘decent’ burial. In tally with the sad mode and the motive of the journey, Bess orders her men to have the ship painted all in ‘black’ and gives it the ‘Negro’ as its name. Disguised as a sea Captain, Bess Bridges, joined by Goodlack, Roughman, Clem, and others sail to Fayal with the aim of recovering the body of her lover. They meet Spanish corsairs whom they fight and take many of them as prisoners. Among those Bess sees at Fayal are an English merchant and her Spencer whom she takes to be the ghost of her late lover. She faints and hence is separated once
more from her lover but not before promising the ghost to take revenge for him. Spencer and his company take the ship to Mamorah so that he would be in a position to join the earliest trip to England. Due to lack of water and victuals, Bess and her crew have to sail to Mamorah too. Before reaching the shore, the English are spotted by the Moors who report to their King the arrival of a beautiful English girl whose beauty they have never seen before.

The King of Fez, Mullisheg, entertains his guests and he instantly falls in love with the English maid; Bess Bridges. He offers her half of his kingdom should she agree to marry him but the young English girl politely asks the Moorish King not to approach her unless she invites him to do so. She asks the King to provide her ‘marines’ with the water and the victuals they need, and he does. At the court of Mullisheg, Bess meets some European captives, an Italian (Florentine) merchant and a French merchant, and a ‘Christian’ preacher, who ask Bess to entreat Mullisheg to release them and she (with one kiss or more to the Moorish ruler) manages to get the job done. At this point, Spencer enters at the court of Mullisheg. Bess asks Mullisheg to show her English comrades a favour and he offers to take the noblest among them, Spencer, as a ‘chief eunuch’. Bess, and Spencer, declines the generous offer but Clem, the lightest among his fellows, accepts it and hence he tastes the barber’s razor, i. e., is castrated. Mullisheg is made aware of the love story between Bess and Spencer and he acts in a noble way declaring that he will suppress his ‘wanton’ love for Bess. He blesses the match and sends the English couple back home with heaps of gold as their marriage gifts.

Part II begins with the Queen of Fez, Tota, who expresses her intention to avenge herself against her husband whom she accuses of deserting her for his love of the English Bess. Tota approaches Roughman and asks him to secure an intimate meeting with the English Spencer promising him bounteous rewards should he succeed. Mullisheg, on the other hand, whose love for Bess grows uncontrollable, asks Goodlack to arrange a private meeting with Bess promising the highest rewards on completion of his mission. Roughman and Goodlack meet and confess to each other about the scheming Moorish partners and they agree to fool the two Moorish lovers to sleep with one another instead of sleeping with Bess and Spencer. Busy in what they take to be their finest marital intercourse ever, the English fool the Moors and escape their Moorish captors. Bess, Goodlack, Roughman, and Clem, manage to go the boat while Spencer is caught by the Moorish guards but not before killing many of them. The Viceroy of the King of Fez, Joffer basha, is affected by Spencer’s gallantry and when the latter asks him just to let him go the ship to tell his wife that he cannot join them in their journey back home because he promised to meet her there, the Moorish Cade is moved by his story
and allows him to go. Though disapproved by all his English comrades, Spencer decides to go back to Fez to fulfill his promise to the Moor. Just before the beheading of Joffer by the Moors, Spencer, to the astonishment of the Moors, appears and rescues Joffer from death. Mullisheg asks Spencer to send to his fellows on board the Negro to come back and surrender themselves otherwise he will have him killed but Spencer challenges the Moorish King and refuses to succumb to his threats. In the meantime, Bess and the rest of the English crew enter and Bess asks Mullisheg to kill her for Spencer. Goodlack, Roughman, and Clem do the same. Spencer tells Mullisheg to take his own life if he should and to let Bess and her comrades leave safely to England. Moved by this unprecedented sort of self-sacrifice shown by the English, Mullisheg declares that the virtues of these Englishmen have suppressed lust and evil in him. He forgives Spencer and sets the English free and never forgets to load them with bounteous gifts.

This could be the end of the play but Heywood chooses to introduce his audiences to more and more adventures where their fellows score victory after victory against the Moors, Spaniards, the French or the Italians. On their way back to England, Bess, Spencer, Goodlack, and Clem, fight French, Spaniard and Italian pirates and take many of them captive. Due to foul weather, the Negro is shipwrecked and the English crew are dispersed along the Italian coast. It happens that Spencer finds shelter in the county of the Marquis of Ferrara whom Bess released earlier from the bondage in Barbary while Goodlack seeks refuge in the county of the Marquis of Manuta who too was set free by the Moorish King upon intercession from Bess. Bess, Roughman, and Clem, on the other hand, are driven to Florence. Two Italian bandits are impressed by the beauty of Bess and try to ravish her. Defending her, Roughman is hurt and Bess is saved by the Duke of Florence. A merchant in the train of the Duke of Florence happens to be none but rather the miserable Florentine merchant whom Bess saved in Fez by appealing to Mullisheg to release him and let him go back to his country. The merchant identifies his rescuer and introduces her to the Duke of Florence who is enthralled by the beauty and heroic deeds of Bess. Meanwhile, to help the dispersed English unite again, the news come to the duke that the Marquis of Ferrara and the marquis of Manuta offer themselves to be in league with the Duke of Florence. To the astonishment of all, Ferrara and Manuta enter joined by Spencer and Goodlack. Bess, who mistakes Spencer at Fayal to be none but his ghost; who fails to recognize him from the moment she sees him at the court of Mullisheg, spots Spencer among a crowd and casts him a ‘jewel’. The Duke of Florence, who falls in love with Bess, asks Spencer to read a love letter the former has written to

---

The ‘jealous’ Duke asks Spencer just to read his words and not to act in a partial way: neither to touch nor to smile at the addressee. Spencer, who did not expect the one whom the Duke of Florence has fallen in love with to be Bess, reads the love letter on the way he is instructed by the Duke. Though he realizes that the one to whom he is reading the love letter to be none but his Bess, Spencer honours the pledge he has given to the Duke and does the job without a blemish. Offended by what she takes to be Spencer’s ingratitude, Bess decides, for the time being, to take her, and all women’s, revenge. She swoons yet Spencer is not affected and, honouring his pledge, does not touch her though. A merchant brings the news to the Duke of Florence that the Moorish pirates, under the conduct of some ‘brave’ fighter, Joffer, have lately attacked Italian ships. The Italians dispatch certain Pedro Deventuro to fight the Moors back. The Italians win a decisive victory against the Moors and take many of them captive. Amongst those captured Joffer basha is the most prominent. For no obvious reason, even before being identified by Bess or Spencer, the Duke of Florence orders his officers to use Joffer “like the noblest of his nation.” When Joffer is ushered in so that the Duke of Florence would decide his fate, Spencer, Bess, Goodlack, Roughman, the Italian merchants, recognize the Moorish caid to be their savior in Barbary and Spencer offers to sell himself, his friends or fortunes, to release the ‘noble’ Moor from captivity. Touched by the noble doing of Spencer and his comrades, Joffer decides to convert to Christianity and asks them to accept him as a ‘brother’. Florence blesses the marriage of Bess and Spencer and, like the Moorish King, the Florentine ruler sends them back to England with many bountiful gifts.

I: Historical background

Put in its historical and political context, The Fair Maid of the West, from a New Historicist point of view, may be discussed in relation to themes of piracy, captivity narrative, colonialism, or conversion. The story of the heroine of the play, Bess Bridges, is the story of the then budding English travel experience all over the world and the beginning of a new colonial era. Through the heroic deeds of Bess (the daring young girl) and Spencer (the brave rich merchant) the English rival the Spaniards, the French, and the Moors, in terms of sea-power and priveteering, and they end up triumphant against all of them. Typically, the play begins with two English captains speaking about an eminent sea voyage; its destination and purpose with the 2nd Captain affirming that the fleet is “bound for the Islands”. Historically, the Moors were involved in a series of
piratical attacks, and reprisals, against many European fleets, ports, or towns, especially Spanish and Portuguese ships where the Salee corsairs, the majority of whom were Moriscos whom the Spaniards and the Portuguese had expelled from Andalusia. While the Moors of Morocco or Fez had signed agreements with England not to capture English travelers or merchants to sell them as slaves, the Salee corsairs were still active in capturing as many Britons, and Europeans, not only in local home waters but also in the British seas and mainland. Travelers, and historians, who lived at that time speak of Algiers, and Barbary in general, as the “throne” of piracy and the “nest” of the devils. Vulnerability to captivity in Barbary, as Linda Colley noted, was in seventeenth century England a “nationwide concern”. Professor Colley goes further claiming that Moorish piratical attacks against British cities, towns, and ports were among the factors that led to the civil war in Britain in 1642. Still, as late as 1729, a British envoy was commissioned to travel to Barbary to negotiate the release of his “Majesty’s subjects unjustly taken and detained in slavery”.

It should be noted here that the amicable relationship between England and the Barbary States during the Elizabethan age helped reduce the amount and ferocity of the piratical attacks leveled by the Moors against England. Ambassadors sent by the Queen of England to the Kings of Morocco and Fez, or Algiers, more often than not managed to secure the release of many a hundred of fellow English captives held in Barbary. By the death of Queen Elizabeth and Ahmed al-Mansour, and the arrival of James I and Mulai Zidan to power in England and Morocco, the number of those English people taken captive by the Moors was on the increase year after year. James I adopted a policy completely different from his predecessor, the late Queen Elizabeth, when it came to the relationship between Britain and the Muslim world in general.

373 Moorish pirates were known in the Arab world as “ghuzat Al-Bahr Al-Andalausiyin”. They appeared on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic shores as early as the ninth century when they used to attack the Byzantine posts along the Mediterranean sea. After their raids, they would come shore to Alexandria in Egypt to sell their spoils to the locals. (Aḥmad ʿAbd el-Laṭif Ḥanāfī, *Al-Magharibībāh Al-Andālūsīyyīn* [Moroccan Andalusians], vol. 1 (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-ʿāmāh Li al-Kitāb, 2005), pp 7 & 86.

374 See, for example, Purchas, *His Pilgrimes*, vol. II, pp. 114 & 505.

375 Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 63. (Henceforth referred to as Captives) Peter Lewis takes the number of British captives in Barbary by 1640 to be three thousand prisoners. Lewis compares Mulai Ismail’s brutal rule, the Moroccan King under whose rule Moorish attacks against Europe reached unprecedented level, to that of Saddam Hussein. (Peter Lewis: “Cornish Slaves of the Sultan” *Daily Mirror*, July 2, 2004, p. 58)

376 Colley, *Captives*, p. 50; see also Matar, *Britain and Barbary*, p. 8 & 112.

377 Colley, *Captives*, p. 64.

378 Colley put the number of British captives in Barbary between 1600s-1640s at 12,000. (*Captives*, p. 44) Britons, argues Colley, were at more risk of being taken captive by Muslim pirates than the other way round. (p. 103)

379 This has been discussed earlier in detail in text.
To deter the Moors from attacking British ports, and as a sort of punishment for earlier assaults, British expeditions were sent one after the other to Barbary.\textsuperscript{380} The Mansel expedition, for example, was dispatched in the early 1620s. Finding it difficult, however, to deter the Barbary corsairs only via military means, the British side opted for diplomacy and the result was that a British Ambassador was dispatched to Algiers shortly after the return of Mansel and his train. The Ambassador managed to secure the release of scores of British prisoners from captivity in Barbary.\textsuperscript{381}

However, this did not mean the end of piratical attacks by, or against, the Moorish corsairs. Agreements between the Kings of Barbary regencies and England were breached from time to time by both sides.\textsuperscript{382} Moorish piracy reached an unprecedented level during the reign of King Charles I. Not only did Moorish pirates (especially the Salee corsairs) launch their attacks against British ships in the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, they did manage to sail to British home waters and mainland, as far as the Thames, and took many local Britons from Baltimore, Bristol or Devon captive.\textsuperscript{383} The Mansel expedition did not put an end to the Moorish piratical depredations against British ships and vessels. Rather, in an act of revenge, Moorish pirates increased the level of their attacks against British naval power. Piracy proved to be a thorn in the side of the British monarch and parliament. Relatives of captives held in captivity in Barbary protested in London against the inability of the government to stop the pirates from attacking British ships or releasing their kinsmen who had been taken captive. Mayors, especially those in affected areas, and religious leaders, sent letters to members of parliament and the Privy Council asking them to work toward putting an end to the piratical Moorish depredations of the Barbary corsairs. The Mayor of Plymouth, for example, wrote a letter to the Privy Council on the 20th of September 1635 complaining that “many thousands in those parts [Devon and Cornwall] will be utterly undone” by the piratical attacks by the Moors.\textsuperscript{384} Salee, at that time, rose to the status of a rogue piratical state; the ‘nest of piracy’ from where the Salee pirates launched many daring attacks against British, and European, ships, ports, and cities. The King of New Salee

\textsuperscript{380} For the various British piratical activities against the Moors, the Spaniards, the French, and the Italians, see: Fisher, \textit{Barbary Legend}, pp 125-148.
\textsuperscript{381} Chew, \textit{The Crescent and the Rose}, p. 368. See also Rice, “The Turk, Moor, and the Persians”, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{383} Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, James, 1619-1623, vol. X, p 12, Calendar of State Papers, Charles I, 1625-1626, vol. I, pp 11, 20, 54, 81 & 343. Only between 1609 and 1616, argued Rice, more than 446 vessels were seized by Algiers pirates (Rice, “The Turk, Moor, and Persian”, p. 70) while Colley put the number of British ships captured by Barbary pirates between 1600 and 1640 at more than 800 vessels. (\textit{Captives}, pp 43-44)
\textsuperscript{384} Calendar of State Papers, Charles I, 1635, VIII, pp 389, 608, cited also in Matar “The Barbary Corsairs, King Charles I and the Civil War”, pp 242-243, my parentheses.
was reported to have said, when he was told that the ships of the King of England are at the gates of his home town, “what care I for K. of Englands shippes, or all the Christian kings of the world, am not I King of Sally”.385

Salee was semi-autonomous regency where pirates, most of whom were Moriscos expelled from Spain and Portugal, of many Muslim regencies acted freely and were in a position to wreak havoc on British, and European, naval targets. The Salee corsairs did not pay homage to the King of Morocco neither did they work under his banner. Rather, it happened that the King of Morocco sought the help of the King of Britain, Charles I, against the Salee pirates. Salee, at that time, was divided into two parts: Old Salee and New Salee with Old Salee supporting the King of Morocco while the New Salee opposing him.386 Despite the outward hostile environment, the semi-autonomous Morisco statelet [this is to separate it from Morocco] had commercial ties with the English. This relationship, Mohamed Razouk writes, was of ‘reciprocal’ advantage to both sides: Protestant England and Muslim Morisco statelet against one common enemy who attacked the former with his Armada and expelled the latter from their homes in Spain. Moreover, the Moriscos, adds Razouk, were in ‘dire’ need for ‘munitions’ and ‘some other victuals’ and the British wanted to release their captives held in Barbary and protect their ships from being attacked by what Razouk calls the ‘Mujahidin’ pirates.387 These “shippes” were among the English fleet headed by Thomas Rainsborough who was commissioned by the King of England to lead the Salee expedition in 1636 with the aim of punishing the Salee corsairs for their attacks against British navy and ports.388 When The Leopard reached the shores of Salee, some European captives (British, Spanish, and French) swam to The Leopard hoping to save their lives from captivity in Barbary. They told the Master of The Leopard that the:

“Governour of New Sally sent for all Captiane Runnagadoes, and commanded all the Captaines in New Sally that they should goe for the coast of England, so neare the shore with their shippes, and hoyst out all their boats, and goe ashore and fetch the men [.] women and children out of their beds.”389

389 A True Journal of the Sally Fleet, p. 4, my brackets.
The campaign launched by Sir Thomas Rainsborough stopped the Salee corsairs from attacking British targets for the time being. The British side came victorious and three hundred thirty nine captives were released and brought on board ships bound for Britain.

Moorish piratical depredations against the British, and European, fleet[s] with thousands of British and Europeans taken captive, some of them never came back home, the latter must have started to question the idea of their alleged, ethnic, cultural, and religious superiority. A sense of “imbalance” was dominant at that time: how could it be that these “inferior” people subject the brave British, and European, warriors to humiliation? How could it be that this religion (or rather ‘superstition’ as Europeans used to think of Islam at that time), replace Christianity in the Orient, the seat of Christianity? Captivity narrative accounts, which recorded the stories of the subjugation of Britons, and Europeans, at the hands of the Moors, and the Turks, a supposedly inferior race[s], intensified this sense of “imbalance” and “created a violation of the imagined national hierarchy that placed the Western above the non-Western cultures.”

Publishing captivity narratives, writing plays or composing pageants and epics in which English, and European, heroes overcame the Moorish, and Turkish, ‘other’, ridiculing him and his religion and how they ended up victorious against him and in some cases, furthermore, converting him to Christianity, acted as a lever that might have helped balance out the relationship between the Moor, the Turk, and the English, or the European, even to the advantage of the latter. In these accounts, not only did the English level against the Moor but they overcame, humiliated and won a decisive battle against them. If the English, or the European, folk at home questioned the superiority of their race, culture, or religion, over those who capture their fellow countrymen, writing a play such as The Jew of Malta, The Fair Maid of the West, Othello, A Christian Turned Turk, or The Renegado, or publishing accounts of those returning captives and travellers might have helped restore a sense of belonging to Englishness and Christianity. Published captivity accounts, notes Snader, marked a “restoration” of the sense of “imbalance by implying both the happy ending of the captive’s release and the possibility of knowing and recording the captive-taking culture.” For those who did not publish their stories there could be some financial gains. Telling one’s story of captivity lands, noted Linda Colley, could have benefited a returning captive. This happened when some returning captives used to “entertain impatient passersby on busy streets as a means of attracting charity”. Heywood and his fellow dramatists, argues Matar, could not have written

391 Snader, Caught Between Two Worlds, p. 63.
392 Colley, Captivity, p. 13
plays in which British captive women were depicted since that would have humiliated the audience; something they could not tolerate. Dramatists, and poets, in their turn, turned the enslavement and misery from which many thousands of their countrymen had suffered at the hands of the barbarian Moors into courage, bravery, and triumph. In plays, epics, and romances, more often than not, a British, or European, captive would fool his captor and manage to escape, sometimes, ironically, with the help of a Moorish lover who fell in love with him and was ready to elope with him forsaking family, country, and religion all for a loving captive. In many plays, and narrative accounts, written at that time, a few Britons, or Europeans, would, more often than not, overcome, kill, drown, or take captive, scores of Moorish or Turkish pirates.

II: Authorship and Sources of the play

There is roughly a span of thirty years between the appearance of the first and the second part of *The Fair Maid of the West*. According to the majority of critics, the first part was written sometime between 1590s and 1603 while the second part was written in the 1630s. No critic has been successful, wrote Turner, in “fixing” the date of the publication of the first part or the second part of *The Fair Maid of the West*. Critics have detected many discrepancies, and contradictions, between the two parts. Such abnormalities and contrasts may support the contention of those critics who argue that Part I was without doubt written before the death of Queen Elizabeth. Not only does Heywood introduce in the second part of *The Fair Maid of the West* Moorish stereotyped characters, and themes, in total contrast to those in the first part but he also gives a completely different representation of English characters and their relation to the Moroccan counterparts. In the first part of *The Fair Maid of the West* the reader may find

---

393 Matar, *Britain and Barbary*, p. 94.
394 See, for example, among many others, the accounts about the release of hundreds of English captives held by the Turks at Alexandria by Fox, and his comrades, (Hakluyt, vol. 5, p 162) the recovery of the *Exchange*, a ship of Bristol, (*The Famous and wonderful Recovery of a Ship of Bristol, called the Exchange, from the Turkish Pirates of Argier*, London, printed for Nathaniel Butter, 1622, reprinted in Stuart Tracts 1603-1693, An English Garner (ed.), C.H. Firth, London, Archibald Constable and Co. Ltd., 1903, pp 249-274) or the story of sir Henry Middleton and his voyage with the east-India company to the Orient.
the ugly and the beautiful, lifelike Moors, and a magnificent, loving, caring, and
beautiful virgin Queen (Elizabeth I) whom the author refers to scores of times
throughout the first part. In the second part, Heywood, on the contrary, introduces his
readers and audience to a lot of Moorish treachery, lust, cowardice, and inhumanity, and
utter negligence of his late Queen mother, whom he praises lavishly in the first part. The
single Moor who acts like any other human being of flesh and blood, Joffer Basha,
converts from Islam to Christianity by the end of the play.

No source has ever been named yet as the primary source from which Heywood got
his plot. The European side of the story in which a female lover travels to save a lover
captured in Barbary had more than one analogue in Italian literature. As for the stories
about Moorish treachery, villainy, sensuality, bloodiness, etc., they are abundant in the
accounts about the Moors in travellers, merchants and returning captives. Writing about
The Fair Maid, W. G. Rice takes the play to be built on the story of Barnabe Riche. The
story of Riche, Rice revealed, was taken from Cinthio, the Tale of Fineo and
Fiamma. Fineo and Fiamma were two Italian lovers who, like Bess and Spencer,
were separated from each other and had to undergo many hardships before being
miraculously united at the end. Like in the play, the heroine travels in a boat to save her
lover who was taken captive and had to serve as a slave in Barbary. In addition, there
are many ballad stories that were common at the time that may fit as legitimate sources
of The Fair Maid of the West. From these the story of Long Meg, whom Heywood refers
to in the play, and the story of Mary Ambre bear genuine similarities to The Fair Maid
of the West.

The idea behind this chapter is that, in addition to the common knowledge about the
Moors available at that time, two travel narratives that appeared in Hakluyt and Purchas,
respectively, are likely to be the source[s] from which Heywood got his story,
particularly those motifs that are related to the Moors. The first story appeared in
Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations in 1598 under the title “The voyage made to Tripolis in

399 Barnabe Riche, Riche his Farwell to Militarie Profession (London: 1581, reprinted in 1846 by
The Shakespeare Society and in 1992 by Donald Beecher, Ottawa: Dovehouse).
400 Brownell Salamon refers to an earlier similar anecdote in Boccaccio’s Decameron. It is the
story of an Italian lover, Martuccio Gomito, who is captured by Moorish pirates in Tunis and is
kept as a slave for a long period of time there. His lover, Constance, puts to sea disguised as
man hoping to die but she is saved by her Moorish attendant whom she hired to accompany her
in the journey. (Brownell Salomon (ed.), The Fair Maid of the West, Part 1, A Critical Edition
(Salzburg: Studies in English literature, Jacobean Drama Studies Series, no. 36, 1975), pp 14-16
& 30.)
402 The stories are mentioned in detail in W. E. Roberts, “Ballad themes in The Fair Maid of the
West” JAF, no. 68, (1955), pp19-23. This has been also discussed by Brownell Salmon (ed.) The
Fair Maid of the West, pp 22-26.
Barbarie, in the yeere 1583. with a ship called the Jesus, wherein the adventures and
distresses of some Englishmen are truly reported, and other necessary circumstances
observed.\textsuperscript{403} The narrator of the story, Thomas Sanders, managed to send a letter from
his captivity in Barbary to his father in England and Queen Elizabeth, upon knowing
about the distress in which her subjects were, commissioned her ambassador in
Constantinople, Sir William Hareborne, to negotiate the release of the English prisoners.
The famous letter of Queen Elizabeth to “Zultan Murad Can” in which she cleared
herself of being associated with “Idolaters and false professors of the Name of Christ”
was published in Hakluyt.\textsuperscript{404} The Jesus set sail to Barbary on the 16\textsuperscript{th} of October 1583
and, due to many unhappy incidents that happened to those on board with the death of
many of them, the English reach Tripolis on the 18\textsuperscript{th} of March the following the year,
1584. The “King,” or rather the Day, of Tripolis offered to sell his oil to the English, but
at a higher price.\textsuperscript{405} After bargaining, the Moorish ruler agreed to trade his oil for its
market price and agreed to wave the customs, if only for the time being. The merchants’
Factor, Romane Sonnings, a Frenchman, needed money to buy an item in Tripolis and,
having not enough money on him at the time, borrowed “an hundred Chikinoes” from
one Miles Dickson, an Englishman, promising to pay back on return to his lodging.\textsuperscript{406}
Later, this Sonnings handed Dickson “money bound up in a napkin” and told him that
his money was back to him. Dickson did not check the money straightway and when he
did on returning back to his lodging he claimed that his money is lacking a “Chikinoe”
and gave the purse back to Sonnings. Sonnings meets a Portuguese old friend of his,
Patrone Norado, who did him a favour a year earlier and the latter, because he was
indebted to a “Turke” the sum of “foure hundred and fiftie crowns” for commodities he
sent to Europe, asks Sonnings to take him aboard the ship to the Islands so that he would
be able to flee his creditor.\textsuperscript{407}

Getting the oil for the price they desire, saving a fellow Christian from the terrible
‘heathen’ Moors, the crew rushed and set sail only to be stopped by the calls from a
messenger from the king of Tripolis to hand in the said Patrone Norado and, strangely
enough, to pay the customs for the oils they bought from him otherwise he would have
to confiscate the goods. For the moment, the English refused to surrender and the ruler
of Tripolis called up his “Renegadoes” and the many European prisoners available in
Tripolis at that time promising the one who manages to bring the English ship back his

\textsuperscript{403} Hakluyt, \textit{Principal Navigations}, vol. 3, pp 139-159.
\textsuperscript{404} Ibid, vol. 3, p. 155.
\textsuperscript{405} It should be noted that the king of Morocco in \textit{The Fair Maid} is advocating having active
trade with the outside, here Christian, world.
\textsuperscript{406} Hakluyt, \textit{Principal Navigations}, vol. 3, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{407} Ibid, vol. 3, pp 140-141.
freedom. The job was done by certain Spanish Sebastian but the traitor never had his freedom. Sonnings and Norado were put to trial and both were doomed to be hanged over the “Northeast bulwarke” (p.145). Uttering a few words of disapproval of the verdict to his Master, Andrew Dier was condemned to be hanged over the “walles of the Westermost bulwarke” upon which the English Factor, Richard Skegs, fell upon his knees before the King and begged him to pardon his master, or to kill him, the Factor, for him (p. 145). Upon the intercession of the locals, who might have been impressed by English gallantry and self-sacrifice, the King agreed to pardon both of them. The English are overwhelmed when their companions come back to the camp and tell the story of how the Factor was saved and how the Master of the ship was spared his life; if only for the time being. Not uncharacteristic of a Moor, the King of Tripolis, upon the advice given by one his men that they would not be able to claim the spoils of these captives for themselves nor would they be in a position to take any of the crew captive unless the Master of the ship was killed, broke his promise to spare the lives of the Master and the Factor. The narrator of the story was not to miss the chance to reiterate the villainous and treacherous nature of the Moor who breaches the solemn promises he takes upon himself:

Here all the true Christians may see what trust a Christian may put in an infidels promise, who being a King, pardoned a man nowe, as you have heard, and within an houre after hanged him for the same cause before a whole multitude: and also promised the Factor their oyles custome free, and at their away made them pay the uttermost penie for the custome thereof.408

Sonnings, thinking that ‘turning Turke’ might save him the evil of the day, protested to be a Muslim and, upon being asked by the king to profess ‘al-Shahada’409 if he really wants to become a Muslim, the man said the words. Becoming a Turk, however, did not help Sonnings save his life and the Moors were reported to have said when killing him “Now shalt die in the faith of a Turke”.410 Norado was doomed to spend the rest of his life in Barbarie as a slave.

408 Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, vol. 3, p. 146. In the play, Mullisheg, who though managing to control the sexual desire inside him, promises not to touch Bess later he schemes to rape her. 409 Al-Shahada [Oneness of God] is an Arabic word which can be translated literally into “There is no God but Allah and Muhâmmad is a Prophet of Allah”. 410 Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, vol. 3, p. 146.
The episodes about the “Island voyage” and the journey of Sir Henry Middleton and his companions to Barbary represent the second anecdote from which Heywood seems to have taken his story about the Moors of Barbary. Both stories bear many similarities to the Moorish bits and pieces in The Fair Maid and both appeared in Purchas’s His Pilgrimes. Anyone who reads The Fair Maid will not fail to notice the parallel lines between the actual story of the Island Voyage and the dramatic story coined by Heywood. In the play, as well as in the real story, the English merchants and adventures capture Spaniards (at Fayal and Tercera) who in the first place attack them but had to surrender themselves to the English and “all whom, wee received, and well intreated, using some for Guides, and some for our Carriages…” In this voyage, Sir Walter Raleigh, one of the most prominent British adventurers the nation has ever known, was the Vice-Admiral of the expedition. In the factual journey Sir George Carew, like Spencer, was separated from the rest of the fleet. It was in the Island expedition that the Earle of Lincolne, the birth place of Heywood, the high Admiral of England, was on board one of the ships. Due to foul weather, the ship in which the Earle was on board was about to drown. He was advised to save himself by boarding any safer ship. The Earle, like Spencer in The Fair Maid of the West, refused to save himself or to leave his fellows to trouble. He was reported to have said “I honour the Queen my Mistress so much, to bring her word that I have saved my selfe, and lost her Ship: and therefore let us do our best to save altogether…” Born in Lincolnshire, it is not illogic to assume that Heywood was aware of these stories and hence they were among the source for his play.

The anecdote of the voyage undertaken by Sir Henry Middleton and his en troupe to Moha (present day Mecca) is the third episode that bears many similarities to the story

---

411 The accounts about the “Island voyage” were published in Purchas by more than one narrator. See, for example, “The Voyage to the Isles of Azores, under the conduct of the Right Honorable Robert Earle of Essex, 1597”, Purchas, His Pilgrimes, vol. xx, pp 22-33 and “A large Relation of the said Iiland Voyage written by Sir Arthur Georges Knight…” Purchas, His Pilgrimes, vol. xx, pp 34-134.

412 The story was told by more than one narrator. The main two narrators are Sir Henry Middleton and Captain Nichoals Dounton. The story told by Middleton bore the title “The sixth voyage, set forth by the East- Indian Company in three Shippes; the Trades Increase, of one thousand Tunnes, and in her the General Sir Henry Middleton, Admiral; the Pepper-Corne of two hundred and fiftie, Vice-Admiral, the Captaine Nicholas Dounton: and The Darling of nintie. The Bark Samuel followed as a Victualler of burthen one hundred and eightie; written by Sir H. Middleton”, Purchas, vol. iii, pp 115-193 while the story narrated by Captain Nicholas Dounton, was given the title “Nicholas Dounton Captiane of the Pepper-Corne, a Ship of two hundred and fiftie Tunnes, and Lieutenant in the sixth Voyage to the East-Indies, set forth by the said Company, his Journal, or certaine Extracts thereof.”, Purchas, His Pilgrimes, vol. 3, pp 194-204.

413 Purchas, His Pilgrimes, vol. xx, p. 82.


The accounts about the “Island Voyage” and the journey of Sir Henry Middleton, being published for the first time in Purchas’s, may work as a potential source of the second part, not the first, of the play. The crew set sail in 1610 heading to the Orient. On the 25th of October 1610 they approached Aden and on the same day Sir Henry sent M. Femel with a present to the King of the country (p. 120-121). In Aden, they were told by the locals that should they go to Moha they would be able to sell their commodities at profitable prices as did their fellow countryman Mr Sharpeigh the year before. Asked about the King of Moha, the natives replied that his name was “Jeffer Basha” and that he was better than his predecessor (p. 122). On the 13th of November 1610, they were on the outskirts of Moha. Spotted by the “Arabians” of Moha, Emeir Bahars (Lord of the Sea) comes in a boat to find out the whereabouts of the strangers. When they told him that they are English merchants looking for effecting trade transactions with them, the Lord of the Sea welcomed them heartily. (p.124). On the 14th of November 1610, the Lord of the Sea came to Sir Henry, along with four other Turks two of whom spoke Italian, gave him a present from the Aga (the ruler of Moha) and told him that they “should have as free Trade as … [they] had in Stambola, Aleppo, or any part of the Turkes Dominions” (p. 124, parentheses added). Middleton was told that he should come ashore with the Lord of the Sea should he wish to have proper trade with the Aga of Moha, and he did. On the 28th of November 1610, Sir Middleton, and Femel, received Master Pemberton and invited him to have supper with him. The three, suspecting no intruders, the guests were overheard having a free chit-chat. When embarking to leave Pemberton was not allowed to by the stubborn Turks at the gate of ‘English House’. A message in the Arabic tongue was subsequently sent to Sir Middleton but its contents he was not able to decipher due to the lack of an interpreter. When the interpreter told Sir Middleton that he and his colleagues were betrayed because the “Turkes and my people were by the eares at the back of the House” in which the English aboded, hurly burly ensued and people were running in different directions. (p.127) Running after them and speaking as loud as he could trying to clarify the situation or be apprised of what was going on, Sir Middleton was struck on the head by one Turk and was taken to the Aga where he found many of his companions chained. Eight of his men were killed in the onslaught. He was deprived of his money and gold.

416 “The sixth voyage, set forth by the East-Indian Company in three Shippes; the Trades Increase, of one thousand Tunnes, and in her the General Sir Henry Middleton, Admiral; the Pepper-Corne of two hundred and fiftie, Vice-Admiral, the Captaine Nicholas Dounton: and the Darling of ninetie. The Bark Samuel followed as a Victualler of burthen one hundred and eightie: written by Sir H. Middleton”, Purchas, vol.iii, pp 115-193.

417 Terms such as “Turks”, “Moors” or “Arabians” are used interchangeably by the narrator of the story.
The Turks, or rather the Arabians, went to ransack the victuals on board the English ships. The assailants killed, in the first instance, three Britons but within minutes, due to the fact that the Turks misunderstood the instructions of their leader, the situation changed to the advantage of the Britons who managed to kill, drown, or take captive, all the assailants save one Turk who “hid himself till the furie was past, who yeelded and was received to mercie”. (p. 129)

The news came to the Aga that his Emeir Bahars [Lord of the Sea] and his soldiers were taken captive by the English. Sir Middleton, and seven others of his terrain, was taken to the house of the Aga who asked him to write to his colleagues on board the _Darling_ to enquire about the numbers and names of Turkish captives but he declined. Again, he is advised to write to them to ask them to come ashore and surrender themselves along with the local prisoners they had with them and that he would allow them to leave in a small ship but, not trusting the treacherous Turks anymore, he refused to write the letter. Sir Middleton, at that time, was told by the Aga that the reason why he and his people were detained is that they came too close to the holy city of Medina; a place near which non-Muslims should not be allowed and Sir Middleton replied that they only came ashore after they got his permission (p.131). On the 15th of December 1610, not having enough water to succor them or hearing from their colleagues ashore, those on board the _Darling_ decided, upon the advice of certain John Chambers, to send some of them to negotiate with the Turks whatever the consequences might be. (It should be noted here that in _The Fair Maid of the West_ Bess and her crew had to go to Mamorah in Barbary due to lack of water and victuals)

While kept in a dire room, chained, waiting for one of three bitter alternatives, death, perpetual imprisonment or slavery, Sir Middleton was surprised to know that the Aga of Zenan, Regib Ismael Aga, and the Captiane of the Chawsses, Jasfer Aga, came with the order to take him and his colleagues to the Basha of Zenan (p.134). Regib Aga asked Sir Middleton to write a letter to his fellows on board the _Darling_ to surrender themselves to the Basha of Zenan and, this time, he did. Those on board the _Darling_ were very happy to know that their master was still alive (p. 132). Sir Middleton, along with thirty four of

418 In a typical vein, Mullisheg asks Spencer to tell those on board the _Negro_ to come ashore and surrender themselves but he rejects the orders and, even more, shows his contempt the offer:

Mullisheg: Send to thy _Negro_ and surrender up 
Thy captian and thy fair bride; otherwise, 
By all the holy rites of our great prophet, 
Thou shallt not live an hour.

Spencer: Alas, good King, 
Not live an hour? And when my head is off, 
What canst thou do them? Call’st thou that revenge…

( Part II, III, iii, 77-83)
his terrain, was taken to Zenan. During the journey to Zenan, Sir Henry found “a great friend of one Hamet Aga, who sent diverse comfort, for my cause was good: he sent me and my people provisions of Bread for our journey and withal his letters to the Kaha” (p. 136). The Basha of Zenan told Sir Middleton that he would write to the Ottoman Sultan in Stambola (Constantinople) to see what should be done with him and colleagues promising to do all best at the High Porte to clear them of any offence. They were taken to the Grand Senior in Stambola where Sir Middleton and his terrain found some great friends among the Moors with a “Moore of Cairo” and an Arabian rich merchant, Hamet Waddy, who offer valuable help to the English (pp 140-141). Against all the omens, Sir Middleton and his people were cleared of any offence and were told that they were free to go leave to England, or even to go back to Moha to have trade with the Moors there. Though he had a writ from the Grand Senior to the governor of Moha, Sir Middleton, like Spencer and his company in the play, intended to escape with his colleagues at the earliest opportunity should one come. Sir Middleton, John Fowler, Benjamin Greene, Rowland Webbe, R. Mico, Ro. Conwey, William Browne, John Wright, Arthur Atkinson, Thomas Evans, Ioha Wood, and Henry Fourtune managed to escape and reach the Darling safely, via a boat provided by Pemberton, while Femel and some others were caught by the Moors (p. 158). A boat with two Arabs on it approaches the Darling and those boarding it told Sir Middleton that the lives of Femel and his friend were in great danger. They notify him that they are detained by the Aga of Moha who wanted to behead them for daring to escape, but after the intercession of certain Nehuda Amber and Nuhuda Mahomet of Cananor, and others, their lives were spared. Now, Sir Middleton started to threaten that should not the Moors send him Femel and the others along with the commodities the Aga had earlier confiscated, he would set all the ships at sea on fire (pp 159-160). Many of his copatriots were released but no goods nor compensations given to Sir Middleton.

One of the main parallel lines between the narrative story of Sir Henry Middleton and the play is the behaviour of the male hero: Sir Middleton and Spencer where the latter, in similar way to Middleton, in spite the fact that he was just a few moments from being killed should Mullisheg give orders to his men to do it, challenged and spoke rudely to the mighty King of Fez, as does Middleton to the ruler of Moha or the basha of Zenan. Reproached by the King of Fez for his ingratitude for the good usage, and gifts, he offered to the English, Spencer replies:
In that thou art not royal, Mullisheg,  
Of all thy gold and jewels lately gives us,  
There’s not a doit [sic] embark’d,  
For, finding thee dishonorably unkind,  
Scorning thy gold, we left it all behind.  

(Part II, III, iii, 68-72)

And, when Mullisheg tells Spencer that he has got only one option left to save his life, Spencer, proudly, challenges Mullisheg to “propose it”. The King asks him to bring back the English crew of the Negro, exactly in the same way that the king of Moha orders Sir Midleton to ask his fellow English sailors to bring back the darling with its English seamen and the Turks they had taken prisoners with them on board the ship but the latter declines the offer, and on the spot, Spencer, once more, did dare to reject the order and, even more, to insult the Moorish King:

Alas, good King,  
I pity and despise thy tyranny.  
Not live an hour? And when my head is off,  
What canst thou do then? Call’st thou that revenge,  
To ease me of a thousand turbulent griefs  
And throw my soul in glory for my honor?  
Why, thou striv’st to make me happy. But for her,  
Wert thou the king of all the kings on earth,  
Couldst thou lay all their scepters, robes, and crowns  
Emperor of th’ universal empery,  
Rather than yield my basest ship boy up  
To become thy slave, much less betray my bride  
To thee and to thy brutish lust, know, King  
Of Fez, I’d die a hundred thousand deaths first.  

(Part II, III, iii, 80-94)419

Taught a lesson in bravery, endurance and self-denial, the King of Fez, at last, agrees to set the English crew free and, for the second time, never forgets to bless the marriage of the English couple. He, furthermore, renounced the sensual side within him and expressed his fascination with English morals and values:

Shall lust in me have chief predominance?  
And virtuous deeds, for which in Fez,  
I have been long renown’d, be quite exiled?  
Shall Christians have the honor  
To be sole heirs of goodness, and we Moors  
Barbarous and bloody?  

(Part II, III, iii, 139-145)

The similarities between the Middleton saga in Purchas’s narrative account and Spencer’s daring challenge of Mullisheg in *The Fair Maid of the West* would support my contention that the story of Sir Henry Midleton and his companions published in Purchas is among the primary sources from which Heywood got his story. In both cases, a British gallant challenged and humbled a Moorish monarch.

Along with these three main stories about the Orient and its Moors, critics, however, refer to the fact that Heywood may have benefited from a wide range of travel and captivity narratives that were available at his time. Stories, fairy tales, or fables, about the Moors, and the Orient, were not uncommon in Elizabethan England. An era of extensive travel and exploration was just starting. Scores of thousands of Britons, and Europeans, left home heading to the rich Orient or West Indies looking for fresh opportunities, new markets, and spoils. Thousands came back safely after years in the wilderness of the then untamable oceans or the heat of Africa while thousands others never came back home. Many were taken captive in Barbary or in the vast Ottoman Empire and had to spend years under the cruelty of humiliating slavery and others choosing to convert to the religion of their powerful captors. Returning travellers, adventures, or captives, had innumerable accounts and stories about the Orient, its Moors, beasts, devils, religions or superstitions to tell to their countrymen. Some of these accounts were published while the majority of these accounts were just told and retold to excited audiences in British towns and cities; in taverns and pubs. London, according to Cawley, was “filled with talkative travelers whose stories passed current.” The public, as Roslyn L. Knutson put it, must have been familiar with stories about travellers, captives, and Barbary. It was not uncommon that a returning traveller or a captive would sit, circled by an audience, and tell his story to a gathering.

---

420 See, for example, Jones’s *Othello’s Countrymen*, p.18 and Katherine Bates, *Thomas Heywood*, pp 140-142.
421 Adam Elliot, one of these returning travellers, used to tell his story of captivity whenever a chance presented itself to him. He himself admitted that on so many occasions travellers tended to exaggerate in telling the stories that happened to them while abroad. See Adam Elliot, *A Modest Vindication of Titus Oates, the Salamanca* – (London, 1682) p. 19. An English proverb, as Joseph Pitts put in his captivity narrative, endorses the fact that some travellers may be tempted to exaggerate their accounts. Pitts stated “travelers must be allowed to what stories they please: ’its better believe what he saith than to go and seek out the truth out of it.’” (Joseph Pitts, *A True and Faithful Account of the Religion and manners of the Mohammetans, with an Account of the Author’s Being Taken Captive*, in Daniel J. Vitkus (ed.), *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 222.
Sanderson, for example, used to go to The Royal Exchange to recount his story of travel and captivity in the Orient to the enthusiastic folk who came to enjoy gossip. More often than not, a narrator would add to, or alter, original stories to render his more spicy and appealing to the folk who might suspect him of being corrupted by his contact with the treacherous Moors far from home. In spite of the fact that the majority of these accounts, according to L. Wright, contain many lies yet such tales were popular and people believed them. The aim behind telling or publishing such stories was multidimensional: to show the public, those who may be in doubt, that an Englishman, or English morals, is capable of enduring the worst hardships and calamities that might befall him, even those inflicted upon him by the ruthless cruel Moors, or Turks, and that a committed Protestant, or even Catholic, should eventually end up victorious, religiously or physically, in his contest with Mahometan Moors. To prove to an Elizabethan audience that their religion was more perfect than that of the Moors and that the God of the English was “big”ger than the God of the Moors was not an easy task.

Since the number of those captured, or lost, in Barbary, and the Ottoman Empire, was in the thousands and the total number of population of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth was only a few millions, it is expected that wider sections of the populace were familiar with the stories of those held in Barbary or in the Ottoman Empire.

To sum up here, stories, epics, and tales about the adventures, enslavement, and triumph in the Orient were told and retold in taverns, sung in pageants, and written and acted on the stage all over the country by amateurish and professional companies alike. From all these accounts (oral or written) about captivity or adventure in the Orient, these two stories, the one in Hakluyt and the other in Purchas, I would argue, would be claimed to be among the the main anecdotes behind the making of *The Fair Maid of the West*.

From what has been said earlier, it is reasonable to assume that Heywood had considerable information about merchants and travellers who visited the Orient, and the West Indies; stories about piracy and captives. What would support me further here is the facts that in 1632 Heywood addressed his pageant commemorating the Mayoral celebrations of London, *Londini Artium* and *Scientarium*, to Nicholas Raynton, a

---


427 After managing to free their fellow English captives at a Turkish stronghold in Alexandria, Egypt, the narrator could say “And verely I thinke their Gode amased thereat: it could not be but he must blush for shame, he can speake never a word for dulnes, much lesse can he helpe their in such an extremite… But howsoever their God behaved himselfe, our god shewed himselfe a God indeed, and that he was the onely living God…” (Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, vol., iii, p. 46)
merchant and an adventurer, and in 1633 his pageant, *Londini Emporia*, was addressed to Maurice Abbot, a founding member of the East Indian Company; a company under which banner Sir Middleton put out to sea in his journey to the Orient.\(^{428}\) Not only this, one can assume that Heywood’s involvement with merchants and travellers was much closer than many critics did anticipate. Heywood, for example, dedicated his *Iron Age*, a play about Queen Elizabeth, to Thomas Manwring; a famous traveller who had to suffer a lot in his journey to the Orient. This was reflected in the writings of Heywood per se. *The Foure Apprentices of London* bears many resemblances to *The Fair Maid*, both tackle the theme of the war between the Orient and Christendom in which a small number of English soldiers outwit and defeat the army of the Sultan of Babylon and the Emperor of Persia. Also in this play a woman who disguises herself as a man is loved by more than one contender.\(^{429}\) Heywood’s *Fortune by Land and Sea*, written in collaboration with Thomas Rowley, goes in the same vein with many stories about travels and piracy.\(^{430}\)

Heywood’s involvement with travelers and merchants has already been discussed in detail. Here it may be apposite to build on how this was reflected in the play itself. From the onset, *The Fair Maid* betrays an atmosphere of active commerce, travel, and, to an extent, colonization:

The great success at Cales under the conduct of such a noble general [Drake] has put heart into the English; they are all on fire to purchase from the Spaniards. If their caracks come deeply laden, we shall tug with them for golden spoil.

How Plymouth swells with gallants! How the streets glisten with gold! You cannot meet a man but trick’d in scarf and feathers, that it seems as if the pride of England’s gallantry were harbor’d here.

(Part I, I, i, 5-15, my parentheses)

Spencer, and Bess, it seems that Heywood meant it, travelled to the same island which the valiant Raleigh ransacked a year earlier according to the play:

---


Since English Raleigh won and spoil’d it first,
The town’s re-edified and fort new built,
And four pieces in the blockhouse lie
To keep the harbor’s mouth.
(Part I, IV, iv, 31-32)

Yet, while the first, Raleigh, did not find any harm in pillaging the island and killing many of its inhabitants, the latter, Spencer, preaches a gallant and humanistic approach. Asked by the remorseless Goodlack if he has taken the journey for pillage, Spencer replies:

… pillage, Captian?
No, ’tis for honor; and the brave society
Of all these shining gallants that attend
The great lord general drew me hither first
No hope of gain or spoil.
(Part I, ii, 9-12)

Bess, in the same vein, when brought to safety by Goodlack to the King of Barbary, the latter orders his warden to give Goodlack a reward, a golden one, for his efforts but Bess orders her countryman not to accept the gift

Captain, touch it not,…
Know, King of Fez, my fellows want no gold.
I only came to see thee for my pleasure
And show thee what these say thou never saw’st,
A woman born in England.
(Part I, V, i, 38-41)

IV: Moors and Britons: Cultural competition and the theme of conversion

The main idea behind this chapter is that the image of Moors did not only change from one era to another, from an author to the other but it did also change in the writings of the same author. In other words, the Moors who act in a favourable way hosting their English guests in the first part of The Fair Maid are made by the author to act irrationally and betray their English visitors in the second part of the play. This chapter assumes that the political givens of the 1600s and the 1630s in which the two parts were written separately had their effect on the making of the two parts of the play. The author, one could say, responded to the political and cultural aspects prevailing at his time. He wanted to hit back at the Moors and punish them for their piratical acts. If these Moors
managed to take thousands of Heywood’s fellowmen captive in the Atlantic in local waters, Heywood wanted to show his readers and countrymen that they are better than enemies in terms of power, culture, religion, or manners.

The Moors portrayed by Heywood in the first part of *The Fair Maid of the West* are definitely different from the ones he introduced in the second part of the same play. Typical of a lesser Elizabethan dramatist who would praise those whom his Queen favoured and would criticize those she did not, Heywood presented a loving and friendly Moor in Part one and a treacherous, lustful one in Part II of *The Fair Maid of the West*.

Theoretically, Heywood’s *The Fair Maid*, all in all, is more of a pageant or a fairy tale than of a proper drama. The British defeat all their enemies: Moors, Spaniards, French, and Italians. Incidents and situations do not proceed as in real life but as the author, or the audience, wanted or wished them to follow. Fate, and providence, is always on the side of the believing side making their life easier and smoother. The wind is fair, enemies are beaten and humbly defeated by the overwhelming Britons and ships are captured and ransacked with its sailors taken captive while native fellow Britons, and European, captives are redeemed. Moors, Florentines, or Spaniards, princes, Kings or Queens all made to act to the advantage of the unconquerable and undefeatable Britons. Because the plot of *The Fair Maid*, as Thoryaa Obaid noted, did not mainly focus on the political struggle between the East and the West, Heywood made “continuous comparisons between the noble Christians and the base Moors.”

What may have prompted Heywood to write a sequel to his first part of *The Fair Maid* was the coming of new rulers to power both in Morocco and England, than Queen Elizabeth and King Ahmed al-Mansour, and the increased pace of the piratical depredations against English ships and ports. The late twenties and early thirties of the seventeenth century witnessed a surge in the volume of Barbary piratical attacks against British interests. The British people were furious and many took to the streets to demonstrate against Moorish raids and the inability on behalf of the King and Parliament to put an end to these depredations. With news of thousands of Britons taken captive in Barbary regencies, with many of them reported to have renounced their Savior and ‘turned Turk,’ drama, and pageants, was exploited in the war against the heathenish Moors. Heywood’s political, and religious, givens may support my contention that Heywood wrote the sequel as a counter attack against the piratical violations practiced by Moorish and pirates. In other words, instead of showing the public that the King and

431 *The Fair Maid* has been labelled by Clark as “half adventure play, half domestic tragicomedy”, (Thomas Heywood, p. 213) and by Velte as “a Romantic adventure sort of drama” (*The Bourgeois Elements in the Dramas of Thomas Heywood*), p. 65.

432 Obaid, “The Moor Figure in English Renaissance Drama”, p. 539.
Parliament are incapable of dealing with the Barbary crisis, the play showed the people that a war against the Moors could be won, politically and religiously.

Contrary to the historical givens of the period in which the play was written, while many thousands of Britons and Europeans were suffering from humiliating captivity in Barbary, and the Ottoman Empire, Heywood, and the majority of Elizabethan dramatists and poets, chose to commemorate the heroic deeds of those captives as resisting the lure of a ‘false’ Mohamettan religion with its harem and lasciviousness; even overpowering their captors and managing to escape the tyranny of the Moors. In some cases, they succeed in converting their masters to the true religion. Born to a father who was a Priest, the religious element is not absent in the writings of Heywood. Heywood was a strong enthusiastic devotee of his country and religion. He had what Cromwell labeled as a “beautiful faith in his Englishness, an unswerving loyalty to a belief in the essential virtues of his countrymen”. In The Fair Maid, as well as in many other works of his, a patriotic sentiment is felt throughout the writings of Heywood to the extent that Michael Neil ranks him, along with Thomas Nashe, among the most patriotic of all Elizabethan dramatists. Heywood, and his fellow dramatist, gave what the audience wanted, and expected: brave and victorious English travellers and many ahistorical accounts of victories against the Moors, Turks, Spaniards, Italians, and others. For D’Amico Heywood was a “student of popular opinion”. Heywood, in this regard, chose themes and incidents that appealed to his audience. A play representing the nobler elements of the English character, such as bravery, loyalty, honesty, patriotism, would strike, as Cromwell put it, an “echo of sympathy in the hearts fired by patriotism characterised by Elizabethan England.” The message that the playwright might have had wished to convey to his readers is that an Englishman, or Englishwoman, will never compromise his/her religious, moral, or cultural values and that the English will usually have the upper hand against their enemies or opponents be it in the court of the Moorish Muslim Mullisheg or in the court of the catholic.

433 This in line with the ideas proposed by Matar, Vitkus, D’Amico and others.
435 Cromwell, Thomas Heywood , p. 206.
436 Michael Neil, Putting History to the Question, p. 349.
438 Cromwell, Thomas Heywood, p. 30. See also, in this regard, McLuskie who argued that Heywood's “long-live success as a theatre professional depended on his ability to recognize new trends. He adapted in The Fair Maid of the West, Part II, to fit the new fashion for sensualised romance…” , p. 22.
The reality behind *The Fair Maid*, and its sisters, as could be inferred from the words of Lois Potter, was “far different from what Heywood and his contemporaries envisaged.” L. C. Knights may have been right when he classified *The Fair Maid of the West*, and *The Four Prentices of London*, as being sort of ‘romantic adventure’ and ‘fairy tales’ in spite of the fact that their characters were “taken from everyday life”.

Historically speaking, during the Renaissance period thousands of Europeans converted from Christianity to Islam. At the time in which *The Fair Maid* was written conversion from Christianity to Islam reached, according to Lois Potter, unprecedented levels. The English public must have been shocked to see their fellow countrymen forsaking their religion and country for Mohamet; a job, or as many liked to put it, a beautiful wife and voluptuous life. The fact is, unlike the case in *The Fair Maid*, and many other conversion plays, conversion to Islam in Elizabethan England, wrote Vitkus, was “widespread in the Mediterranean while conversion of Muslims to Christianity was extremely rare.” Reasons for conversion to Islam ranged, according to objective as well as subjective points of view, from attraction to the openness and diversity that Islamic culture “allowed to its converts,” to economic and pragmatic reasons.

---

441 For Lois Potter “It was the extent of Christian apostasy, on a scale unprecedented since the period of the Crusades, that was most shocking to English readers.” (“Pirates and ‘turning Turk’”, p. 129)
443 In the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Twenty or Twenty First centuries, conversion from religion to the other has not been solely motivated by religious reasons. One would agree in this regard with Questier’s contention that conversion from one religion to another should not be seen as purely religiously motivated. (Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England*, 1580-1652 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 2) For more about the reasons and objectives for conversion see Vitkus introduction to his *Three Turk Plays* and Vitkus “Turning Turk”, p. 110 and Matar, *Islam in Britain*, chapters 1&4 and Matar *Turks, Moors*, p. 9 &99. It was not uncommon for Europeans at that time to convert from a religion, or a sect, to the other. James Wadsworth, for example, in the early years of the seventeenth century was taken captive by the Moors and then sold as a slave in Salee. He suffered from many severe hardships to the extent that his master gave him permission to find anyone whom he could persuade to purchase his redemption. Wadsworth was successful in finding a French merchant who was ready to do the job but, ironically, when he went to France Wadsworth converted to Catholicism. Yet again, when he returned back to England he converted to Protestantism. (Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose*, pp 381-2) For some others, it was as easy to convert to Islam as to leave it. This is what happened to some English and Dutch renegadoes who converted to Islam and worked and pirates and sailors on board *The Exchange*. John Rawlings, an English captive who masterminded an escape with *The Exchange* from Moorish home water to British home water after killing, drowning many Turks and Moors on board the ship and taking the rest as hostages. Some of those Algerians on board *The Exchange* were originally Britons and Dutch who converted to Islam yet when their fellow Britons managed to control the ship they professed that that had been forced to accept Islam and announced that they wanted to be Christians again and they were accepted.
In *The Fair Maid of the West*, a cultural, and religious, fight was fought between the Moors and the Britons. Throughout the play, especially in Part II, the Moors are portrayed as ‘treacherous’, ‘coward’, ‘lustful’ and ‘irreligious’ whereas the English are portrayed as ‘honest’, ‘brave’ and sexually restrained and ‘religious’. Lois Potter is among the few critics to have pointed out to the cross-cultural hint in *The Fair Maid of the West* manifested in the form of a competition between Spencer and Joffer in nobility and religiosity. Joffer, the noblest among his fellow Moors, was trying, in vain, to match what Spencer and his mates in their nobility and self-denial. But at the end of the play, Joffer concedes defeat in an act that the author meant to reveal the triumph of European and Christian values over Moorish barbarity.

Joffer’s lapse from Islam to Christianity did not come out of a sudden nor was it made justifiable by the author throughout the play. Joffer might have had studied it very carefully, compares the practices of his fellow Moors with their assumed treacherous, lustful, and dishonest dealings to those of the foreign Western guests. He concedes the defeat of his own culture, dogma, people, and values. The deciding factor is the act of letting Spencer “pass free” to say farewell to his beloved Bess and friends. In other words, should Spencer break his oath and escape with Bess and the English terrain to England Joffer would have the chance to name him, and all his fellows, as “treacherous” and would declare his culture and religion to be victorious against that of Spencer and his colleagues. Should Spencer, on the other hand, honour the pledge he has given to Joffer and came back to Fez to meet a likely, and expectedly unmerciful death, Joffer would declare Spencer and camp (and obviously their religion) to be superior to that of him and his fellow Moors.

Touched by the story of Spencer and his determination to fulfill his promise to his fiancée, Joffer allows Spencer to go shore to tell his lover, Bess, that he could not join her in her journey back home because he had promised Bash Joffer, that he would just leave for a while to inform his English colleagues of his inability to go with them and then come back. Spencer accepts the challenge and asks Joffer to set him a certain time if he does not return by the due time he would be “held a scorn to Christendom/ And a recreant to... [his] country” (Part II, II, iii, 111-112, my parentheses) Joffer’s endorsement of the hazard that he might lose his life should Spencer do not come back made the latter esteem the former and wonder at this chivalrous Caid he found among these bloody Moors. Joffer was ready to sacrifice himself for Spencer, whom he has just known for a few days, so that the latter could pass to meet his beloved. Joffer, in other words, seems to be acting like a good Christian even before becoming one. A tone of

444 Lois Potter, “Pirates and ‘turning Turk’ in Renaissance Drama”, p. 128.
salvation, and sacrifice, is felt in the words of Moorish Joffer, or English Heywood who could not impersonate his characters, prior to his conversion:

And when you are at sea,
The wind no question may blow fair; your anchors
They are soon weigh’d, and you have sea room free
To pass unto your country. ’Tis but my life,
And I shall think it nobly spent to save you,
Her, and your train from many sad disasters.
(Part II, III, i, 104-109)

Strangely enough, Joffer prays in saintly tone for the safe return of the English crew.445

Not likely, the two competitors come to like and praise one another by the end of the play. Joffer, a Muslim Moor, and Spencer, a Christian Briton, compete in praising each other, with the former exalting Spencer and the English nation while the latter not believing to see such noble qualities in barren and barbarous Barbary. Joffer addresses Spencer as that “brave and worthy Englishman” while Spencer speaks of Joffer as “thou noblest of thy nation”. (Part II, II, vi, 19&45) The dual fascination goes on; Joffer exalts:

Sir, though we wonder at your noble deeds,
Yet I must do the office of a subject
And runs in these my veins, when I behold
The slaughter you have made, which wonders me,
I wish you had escap’d and not been made captive
To him, who though he may admire and love you,
Yet cannot help you.
(Part II, II, vi, 1-8)

While Spencer pays back saying:

Your state is like your birth, for you are Joffer,
Chief bashaw o the king, and him I know
Lord of most noble thoughts.
(Part II, II, vi, 9-11)

Not sure if Spencer is happy with his concessions and charitable behaviour, not expected by an Englishman from a Moor, Joffer reassures Spencer that though a Moor he can act as he might expect from a good fellow “Sir, think me, though a moor./ A nation strange unto you Christians/Yet I can be noble…”(Part II, II, vi, 33-36). To the astonishment of all, Moors and English, Spencer comes back to Fez in fulfillment of the pledge he has given to Joffer. Mullisheg, who gives orders to his Alcade to put Joffer in the dock for allowing Spencer o escape, did not expect the English “stranger” to come back

445 Here, the question that may come to the mind of a New Historicist is that Joffer: was about to enquire about how to apply for asylum seeker?
hazarding his life just for a “bare verbal” promise he gave to his bashaw Joffer. In a sarcastic way Mullisheg disproves the possibility that Spencer would surrender himself for a second time to the Moors: Is’t possible?/ Can England, so far distant, harbor such/ Noble virtues? (Part II, III, iii, 37-38) Bess, who grew furious with her lover’s negligence of her pleas not to go back to the Moors, accuses him of going back to Fez because he fell in love with the Queen of Fez, the wife of Mullisheg. His English comrades, in turn, does not approve nor endorse the fact that Spencer, a Christian, wanted to give himself up to the Moors even though the lives of thousands of Moors might be lost if he did not. Goodlack, in this vein, exclaims “’T was (Joffer’s act) nobly done/ But what’s the lives of twenty thousands Moors/ To one that is a Christian?” (Part II, III, iii, 119-120, my parentheses) Spencer, still, could win his case against those who opposed his decision to go back to Fez in fulfillment of his promise to Joffer. As a true, committed, Christian, Spencer argues that he would go back to Fez, even if this meant his death, so that Moors could not say that Christians are traitors:

I prize my honor and Christian’s faith
Above what earth can yield. Shall Fez report
Unto our country’s shame and to the scandal
Of our religion that a barbarous Moor
Can exceed us in nobleness? No, I’ll die
A hundred thousand deaths first.
(Part II, III, ii, 131-136)

Saintly Spencer could tolerate the severest sorts of tortures, be it boiling cauldrons, the stakes, the bastinado, etc. yet he would just shed his “pearly tears” if he could not keep his promise.

Now, it was Spencer’s turn to pay Joffer back his gallant use of the former. In a fierce battle between Moorish pirates and the Italian soldiers Bashaw Joffer, a stout fighter and a leader of the Moorish pirates, is taken prisoner by Italian seamen. Being sure that his party were going to lose the battle, Joffer tried to kill himself than suffer the fate of being taken captive by his enemies but he is saved by Petro, an Italian seaman. The Duke of Florence, rather than killing the Moorish pirate for the calamities he and his fellow Moors, and Turks, have inflicted upon his Italian, and European colleagues, impressed by the bravery Joffer has shown in the battle against his men and his intention to die a soldier’s death, proclaims “Although a prisoner captive and a moor,/ Yet use him like the noblest of his nation” (Part II, V, IV, 37-38). Seeing his old benevolent friend in the dock, Spencer, joined by Bess and Goodlack, shows sincere willingness to sacrifice himself to release Joffer from his captivity:
An English virtue thou shalt try,
That for my life once didst not fear to die.—
Then for his noble office done to me,
Embrace him, Bess, dear Goodluck, and the rest,
While to this prince I kneel. — This was the bashaw
King Mullisheg made great Viceroy of Argiers.
I do not know, prince, how he is fall’n so low;
But if myself, my friends, and all my fortunes
May redeem him home, unto my naked skin
I’ll sell myself. And if my wealth will not
Amount so much, I’ll leave myself in hostage.

(Part II, V, iv, 166-175)

Touched by the self-denial act of Spencer and his inclination to save Joffer, even though if it meant his death, the Duke of Florence declares that noble Joffer can pass to his country, Barbary, “ransomless and free”. Impressed by the noble and charitable nature of his European captors, Joffer decides to “turn Christian”\(^{446}\) and asks them to accept him as a fellow Christian:

Such honor is not found in Barbary:
The virtue of these Christians hath converted me,
Which to the world I can no longer smother
Accept me, then, a Christian and a brother.

(Part II, V, iv, 184-186)

Unlike those clownish characters whom Elizabethan dramatists made to convert to Islam, Muslim Joffer converts to Christianity through:

a series of chivalric gestures ... The episode involving Joffer’s switch to Christianity is a theatrical version of the traditional fantasy about the conversion of Moors, and that harks back to the Crusades and the romance tales inspired by the crusades. Joffer conforms to the type of the noble Moor or virtuous pagan knight who was represented as convertive.\(^ {447}\)

Joffer’s conversion, argues Barthelemy, “signals the final and greatest victory” of the English against the ‘other’.\(^ {448}\) The desire to convert Muslims, or as they were called sometimes “pagans” and “infidels,” was something that many sections of the English, and European, society wished to see come true. Quakers hazarded their lives to preach Christianity in the lands of the barbarous Moors and infidel Turks. Men of letters, in their turn, as has been suggested earlier, played on the theme of conversion of Moors,

---

\(^{446}\) The phrase “turn Christian” is used by me to echo the term “turn Turk”.


Mohammetans, or Turks, to Christianity. In real life or in works of fiction, stories and dreams about converting the Moors, heathens, and Turks were not uncommon.\textsuperscript{449}

It might be worthy here to stress that Joffer, like Mully Hamet or Abd el Melek in The Battle of Alcazar, belong to the category of noble Moors, if not the only one in the play, who acted throughout the play in a way that is not incompatible with the Western, Christian, man. Though a Moor, there is nothing at all in the two parts of the play about him being involved in any sorts of wickedness or vices, lustfulness, treachery or foolishness common with his fellow Moors. It seems to me as if it were meant by Heywood, Joffer Basha acted in a way which puts him closer to the Western, Christian camp characterized by forgiveness, self-sacrifice, manhood etc. than to the Oriental Muslim one associated with harem, cruelty, etc. In the play, Joffer, even more, is not mocked, or taunted or cursed by the dramatist for his colour or Moorishness. From all his fellow black, and tawny, Moors, he is referred to as a “swan” from Barbary.

Conversion from one religion to the other has always been a sensitive issue. In spite of the fact that many Elizabethan plays built on the theme of conversion to/from Islam the size of critical literature on the topic has never matched the importance nor the volume of the genre and, instead, more emphasis has been given to the theme of conversion of Catholicism to Protestantism or vice versa.\textsuperscript{450} The main conversion plays include: Soliman and Perseda, Tamburlaine, A Christian Turn’d Turk, The Fair Maid of the West, parts I and II, Othello and The Renegado. It might be appropriate here to refer to the quality and number of people who converted to/from Islam. Those who convert to Christianity in these plays are the good and the noble ones among their people while those who convert to Islam, on the contrary, are the lightest (clowns, or slaves) among their fellows with the former rewarded by being blessed and saved by the end of the play while the latter are damned and punished for their apostasy. In the majority of the conversion plays, I would agree here with Jonathan Burton, those Christians who choose to convert to Islam are vilified and those Muslims who opt to covert to

\textsuperscript{449} Concerning the prophecy of converting kings of the Muslim world to Christianity see Chew, The Crescent and the Rose, p. 437 and Matar, Islam in Britain, pp 125-126, 151.
\textsuperscript{450} For example, Peter Milward, Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age (London: The Scholar Press, 1977); Robert W. Hefner (ed.), Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation (California: University of California University Press, 1993); Michael C. Questier, Conversion, Politics and Religion in England. Cambridge Studies in Early Modern English History Series, did not have anything to do with the theme of conversion to/from Islam in Renaissance time while Nehemia Levzion’s (ed.), Conversion to Islam (New York; London: Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1979) has dealt with the theme of conversion to Islam yet it had nothing to do, as Levzioni admits, with conversion to Islam in North Africa in the Renaissance period. (Levtzion’s book is the outcome of a seminar held at the University of Oriental and African Studies[SOAS] in 1972-73)
Christianity are exalted.  

Not only that but “whereas certain Muslim figures may be brought to Christianity in sincere acts of conversion, no representation of a Christian man (or woman’s) whole-hearted conversion to Islam exists in the canon.”

In these plays, those renegadoes would usually convert for trivial and non-genuine reasons; e.g. marrying a beautiful wife, escaping the hardships of slavery or unmerciful debtors, while those who convert to Christianity do so out of convention and understanding of the forgiveness and the greatness of Christianity with its stories of magical miracles of the Lord and Savior compared to the worldliness of Mohamet and the inability of the God of Muslims. The message that many conversion plays tended to convey to the Elizabethan audience, at a time when large numbers of their fellow English and European countrymen were converting from Christianity to Islam, was that if you convert you may end up losing your manhood (being castrated or at least circumcised), and, above all, your Saviour. The message that dramatists wanted to deliver to their perplexed countrymen is that, here I echo Burton, apostacy is dangerous. At the same time they relieved them of anxiety by mocking conversion to Islam when they chose to convert to Islam only foolish and clownish (Clem-like) persons.

To sum up, one may state that Heywood’s representation of the Moors did not differ considerably from the viewpoints common at his time, neither did he manage to compete nor match the lifelike and outstanding productions of the Moors on the Elizabethan stage by writers such as Marlowe or Shakespeare. The play did not succeed in portraying Moorish manners either.


Ibid, p. 93.

Captain Ward, for example, a renowned English pirate, who converted to Islam and married a Muslim woman was made in William Daborne’s, *A Christian Turn’d Turk* to have converted to Islam out of his lust to Voada, a Turkish woman, and, as a typical convert, by the end of the play was reported to have cursed Islam and Mohamet for failing him and prayed for Christians to unite against the Turks to free Jerusalem from the “slaves of Mahomet”.


Cf. Rice who stated “On the whole misbelievers [Moors come amongst them] come off fairly well then in Heywood’s handling. Yet he does not neglect to emphasize the superiority of those who are doubly blessed by their devotion to Christ and Queen Elizabeth.” (The Turk, Moor, and Persian, p. 441, my parentheses)


131
A thousand honors for thee and more gold
Than, shouldst thou live a double Nestor's age
Thou couldst find ways to lavish.

(Part II, I, I, 362-364)

Only a few lines later, Mullisheg, the should be foolish Moorish king, compares himself
to Priam, and Bess to Helen and, even more, refers to the Tagus river in Spain.457

The reception of *The Fair Maid of the West* in the Arab world

Past literary scholarship in English on Thomas Heywood has been very limited. Unlike
many of his contemporaries, Heywood’s complete works were not published until late in
the eighteenth century. More often than not, many critics who wrote on Elizabethan
drama have not included Heywood in their studies.458 It seems, however, that a budding
interest in Heywood and his works is gaining momentum. Many of his works have been
reprinted during the last three decades.459 Interestingly, Heywood’s works have attracted
far less attention in the Arab world than those of his predecessors; Peele and Dekker.
When it comes to the reception of *The Fair Maid of the West* in the Arab world,
Heywood is hardly known and his works have not received any considerable attention.

457 The improbabilities and lack of motivation in the making of the plays, according to Otelia
Cromwell, is characteristic of Heywood. A good case in a point is *The Fair Maid* Cromwell did
not refer to the improbabilities in *The Fair Maid*, they are many, yet she discussed those in *The
Four Prentices of London*. Among the many implausible events that the reader may find in *The
Fair Maid* are two major ones: the fact that Bess, a tanner’s daughter, and Spencer, tells the
mighty King of Fez off and that the story of Spencer being mistook for another one who
happened to bear the same name and is falsely reported be dead. (Cromwell, *Thomas Heywood*,
p. 119)

458 For example, in Ashley Thorndyle (ed.), *The Minor Elizabethan Drama*, 2 vols. (London: J.
M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1949, first published 1910), Heywood is not included.

459 Marilyn Johnson, *Images of Women in the Works of Thomas Heywood* (Salzburg: Edwin
Mellen Press 1974, Salzburg Studies: Jacobean Drama Studies); Brownell Salomon (ed.), *The
Fair Maid of the West*, Part 1, A critical edition (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und
Literatur, *Salzburg studies in English literature. Jacobean Drama Studies Series, No. 36*, 1975);
Pub, 1980); Mary Ann Weber Gasior (ed.), *Thomas Heywood's The four prentices of London*:
a critical old-spelling edition (New York: Garland Pub, 1980); David M. Bergeron (ed.) *Thomas
*His Majesty's Royal Ship: A Critical Edition of Thomas Heywood's A True Description of His
Majesties Royall Ship* (AMS Press 1990, AMS Studies in the Renaissance); Kathleen McLuskie,
*Dekker and Heywood: Professional Dramatists*, Paul Merchant (ed.), *Thomas Heywood Three
Marriage plays: The Wise-woman of Hogsdon; The English Traveller; The Captives* (Manchester;
Rowland (ed.)*The first and second parts of King Edward IV* (Manchester: Manchester
University Press, *The Revels Plays Companion Library Series*, 2005); Brian Scobie (ed.) *A
Series*); Brian Scobie (ed.), *A woman Killed with Kindness* (W. W. Norton & Company 1986,
reprinted in 2003)
Bekkaoui, who has written massively on British drama (especially those plays with North African themes or characters), has little or nothing to say about Heywood and his *The Fair Maid of the West*. In spite of the fact that in his intensive book on the Moorish question Bekkaoui touched on the theme of the castration of Europeans at the Moroccan courts, conversion of the Moor or the white man is fear of the European female fascination with the Moor he did not come near to *The Fair Maid of the West*.\(^{460}\) The reason I think little attention has been paid to *The Fair Maid* in the Arab world is that it deals with a sensitive area; the conversion of a Muslim to Christianity.

By the time I finished this thesis, I have not come across any translation of *The Fair Maid of the West* neither have I managed to get hold of any written critique of the play. Nehad Selaiha and Sameh Fekry Hannah, two Arabic Academics familiar with the reception of English drama in the Arab world, have confirmed to me that they are not aware of any Arabic translation or adaptation of *The Fair Maid of the West*.\(^{461}\) Due to its sensitive nature, being loaded with religious content, Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West* is unlikely to be translated or performed in the Arab world; at least in the foreseeable future. The conversion of a Muslim, Joffer, to Christianity by the end of the play renders any reproduction of the story a taboo for which the culprit may lose his life; or at least his job. Even teaching such a play at universities may pose a risk that only a few can take.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined *The Fair Maid of the West* in the light of the historical, political, and cultural givens of Elizabethan England. Not much attention has been given in this study to the dramatic structure since this has been undertaken by many other critics cited above. Applying a New Historicism approach, the themes of piracy, conversion and patriotism were given the kind of attention lacked in many of the previous studies that concerned itself with Renaissance or Elizabethan drama. In *The Fair Maid of the West*, Heywood hits on the differences between the Christians and the non-Christians putting emphasis on the virtues and noble deeds of the former and the vices and wicked deeds of the latter

I scrutinized the potential sources of the play. As well, I have tried to trace the source of *The Fair Maid of the West*. I pointed out that there are two of written accounts, one in

\(^{460}\) These titles included “Images of Conquest and Castration”, [pp 140-150] “Contradiction and the Conversion of the Moorish Prince”[pp 162-173], and “White Male fear of white female fascination with the Moor” [pp 181-187] (Bekkaoui, *Signs of Spectacular Resistance*)

\(^{461}\) See footnote no. 224, passim.
Hakluyt and one Purchas, that deem likely to be the sources of the play. The similarities between these stories and the incidents in the two parts of The Fair Maid encouraged me to argue that they are among the most viable sources of the play.

Regarding the image of Moors in Heywood’s The Fair Maid of the West, Part I and Part II, I tried to establish that the image of the Moor did not only change from time to time and from one author to another but it did change in the writings of one and the same author writing the very same play. Here, Heywood presents two very different representations of the Moorish characters in the first and the second part of his play. The historical, political, and cultural moment in which the play was written was brought back and the play has been discussed from a contemporaneous New Historicist point of view. My aim was to prove that the seemingly friendly relationship between England and Morocco during the reign of Queen Elizabeth and King Ahmed al-Mansour helped reduce the volume of negative stereotyping of Moorish characters in Elizabethan drama, though it did not eliminate it. In Heywood’s case, this meant praising the Moors in Part I and cursing the same Moors in Part II of his play.

At the very end, this chapter is a deliberate attempt to take Heywood seriously and I hope that some others will follow suit. Heywood has not received the kind of attention many of his contemporaries did. Heywood’s works may not enjoy the professionalism or originality of Shakespeare nor the sharpness and the daring tone of Marlowe, yet they could still be studied for their educational, patriotic or religious significance.

Among all the critics who have written on Heywood Louis B Wright argues that Heywood has received due attention during and after his life. Louis is mainly concerned with the reproduction and acting of Heywood’s plays from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century. (Louis B. Wright, Notes on Thomas Heywood’s later reputation”, The Review of English Studies, vol. 4, no. 14 (1928), pp 135-144.
This chapter deals with the image of Moors in Shakespeare’s plays. The main attention will be given to *Othello* where the Moor belongs to the category of Moors discussed in earlier chapters, i.e., Moors that have something to do with North Africa and the Orient. Moors who appear in *Othello, The Merchant of Venice, The Tempest*, and *Titus Andronicus* will be invoked for a comparison between the different types of Moors that Shakespeare has introduced to his readers. In my analysis of how the Moors are depicted in Shakespeare’s plays, I will follow the same approach that has been adopted in the first three chapters; i.e., how Moors see themselves, how others see them and how the author chooses to portray them. More emphasis will be given, as in earlier chapters, to the historical, cultural, and political aspects in relation to the image of the Moors in Shakespeare’s plays.

Among other things, this chapter will discuss the setting and sources of the play, its historical and political background, and its author’s capability, or lack of it, to ‘impersonate’ his ‘Moors’. I will be demonstrating why Venice served as an ideal setting for *Othello*. What I propose in this chapter is that Shakespeare’s Moors are unique. Of the four Moors Shakespeare introduced in his career, two are devilish, Aaron and Caliban, and two are noble, Othello and Prince of Morocco. At the end of the chapter, I will refer to the reception of Shakespeare’s plays, mostly *Othello*, by Arab audiences and critics. In this regard, I will argue that in spite of the fact that most of Shakespeare’s works have been translated, Arabized, and re-translated into Arabic, little or nothing has been written on these reproductions of the works of Shakespeare in the Arab world. Studies on the reception of Shakespeare’s works in the Arab, or Muslim, world are scant and difficult to find. Egypt will be taken as a case study for two reasons: it is the biggest and most influential Arab capital when it comes to drama, cinema, or arts in general, and for the availability of written material on the topic. My aim here is to fill this gap by bringing to light the scholastic writings undertaken by Arab critics, translators and academics, during the last few decades. I would be arguing that *Othello* is among the greatest plays written in English. To receive such a critical acclaim and raise all these discussions around the Arab world is no strange thing. No other work of Shakespeare, I

---

463 There has been much interest in Shakespeare in North African countries but most the writings are in French.
would agree here with Ferial Ghazoul, has received similar attention from Arab critics neither did any play harp on the idea of “Arab sensibility and identity” as did Othello. For one thing, argues Ghazoul, “the hero is a Moor and therefore an “Arab.” Furthermore, he is not just an Arab character in an Arab context; he is an Arab in Europe, necessarily evoking all the complex confrontations of Self-Other in a context of power struggle.”

Othello is an ‘open’ text and hence any interpretation may count as legitimate as the other. Though great and unique, the play, however, is seen by many critics as ‘difficult’ to understand; ‘open’; ‘vague’ or even ‘contradictory’. Contradictions and ambiguities in Othello may include: Is Othello brown, black Moor, or Negro, a Christian or a Muslim? Is he a ‘noble,’ or a ‘barbarian,’ Moor? Is Desdemona a ‘simple,’ a ‘naive,’ maid or a ‘revolutionary’ dishonest ‘courtesan’? Our reading of the play, then, might differ and many would ask: did the Venetians tolerate the Moor for his gallantry and heroism, or just because they needed his help to repel the Turks? All these are ‘valid’ readings of the play.

To start with, it is not redundancy to refer here to Shakespeare’s ‘genius’ and ‘universality’. As a talented writer, Shakespeare tackled ideas, raised issues and presented tragic heroes in a way that only the great dramatist Shakespeare could have done. In an age in which it was not unusual of many of his fellow dramatists to compose pageants or write plays praising the Queen and her men and send her and their enemies to hell, Shakespeare chose to lead a different path: to present stories that may appeal, not only to his countrymen, but to the whole world. Thus, his settings included Denmark, France, Venice, and the New World, and his characters ranged from the native, the French and the Spaniard, to the Moor and the Jew. The whole world was his stage and all types of characters were his target. Shakespeare is not the only dramatist who utilized foreign and exotic settings in his plays, but Shakespeare’s distinction was that he did well what many others have failed to do. He was able to imagine life from the perspective of these ‘others’ while many of his fellow playwrights could not.

Like all their fellow Moors, Shakespeare’s Moors, here Othello, Morocco, Caliban, and Aaron, are not exceptions. Moors, Negroes, and black people, as has been shown earlier, appeared in abundance in medieval morality and Elizabethan Renaissance drama. These Moors, and blackmoors, however, were mostly minor and stereotype characters.

---

466 I am indebted in this regard to Jonathan Bate who entitled one of his chapters in his book The Genius of Shakespeare as “All the world was his stage”, pp 217-250.
more of villains, plotters, and savages, than human beings fit enough to take leading roles on the London stage. Shakespeare was bold enough in introducing a revolution in the representation of the Moor, as he did with the Jew. Shakespeare introduced his audience and readers to different types of Moors and blackmoors. The most famous, rather notorious, among Shakespeare’s Moors (other than Othello) is Aaron in Titus Andronicus while Caliban in The Tempest deservedly takes the status of his deputy. Aaron is among Shakespeare’s articulated villains. He is described as “inhuman dog, unhallowed slave” [Act V, iii, 14] and he commits horrible crimes against other characters in the play. Caliban is a little picaresque dwarfish character.

Shakespeare’s ‘others’ included, among others, the Arab, the Indian, the Jew, the Moor, and the Turk. Of interest to us in this chapter is the image of the Moors. Emphasis will be given to the three types of Moors Shakespeare introduced in his plays: the stereotype villain Moor, Aaron, the Roman Moor, the noble funny and clownish Moor, Morocco, the Prince from Barbary, and the noble ‘erring’ and most controversial Moor, Othello the “tawny” Moor. Othello is a brown Moor who comes originally from Barbary but lives as a semi-nationalised citizen in the tiny Republic of Venice and marries a white beautiful Venetian lady. Shakespeare’s Moors, in other words, come in a choice of different colours and sizes, the cool black, the black and the tawny. They belong to different religious backgrounds: the pagan, Aaron, the Muslim, Morocco, and the converted, Othello. Of these Moors, Othello excels all in bravery, religiosity, Morocco tops them all in extravagance, while Aaron prevails in savagery and animalism.

The trouble that any Shakespeare scholar, critic or even reader may face when writing or reading on Shakespeare is that, to quote Prince Charles (Prince of Wales) “so many other people have done the same, and will continue to do so, for generations.” To one’s solace, the best writings on Shakespeare, according to my own judgment, have been done by what I have termed as “the grand-children of Shakespeare’s others”: James Shapiro (Jewish), Ania Loomba (Indian), Nabil Matar (Arab) Stephen Greenblatt (Jewish), Richmond Barbour (Indian), Jack Shaheen (Arab), to name just a few.

I: The Setting of the play

Shakespeare used Venice as a setting for many of his plays and these are among his greatest works. In The Merchant of Venice and in Othello Venice is the setting. Aleppo,
Cairo, Constantinople, Fez, or Marrakesh, could have fitted as a setting for *Othello* or *The Merchant of Venice*; no other Renaissance European city ever other than Venice could have replaced it as a setting of either play. Venice was the only place in Europe at that time that would serve as a setting for these two plays. First of all, there were many more Moors, and Jews, in the little Republic of Venice than in medieval England, or any other European city. Venice was an open, democratic, metropolitan city where the Moorish fighter, Othello, or the Jewish merchant, Shylock, could live; prosper; and marry one of its damsels, side by side of the natives.\(^{469}\) London, Madrid, or Paris, could not serve as an appropriate setting to any of these plays. Jews were expelled from England in 1290. On the 18\(^{th}\) of July 1290, the decree was issued that all Jews must leave the country by no later than the feast of All Saints of the year 1290.\(^{470}\) Many theories and rumours circulated at that time regarding the motives behind the expulsion of Jews from England at that time. The reasons behind the expulsion of Jews, argues Sholom Singer, were more “economic” than “religious” or “political”.\(^{471}\) Barnett Ovrut goes on the same vein arguing that “economic” factors, with the influence of Jewish moneylenders increasing, helped put an end to their abode in England.\(^{472}\)

When it comes to the Moors in England, by the end of the sixteenth century Queen Elizabeth expressed her dislike of the few hundred Negroes and blackmoor minority residing in her realm. In 1601, she decreed that these Negroes and blackmoors, speaking of them as “the said kind of people” must be evicted from her kingdom because they were taking the jobs her subjects should be taking.\(^{473}\)

More often than not, Moors and Jews were lumped together. The similarities between the Jews and the Moors, especially Muslim Moors, are many: both believe in One God, both do not eat pork or ham, both are “circumcised”, both do not believe in saints or intermediaries between man and God and both deny the Crucifixion.\(^{474}\)

\(^{469}\) I see it striking that Iago, the villain in the play, comes from Florence, not Venice. One cannot say whether Shakespeare meant it or not.


relationship between Jews and Muslims in Renaissance England was sometimes described as “fellowship” or “twinship” and at some others as “kinship”. For the Elizabethan audience this twinship between the Muslim and the Jew, argues E. Salem, was closer than many can anticipate. What might have made the Jew and the Muslim to be lumped together by Elizabethans is that both were more often than not eager to effect what they thought to be “justice” than to forgive or show mercy toward others. This is clearly manifested in Othello and The Merchant of Venice where the ex-Muslim (Othello) and the Jew (Shylock) show utter unwillingness to forgive their Christian victims.

Hence, an 1590s-1600s London hostile to its foreigners, Moors, Negroes, or Jews, the English capital was not expected to tolerate the Moorish Othello as a suitor to one of its rich and high class maidens nor could it accept the Jewish Shylock as one of its leading merchant lenders. Venice, as Allan Bloom put it, offered the most “perfect setting for the action for shylock and Othello because it was the place where the various sorts of men could freely mingle, and it was known the world over as the most tolerant city of its time.” Judging by the sixteenth and seventeenth century standards, any other European city cannot match little Venice when it came to tolerating the ‘other’. While England, France, and Spain expelled, or at least harassed, Jewish, black and Muslim populations, Venice tolerated them all.

Theoretically then, but not theatrically, London, compared to Venice, has little to do with Moorish Othello. Though scattered all over the world in Elizabethan England, as merchants, travellers, adventurers, or budding colonialists, or even mercenaries, Elizabethan Britons did not tolerate the idea that a large number of “foreigners” or “strangers” (be it Moors, blacks, Negroes, Greeks or Dutchmen) might settle within the walls of their capital, London. There could be a handful of Moriscos expelled from Spain, tens of Moorish or Turkish seamen or pirates who were taken captive by the Spaniards or the Portuguese; or a few Moorish or Turkish merchants or slaves who were taken captive by Portuguese or Spanish pirates who had to seek refuge in the realm of her Majesty. These were reluctantly tolerated, for some days, weeks, or months and they

476 Ellie Salem, “The Elizabethan Image of Islam” p. 47. The culmination of the kinship between the Muslim and the Jew, Salem contends, is manipulated by the fact that Elizabethans used to believe that Muhammad fabricated his new religion with the help of a “Jewish magician” and a heretic “monk”. (Ibid)
were shipped back to their countries at the earliest possible opportunity. If their abode lasted for longer than expected, let alone staying permanently, rumours, gossip, and anger may follow.\footnote{The impact of the long stay of the Moorish ambassadorial delegation, who visited London in 1600, on Londoners has been referred to earlier.}

Venice, on the other hand, served as a democratic, and open, Republic where “foreigners” and “strangers” enjoyed the freedom to work, trade, or join its army. No wonder then that a Moor rises to the status of the General of the Venetian army that was dispatched to fight the Turks, or where a Jew grows in influence to be one of its influential brokers and money-lenders. Venice, according to Felix Gilbert, was a place where everyone could live according to his or her own convictions and in which peace, not military expansion, was regarded as the “highest goal”.\footnote{Felix Gilbert, “Venetian Secrets,” \textit{New York Review of Books} (16 July 1987), p. 37.} Unlike the majority of European countries at that time, Venice was not involved in extensive piratical actions against any other nation.\footnote{In this regard, Lewkenor writes: “The Venetians do yearly arme forth certain Gallies though these bee not any other necessitie, yet to make the sea safe and secure from pyrates, and to desend from their oppression honest merchants that crosse the seas about their businesse, without doing any wrong to any man.” Lewes Lewkenor (trans.), \textit{The Commonwealth and Gouernment of Venice}, (London: imprinted by Iohn Windet for Edmund Maties, 1599), p. 136. Hereafter referred to \textit{Commonwealth}.} Venice, then, was a Renaissance [American] dream that many people from different nationalities sought to be part of and to participate in its successes. What is more is that some “foreigners” managed to reach the highest ranks of the Venetian elite class through the good deeds they had done to the country.\footnote{Lewkenor writes, in this respect, that “some forrain men and strangers haue been adopted into this number of citizens [the elite who have the right to govern the public: noblemen, rich men, and brave men], eyther in regard of their great nobility, or that they had beene dutiful towards the state, or els had done vnto the same notable seruice.” Lewes Lewkenor, “The First Booke of the Magistrates and Commonwealth of Venice” in his \textit{The Commonwealth and Gouernment of Venice}, p. 18. Only twentieth century America can match Venice when the former appointed black Colin Powell as the Secretary of Defence in the last epoch of the twentieth century.} Based on a perfect judicial system, distinction and competence were among the main criteria with which Venice would judge the merits of those who want to belong to it or serve under its banner.\footnote{For more on justice in the Venetian law see Lewkenor’s \textit{Commonwealth}, p. A 2.}

From a pragmatic point of view, Venice needed Moorish fighters, or Jewish merchants, and they in turn needed Venice. There were many Moors, Arabs, and others, in Venice than any other European city. The extensive trade waves between Venice and Mediterranean countries attracted many “foreigners” to the city.\footnote{E. Honigmann (ed.), \textit{Othello} (London: Thomas Nelson, The Arden Shakespeare Series, 1997, first published in 1993) p. 8 and William Darlymple in his introduction to Gerald Macleans’s \textit{Re-orienting the Renaissance} (Gerald Mclean (ed.), \textit{Re-orienting the Renaissance}, p. xiv)
centuries would have allowed the Moor to act freely even if it were not for his prowess. Mercenary fighters were needed, Lewkenor wrote, because Venetians were not as good at land fighting as they were at sea warfare. Hence, they had to recruit “strange” soldiers who could fight for them. If they excel themselves in defending the country, any stranger can rise to the status of a native. The question that might arise here is that: was Othello one of these? The stakes that he was one are high. The following quotation sets out the atmosphere in which Othello was written and sheds more light on the position of Moorish fighters in Venice:

To exclude therefore out of our estate the dauger or occasion of any such ambitious enterprises [of seditions or civil wars], our auncestors held it a better course to defend their dominions upon the continent, with forreyn mercenarie soouldiers, than with their homeborn citizens, & to assyne them their stipende out of the tributes and receipts of the Province, wherein they remained: for it is iust, and reasonable, that the souldiers should be maintained at the charge of those in whose defence they are employed, and into their warfare, have many of our associates been ascribed, some of which have attained to the highest degree of commandment in our army, & for the exceedinges of their deserts been enabled with the title of citizens & gentlemen of Venice."

The custom in Venice at that time was that, Lewkenor confirmed, the General of the Army is “alwaies a stranger” (p.132). It happened that during the lifetime of Shakespeare the Captain General of the Venetian army was a “stranger” whose name was Bartholomeo Coglione and he came originally from Bergamo.

Venice, and Italy in general, was thought of as an utopia that many Renaissance writers wanted to visit or emulate. News about a potential invasion of the Ottomans of the tiny Island triggered concern among all the Europeans. Venice was thought of as the gate of Christendom that kept the Turks at bay and if it was lost to the Turks then this means that the gates of hell have been opened for all Europeans. In addition, Venice

---

486 Ibid, p. 131, Italics and parentheses added.
488 For geographical and religious reasons, Venice was so important to the Europeans. Sir John Mandeville refers in his [imaginary] travels to the Orient to the anecdote that says that half of the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified was kept in an abbey in Venice known as “the Hill of the Holy Cross”. (*Travels*, p. 46)
489 Lazzaro Soranzo stresses the importance of defending Venice against the Ottomans; something he deemed tangible because the Turkish navy was not that strong compared to that of the Eupean fleets (in his words the Ottomans “hath no Armada”. *The Ottoman of Lazzaro Soranzo. Wherein is deliuered aswell a full and perfect report of the might and power of Mahemet the third, Great Eperour of the Turkes now rainging...* translated out of Italian into English by Abraham Hartwell. I. Windet: London, 1603), pp 74-77, quotation is taken from p. 75, parentheses mine. Soranzo’s account was published originally in Italianin 1599 under the title of: *L’Ottomanno ... dove si dà pieno ragguaglio ... della potenza del presente Signor de’ Turchi Mehemeto III.*
was the mecca that a large number of Renaissance European travellers sought to visit to the extent that the Pope complained about the large number of English “heretics” congesting the city. In the first sentence of his on Venice, Contanari speaks bombastically of Venice:

Hauing oftentimes obserued many strangers, men wise & learned, who arriuing newly at Venice, and beholding the beautie and magnificence thereof, were stricken with so great an admiration and amazement, that they would, and that with open mouth confesse, neuer anything which beforetime they had scene.…..

Shakespeare, according to Violet Jeffery and Ernesto Grillo, might have visited Venice. If Shakespeare did not have the chance to visit Venice he had the opportunity to read about it in Latin, Italian, or in English. It is clear that Shakespeare was one those dramatists fascinated with the Republic of Venice and its way of life: its democratic nature, tolerance of its “foreigners” and “strangers” and its open and licentious society. What might have tempted Shakespeare more to choose Venice as a setting for his play was the licentious reputation it enjoyed during the Renaissance period, and after. Sexual licentiousness, and prostitution was common in Renaissance Venice that Thomas Coryat, an English traveller who visited the city in the early years of the seventeenth century, was stunned by its women actors, “courtzans” and women with visible breasts. This, as will come later, may sound as an excuse for Othello to be a jealous husband. After all, Desdemona, he might have thought, might be a woman like any one of these wanton women whom he saw in the streets of Venice and who were ready to offer themselves to the highest bidder.

Beside the fact that London did not tolerate its “foreigners”, compared to Venice or Constantinople for example, Mediterranean and exotic settings were the fashion of the time. McPherson, in this regard, argues that Renaissance Venice was “both a city and

---

491 Ibid, sig B.
493 Stanley Wells is of the idea that Shakespeare had “a working knowledge of French and Italian”, Wells, et al (eds.), The Complete Works of Shakespeare, the Northon Anthology, p. xvi. Cf. Ridley was not sure whether Shakespeare knew Italian or French or not, Ridley (ed.), Othello, 1965, p. xv
495 For example, The Spanish Tragedy, The Battle of Alcazar, Tamburlaine the Great, Lust’s Dominion, The Merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet, etc. Vitkus, in this regard, argues that though “never naturalistically “real” or historically accurate: Shakespeare’s audiences consumed representations of foreignness or ancientness that spoke in English verse-and
a world” in itself and like many of his contemporaries Shakespeare and Jonson “were fascinated by that world.”

From what has been said earlier, it is legitimate to argue here that Venice was the unique and optimal city that would fit as a setting for Othello. From a historical point of view, there were many thousands of Moorish captives in Venice. On the other hand, there were no Moors fighting in the army of the English Queen.

II: Sources of the play

The consensus among critics and Shakespearean scholars is that Shakespeare moulded his play on Geraldi Cinthio’s Hicatommithia, published originally in Italian in 1565 and translated into French in 1583. Shakespeare, argues Honigmann, may have read the story in Italian, French, or in a lost English translation. However, the majority of critics tend to give priority to the Italian story, than the French one, as the main source from which Shakespeare got his story arguing that Othello is closer to the Italian version than to the French translation of the story. These critics take Shakespeare’s use of some Latin words as evidence that may support their contention. Shakespeare, according to Ernesto Grillo, “must somehow or other have learnt enough Italian to read and understand our [Italian] writers.” The similarities between the Italian story and Othello are too many to be enumerated here yet the points at which Shakespeare deviated, or departed, from his original source will be invoked in due course.

498 M. Ridley (ed.), Othello; Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare (London: Columbia University Press, 1964) [henceforth referred to as Narrative and Dramatic Sources] and Honigmann (ed.), Othello, the introduction. Cf. Virginian Vaughan, Othello: A contextual Study, where she argues that having surveyed Renaissance texts that might have helped Shakespeare in portraying Othello. Vaughan concludes that she did not find a specific text that might have helped Shakespeare produce Othello the way he did. (p. 63)
499 Honigmann (ed.), Othello, p. 368.
501 Ernesto Grillo, Shakespeare and Italy, p. 125, my parentheses. The chapter is entitled “Did Shakespeare know Italian?”
Besides Cinthio, critics have counted some other sources that might have helped Shakespeare to produce Othello the way he did; mainly, Thomas Newton’s *A Notable Historie of the Saracens*, Lewis Lewkenor’s, *Commonwealth*, Geoffrey Fenton’s, *Certaine Tragicall Discourses*, and Richard Knolles’s *The General historie of the Turkes*. Shakespeare could find information about the Saracens, Moors, and Turks in Newton’s and Knolles’ books while he could find information about Venice and Italy in Lewkenor’s and Fenton’s accounts. The similarities between the story of Bandello and Shakespeare’s play are striking. In Bandello’s tales, there is one of a jealous Albanian husband, Don Spado, who (like Othello) is a military leader who kills his wife and himself because of his excessive jealousy. An interesting parallel line between the two accounts is that the wife in both cases, though on the threshold of death, was able to tell her story to some attendant. Bullough, though, is not sure whether Shakespeare could have read Fenton’s story or not because from his point of view Shakespeare could not read Italian. What I would like to stress here is that the signs that Shakespeare read Fenton’s account are high especially when we take into consideration the fact that Shakespeare, as has been stated earlier, could probably read Italian. The parallel lines between the Fenton story and *Othello* may support my contention here.

The biography of George Castriota, or George Iskander, as he was named by the Turks, may have given Shakespeare the source and momentum to write *Othello*. George Castriota, of Albanian origin, was one of the young children that Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, Hungaria, or Poland, had to deliver to the Great Turk as part of the tribute they had to pay to the Great Turk regularly. Raised as a Muslim, Turkish, ‘janizary’, George showed great valour in fighting for the Turks. Later, when the Turks planned to invade his native country (Albania), he escaped to his home country, reverted to his mother religion and fought against the forces of Sultan Murad in 1448. The similarities between George Castriota and Othello are blatant: both were raised as

---

502 Bollough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, pp 203-204. Fenton’s book is a translation of Belleforset’s *Historie Tragiques* which is, according to Bullough, an adaptation of Bandello.

503 These similarities are listed by Bollough, pp 203-204

504 The Ottomans gave George the name Iskander (i.e., Alexander) for his bravery; thus comparing him to Alexander the Great.

505 According Richard Knolles, a contemporaneous historian, European countries under the rule of the Ottomans had to deliver between ten to twelve thousands of its children every three years. (Richard Knolles, *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (London, 1610, first published 1603, p. 959) Many other sixteenth and seventeenth historians and travellers referred to this fact. Nicholas Nichaly, for example, states that European children, and beautiful young girls and women, were among the tribute paid to the Ottomans. (Nicholas Nicolay, *The Navigations, Peregrinations and Voyages, made into Turkie by Nicholas Nicolay*, translated out of French by T. Washington, (London, 1585), p. K 3) Contemporary to the time in which *Othello* was written, the state of Venice, wrote Lazzaro Soranzo, used to pay the Ottoman Sultan a “1000 Cecchnoes” for the island of Zante. (Soranzo, *The Ottoman of Larazo Soranzo*, p. 37)

506 The story is mentioned in Rice, “The Turk, Moor, and Persian”, p. 30.
Muslims, both converted to Christianity, and both loved to fight the ‘insolent’ Turks and ex-patriot Moors. Shakespeare could have a clue to the story of George Castriota in Ashton’s, Newton’s or Knolle’s accounts on the Turks.

In the same vein, critics found striking similarities between Leo Africanus and Othello. Both Leo and Othello were Moors who were taken captive by Europeans, both converted to Christianity and seemed to have liked to settle in Europe and both were very influential figures who liked to work with fellow Europeans in the war against the Ottoman terror. Louis Whitney detected some other parallel lines between Leo and Othello, i.e., both were Moors who escaped many hazardous dangers in the desert and mountains of Africa and both were “noble” Moors. Similarly, Emily Bartels has found salient, mainly biographical, crossing points between Leo and Othello. In this regard, the majority of critics are of the idea that Shakespeare read Leo’s book on Africa. Whitney states that Shakespeare was closer to Hakluyt and hence it is more likely that he came to know about Pory’s translation of Leo’s book. Bollough argues that Shakespeare “almost certainly consulted Pory’s translation of Leo’s account on Africa”. Honigmann takes the point a bit further arguing that Leo Africanus’ account on Africa, along with the Moorish ambassadorial visit to England in 1600, inspired Shakespeare to write Othello.

---

507 George Castriota is said by a contemporaneous historian to have killed two thousand Turks. There are some scant references to the similarity between Castriot and Othello in Sha’ban, “The Mohammedan world”, pp 19-20 and in Chew, The Crescent and the Rose, p. 474.
508 Peter Ashton (trans.), A Short treatise upon the Turks chronicles (London, 1546), Thomas Newton, Notable Historie of the Saracens, (London, 1575) and Knolles, The Generall Historie of the Turkes.
509 In spite of the fact that he was not an infantry soldier or a knight who fought against the Turks, Leo’s role in the war against the Ottomans was not less important than that of Othello. Leo provided what might be termed in modern terms as “strategic” information on the geography and infrastructure of the enemy. In his account on Africa, Leo gives a detailed geographic survey of Africa, especially the North Africa region, its topographic nature, cities, the habits, beliefs, and fads of its inhabitants. (Leo, A Geographical Historie of Africa)
512 These include, among many others, Obaid, “The Moor Figure in English Renaissance Drama”, p. 90; Jones, Othello’s Countrymen, p. 21; Bollough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, p. 208, and Honigmann (ed.), Othello, p. 4.
514 Honigmann (ed.), Othello, p. 4. Cf. John Draper states that it is probable that Shakespeare read Leo’s account but “apparently too late to be much use”. (Orientalia and Shakespeare, p.13)
The visit of the ambassadorial Moroccan delegation to England in 1600 has been seen as a stimulus, and a source, that inspired Shakespeare to write *Othello*. Among the critics who strenuously advocate this idea are, Bullough, Honigmann, Bates and Bekkaoui. Honigmann and Bates argue that Shakespeare had the chance to see “first hand” the Moorish embassy that visited London in 1600 and the reason for this is that Lord Chamberlain, the company Shakespeare used to write plays for, performed at court in the Christmas time in 1600-1601.\(^5\) I think that it is not unreasonable in any way to speak of the parallel lines that might connect Ambassador Anouri and Othello. If Othello was a Moorish (Muslim) Prince who converted to Christianity and seemed to have preferred the European dress to the Moroccan jalabya and to speak a European language than his native Arabic, Ambassador Abel Wahed Anouri clearly favoured the Moroccan jalabya and Arabic to European dress and tongue. In other words, if Othello the convert Moor prospered in Europe, so did Abd El Wahed the Portuguese convert prosper in the court of Morocco.\(^6\) It might have struck Shakespeare to mould a European correlative, a counter-copy, a mirror-image, of the European “renegade”, now the Moorish ambassador, and plant it on European soil. It should be emphasized here that this is a genuine contention especially when we bear in mind that the head of the Moorish delegation was from European origin but he converted to Islam.\(^7\) Seeing how a Christian European convert prospered under the banner of Mohamaten rule, it might have struck Shakespeare to create an equivalent and present it to his European readers. The story of Leo the African, so famous all over Europe at that time, might have given him a clue to what might happen to a Moor who converts to Christianity.

Far from all the stories, and parallel lines, that have been linked to *Othello* either by critics or historians there remain two episodes that bear the closet resemblances to the story of *Othello*. My contention here is that these two anecdotes stand as a revelation in the making of the play. In 1589, Sir Henry Cavendish and some of other English travellers were on a journey to Constantinople. John Fox, Sir Henry Cavendish’s servant and escort in his journey to the Ottoman capital, narrates how he and his fellows were “mett with ii Turkes, the one a genessary and the other a spahy. These proud Turkes percavyng us to be Crystyans cam to us and stoke us wythe ther rydying whypes and


\(^6\) According to the majority of old critics, such as Thomas Rymer (1693), Charles Gildon (1694) Othello is a Muslim. Samuel Chew is among the few modern writers who believe that Othello is a Muslim. Robert West asserts that Othello is Christian (Robert H. West, “The Christianness of Othello”, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (1964), pp 333-343) Matar, on the other hand, believes that Othello is a convert. (Matar, *Islam in Britain*, p. 130)

\(^7\) The story is mentioned by Matar in *Islam in Britain*. 

146
took away a hatt and would not let us have it again without mony.” 519 In 1600, George Manwaring, Sir Robert Sherely’s companion on his journey to Persia, tells his story of being smacked, humiliated, by the Turks who almost “pulled” off his ears. Manwaring tells how the Turks watched and followed him and his fellow European travellers with “some throwing stones at me, and spitting on me”. 520 These two episodes may serve as the driving motive behind Othello’s beating of a Turk in Aleppo. One would argue here that the omens that Shakespeare knew about this episode are high especially when we know that this George Manwaring was a companion of one of the Sherley brothers; the most “three” prominent “brothers” in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. 521 Elizabethans, argues Sha’ban, ranked the Sherley brothers as “popular heroes” and hence “Knowledge of their adventures must have been widespread because of the variety of sources where people could have heard of them.” 522 There were not only stories that were circulating about the adventures of the brothers but there also grew what Anthony Parr termed the “Sherley myth” 523 One can argue here that Shakespeare probably had these two, or similar, anecdotes about Cavendish or Manwaring being hit or humiliated in Aleppo or Constantinople in mind when writing Othello.

Geographically speaking, Shakespeare was right when he made his Othello smack the ‘Turk’ in Aleppo, and not in any other European or Mediterranean town. Shakespeare seems to have been familiar with travels to the Orient, Aleppo, or Cairo, and Venice. In The Merchant of Venice, Bassanio’s ships are lost in their way back from Aleppo. Historically, among the English travellers who travelled to the Orient, Barthemaaat was in Aleppo as early as 1503, Newbery and Barret in 1580, Sanderson in 1597, Sherley in 1599, Biddulph in 1600, and Cartwright was there in 1603. 524 It was Bidulph’s advice to his fellow English, and European, travellers, not to pay heed to any molestations or insults they may suffer at the hands of the “insolent” Turks at Aleppo, or any other

519 John Fox, Mr. Harrie Cavendish His Journey to and fro Constantinople, 1589, by Fox his Servant, ed., A. C. Wood, The Camden Miscellany, 3rd Series, vol., 64 (London, 1950), p. 14, cited in Sha’ban, p. 60. Fox was thankful because the Turks in Sofia “would stand and stare uppon us and spyt uppon us, but they did not beat us.”


521 Purchas put the brothers among the most important English figures of their time (Purchas, His Pilgrimes, vol. 1, p. 374). News about the Sherley brothers in Elizabethan England and after were like “top news” in our modern times about Saddam Hussein, Usama bin Laden, David Beckham, or George Gallaway. The Travailes of the three English Brothers, a play depicting the heroic adventures of the brothers was published in 1607.


country under the rule of the Turks.\textsuperscript{525} Even though, this did not mean, after all, that travellers to the Orient would go unharmed. William Lithgow got his share when he, along with other European travelling mates, was “laughed at,” “molested” and “beaten” by the Turks escorting them.\textsuperscript{526} Aleppo, or Haleb [Halab] as many English and European travellers knew it by its Arabic name, was known to the English as at that time as “Kingston-upon-Thames”.\textsuperscript{527} However, the number of Venetians in Aleppo at the time of writing the play was more considerable than any other European community because the Venetians chose to ignore the papal order instructing European countries not to trade with the Muslims.\textsuperscript{528} Venetians, especially merchants, according to Deborah Howard, were fond of travelling to the Orient. Deborah goes further arguing that Venetian merchants were so familiar with Oriental trading centres, such as Alexandria, Aleppo, or Damascus, that only few visitors “felt the need to describe them.”\textsuperscript{529} The fact that Shakespeare allows his hero to hit a ‘Turk’ who dared to smack a fellow Venetian runs in ideal harmony with the adoption of Venice as a setting. After all, Othello all throughout the play speaks as a Venetian citizen who loves his country and sees himself as an integral part in the build up of this city. Though raised as a Moor, Othello chooses to side with his new brethren Venetians than with ex-native Moors. There was a ground, argues Cowley, for an enmity between the Moors and the Turks that legitimized Othello to “smack” the Turk who dared to abuse a fellow Venetian.\textsuperscript{530}

III: Original sources and \textit{Othello}

According to the cannons of Greek tragedy, the fate of a tragedy should not be determined nor shaped by chance or Providence. Tragedy, writes Alan Bloom, is “founded on the notion that, in the decisive respect, human beings are free and responsible that their fates are the consequences of their choices. All that is a result of external force or chance is dehumanizing in the tragic view.”\textsuperscript{531} Judging by these criteria, \textit{Othello} is the tragedy of love, naivety, chance, and other things. Desdemona loved

\textsuperscript{525} William Biddulph, cited in Matar, \textit{Islam in Britain\textit{,}} p. 4

\textsuperscript{526} William Lithgow, \textit{The Travels of William Lithgow\textit{,}} p. m.

\textsuperscript{527} Cowley, \textit{The Voyagers\textit{,}} p. 167.


\textsuperscript{530} Cowley, \textit{The Voyagers\textit{,}} p. 168 and Draper, \textit{Orientalia and Shakespeare\textit{,}} p. 134.

\textsuperscript{531} Alan Bloom “Cosmopolitan man” in \textit{Shakespeare's Politics\textit{,}} p. 38.
Othello most and so did he. Being a simple Moor, through Iago’s premeditated tricks, and chance, Othello was made to believe that she was unfaithful to him. From his point of view, Othello was one hundred percent sure that she contaminated his bed with an unlawful relationship with his lieutenant, Cassio. The handkerchief, their marriage token, she lost, knocking on the door by an unknown person thought to be Cassio, and Desdemona’s unrelenting petitions that Cassio should be remanded back to his office as soon as possible, all this made Othello suspicions equal to truth. By killing her, he thought that he was effecting justice against the one whom he loved passionately, but not “wisely” as he said. On her death bed, Othello insists on stamping his kisses on Desdemona’s checks for the last time. Fate and Providence not only acted against Othello in driving him to kill the one he loved but also it did stand against Morocco, in *The Merchant of Venice*, when choosing the casket that might allow him to marry Portia. Providence did not allow Morocco to choose the right casket and was denied the chance to win Portia’s hands. In *Othello*, chance and Providence seemed to have colluded with Iago against Othello. This is clearly against the etiquettes of tragedy and no explanation has been given on why Shakespeare has given chance the upper hand in his play. A quick look at the original story in Cinthio and Shakespeare’s play will show that the former is more logical and realistic than *Othello*.

In the original story the Moor and Disdemona lived peacefully for a considerable period of time. Disdemona used to call him “my Moor” and “never a word passed between them that was not loving” (Bollough, p. 242) When it comes to the rift between the two lovers, the Moor asks his wife for the reason why she takes the trouble to resolutely defend the cause of the Corporal while “he is not your brother, nor even a kinsman, yet you have him so much in heart!” [Bollough, p. 245] Disdemona defends herself arguing that she has not “committed so serious an offence as to deserve such hostility. But you Moors are so hot by nature that any little thing moves you to anger and revenge.” [Bollough, p. 245] Not convinced by what Disdemona’s reasoning for her intercession on behalf of the Corporal, the Moor asks his wife for more clarification, or a proof, otherwise he will have to take revenge. Terrified by the threats of her husband, Disdemona puts an end to this dispute by declaring that she will no longer discuss it with him “Only a very good purpose made me speak to you about this but rather than have you angry with me I shall ever say another word on the subject.” [Bollough, p. 245] This has never materialized in *Othello*. Later, however, the Moor hurries to the Ensign to ask him for all that he knows about the presumed affair between his wife and the Corporal. The Ensign tells the Moor that it is hard for Disdemona to “see the Corporal in disgrace for the simple reason that she takes her pleasure with him whenever he comes to your
[the Moor’s] house. This woman has come to dislike your blackness.”

The Moor replies that he will cut the tongue of anyone who dares to say a bad word against his wife and the Ensign fights back confirming that what he says is the truth. The Moor, then, asks him to prove that his wife is unfaithful to him. (Bollough, pp 245-246) They separate with the Ensign promising to present the proof. Then, the Ensign manages to steal Disdemona’s handkerchief. (Bollough, p. 246) After seeing what meant for him the “ocular proof” for his wife’s adultery, the “handkerchief”, the Moor decides to kill the Corporal or have him killed. He asks the Ensign to kill the Corporal but the latter refuses. By handing him a “large sum of money” the Ensign agrees to kill the Corporal. [Bollough, p. 249] Hearing the news that the Corporal was fatally injured, Disdemona shows the “utmost sorrow” and this makes the Moor more suspicious about his wife’s fidelity. Speaking to the Ensign about Disdemona’s reaction to the news that the Corporal has been seriously injured the latter says “How could you expect anything else?...since he is her life and soul?” [Bollough, p. 250] The Moor who has been thinking of killing the Corporal so that his wife might come back to him now decides to kill his wife as well.

Writing about the sources of Othello, Maurice Charney argues that Shakespeare, sometimes closely followed his sources and at some other times did not. In Othello, Shakespeare has done both, i.e., following and deviating from his original sources at the same time. The main differences between the Cinthio story and Othello are that Desdemona in the original story is much stronger and independent than Shakespeare’s Desdemona and the Moor is more wicked than Othello. Desdemona strongly defends herself against the accusations of the Moors and blames him of being still bound under the influence of his African heritage while Desdemona in Shakespeare’s play does not fight back when Othello accuses her of having an illegal relationship with Cassio. In the original story, the Ensign works hand in hand with the Moor when planning to punish the Corporal for the alleged offence while in Othello Iago plays the role of an agitator than a collaborator in punishing Cassio for allegedly having an affair with Desdemona. Among the significant digressions Shakespeare had moved from his original sources are the fact that the Ensign steals Disdemona’s “handkerchief” while in the play it is Emilia who brings it to Iago and the fact that Shakespeare removed the motivation behind Iago’s desire to punish Desdemona and Othello and gave more room to chance than in the original story.

---

532 Bollough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources, p. 245, my parentheses.
534 Regarding the motivation behind Iago’s wrongdoing, Jonathan Bates states that “One of the major characteristics of Shakespeare’s handling of his sources is a removal of obvious
Thus, it may be safe to reiterate here that the Moor in Cinthio’s story is more devilish than Othello (Iago is far worse) while Desdemona is more active than the Cordellia style Desdemona we see in Shakespeare’s Othello. In Cinthio’s and Shakespeare’s stories, chance helps the Ensign’s, and Iago, schemes to materialize. Had Emilia appeared minutes earlier or had Othello given Desdemona a few minutes, as she asked, to say her prayers in peace, Desdemona’s life could have been saved. Shortly before being strangled by Othello, Desdemona begs him to spare her life:

*Desdemona:* O banish me, my lord, but kill me not!... Kill me to-morrow; let me live to-night......
But half an hour!
But while I say one prayer.

*Othello:* ‘Tis too late (he stifles her)

(V, II, 79-85)

What might have prompted Shakespeare to let the train of events go uninterrupted is that the sense of “anxiety” that was prominent in Elizabethan drama; something that is brought to a kind of perfection in Shakespeare’s Othello. The play, according Greenblatt “remorselessly heightens audience anxiety, an anxiety focused on the audience’s inability to interfere and stop the murderous chain of lies and misunderstandings” and, to a great extent, “chance.” Othello’s downfall, argues Katherine Stockholder, derives from his “willingness to accommodate himself to the flux and certainties of his time- in short, to chance and fortune i the world.” Stockholder argues that Othello’s desire to reach the truth, to see the “ocular” proof in his words, makes him a prey to chance.

To sum up here, Desdemona in Cinthio’s tale is more active than the Desdemona in Othello, the Moor is as barely bad as Othello and the Ensign is far worse in Cinthio’s than Iago in Shakespeare’s story. In the play, Desdemona is more of a pacifist lover, though she takes no notice of her father’s rejection of her marriage to Othello, as if her love for Othello has blinded her eyes and stopped her mind from functioning properly. In this regard, Ragga al-Naqqash argues that the only bit of criticism that may be levelled against Desdemona is that she was rather simple (naive to an extent) and that she did not take any precautions in regards to her relationship with Othello or to the plots

---

533 Katherine s. Stockholder, “Egregiously an Ass” p. 256.
534 Ibid, p. 256.
masterminded by Iago with the aim of destroying her life and that of Othello. In Cinthio’s story, when the Moor accuses Desdemona of having an affair with his lieutenant, she fights back saying “you are a Moor, and so hot-blooded by nature, that the slightest thing moves you to anger and revenge.” In Shakespeare’s Othello, Desdemona does not defend herself against the accusations neither does she clarify things for the simple Moor. Othello asks Desdemona six times to “fetch” him the “handkerchief” but her reaction, strangely enough, helps sustain Othello’s built-in jealous impulses and suspicions. It might be worthy here to quote the dialogue between Othello and Desdemona:

```
Othello: I have a salt and rheum offend me,
       Lend me thy handkerchief. (She hands him a different one but he insists on having the one he gave her as a marriage token)
       Is ’t lost? is ’t gone? speak, is it out o’ the way?
Desdemona: Heaven bless us…
Othello: Fetch it, let me see it.
Desdemona: Why, so I can sir, but I will not now,
       This is a trick, to put me from my suit, [i.e., intersession for Cassio]
       I pray let Cassio be receiv’d again.
Othello: Fetch me that handkerchief, my mind misgives.
Desdemona: come, come,
       You’ll never meet a more sufficient man.
Othello: the handkerchief!
Desdemona: I pray, talk me of Cassio!.
Othello: The handkerchief
Desdemona: A man that all his time!
       Hath founded his good fortunes on your love,
       Shar’d dangers with you,
Othello: The handkerchief!
Desdemona: I’ faith, you are to blame!
Othello: zounds!
(Act III, iv, 47-95, parentheses mine)
```

What is more is that when Lodovico comes from Venice with a writ that Cassio would replace Othello as the General of the Venetian army in Cyprus, Desdemona begs Lodovico to act as a mediator and bridge the gap between Othello and Cassio “Cousin, there’s fall’n between him [Cassio] and my lord [Othello]/ An unkind breach, but you shall make all well.” (Act IV, i, 220-221, my parentheses)

Pretending to be ill, Othello asks Desdemona to give him the “handkerchief”. The handkerchief was dear to Othello and it meant many things for him. Above all, it was their love token and a gift from his late mother whom an Egyptian magician advised that

---

so as long as she keeps it with her she will never lose her husband. When asking Desdemona to present the handkerchief Othello does not discuss it with her neither does he negotiate it. Rather, he was giving her orders to produce the handkerchief. When she failed to provide him with the handkerchief he took his decision she is “loose” and unfaithful to him. As a military leader, Othello gives the verdict and it is “she must die”.

Now, Othello is more of a North African Moor than of a European one. While reasoning and effecting justice was one of the most important characteristics that distinguished Venice from many other cities or countries at that time, Othello chooses to act as a witness, a judge and an executor at the same time. Arguing that “reasoning” is more dominant in Othello than any other Shakespearean play, E. Weedin compares the Duke’s use of reasoning to that of Iago. Weedin finds that while the Duke is not persuaded by the accusations levelled by Brabantio against Othello the latter fell prey to Iago’s sort of reasoning and he thought that he was doing the right thing when he planned to punish Desdemona for her “unfaithfulness”. Weedin concludes that the Duke of Venice uses proper “reasoning” while Othello does not. Weedin compares the ‘charges’ brought by Brabantio against Othello to those brought by Iago against Desdemona. In the first case the Duke ‘disproves’ those charges while in the second Othello does not approve those of Iago. What Weedin seems to have forgotten is that it was Iago’s diabolic nature, and chance, that helps him not only to fool the simple Moor but also to fool Roderigo, Cassio, and Emilia. Iago has never gone straight with what he wanted from his victims neither has he rushed to make his proposals to or accusations against his victims. Iago was extremely patient with his victims and he usually got his catches on the right time. Chance also played a role against Othello: why did Desdemona insist on defending Cassio? What if Desdemona did not lose her handkerchief? What if Emilia did come a few minutes earlier before Othello strangles Desdemona?

Othello’s mistakes include his failure to differentiate between Desdemona’s “human goodness” and an “absolute ideal” of the wife he held of her. In other words, Othello saw Desdemona as a ‘symbol’; someone who loved him passionately and whom he loved as well but when he, falsely, came to think that she is ‘unfaithful’ to him everything around him is shattered.

---

545 Katherine Stockholder “Egregiously an Ass”, p. 262.
Though it was not uncommon of Moors, Othello was not jealous by nature.\footnote{Europeans at that time took the jealousy and promiscuity of the Moors and the blacks for granted. Leo Africanus’ book on Africa and Africans reinforced this. Leo spoke of the Moor who would kill anyone who may offend a female member of his family, be it his wife, sister, mother, or any. This has been referred to in earlier chapters.} Othello, according to Ahmad Sakhsoākh, did not show any sign of jealousy all through the first half of the play.\footnote{Ahmad Sakhsoākh, Tajārib Shākispīriyyah fī <Alamina Al-Mu<āṣir [Shakespearean Experiments in our Contemporary Time]. Cairo: al-Hay‘ah al-<āmāh Li al-Kitāb, 2005, first published 1991], p. 76. Henceforth referred to as Tajārib Shākispīriyyah.} When Shakespeare wrote the play, continues Sakhsoākh, he was not “writing about a black man’s jealousy in particular; Othello’s actions are a result of certain circumstances around him and he reacted to these in a way that reflects his own personal biography. A white man might have done the same if he were put in the same situation.”\footnote{Ibid, p. 79. Cf. Alan Bloom who argues that it is something inborn in Othello that led him to behave in s such a way. For Bloom, “Even the most superficial reader is struck by the slightness of the proofs which convince Othello of Desdemona’s infidelity.” Shakespeare’s Politics, p. 37.} What might have helped to sustain Othello’s suspicion of his wife’s infidelity, one would argue, was the licentious way of life Venice used to enjoy in Elizabethan England.

IV: Othello: The Moor of Venice

Othello is the most humane, noble, and vivid Moor in Renaissance drama. In analyzing the character of Othello, as has been done with other Moors in the first three chapters, attention will be paid first to how the Moor see himself; how he is seen by other fellow characters and the author. Unlike the majority of his contemporaries who mixed between Arabs, Moors, Turks, Shakespeare did not and while many of his fellow dramatists presented Moors and Turks as being familiar with Greek Gods and sometimes worshiping them Shakespeare portrayed them as they were.

Those who comment on Othello’s behaviour are divided into three groups: his opponents and enemies (Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio), his supporter[s] (only Desdemona) and those in-between, neutral, parties who admire Othello’s valour and morals as a leader and a brave fighter defending his country yet they do not hesitate to condemn him when he commits his horrible mistake of killing their fellow citizen, Desdemona (the Duke, Lodovico, First Senator, Montano, and a Gentleman). Othello is described by the Duke as “valiant Othello” and “far more fair than black” [Act I, iii, 48 & Act I, iii, 290]; by Third Gentleman as “warlike Moor Othello” [Act II, i, 26]; by First Senator as “the valiant Moor” and “brave Moor” [Act I, iii, 47 & Act I, iii, 291]; by Montano (his predecessor as a general of the army in the government of Cyprus) as “worthy
governor”, “brave Othello”, “noble Moor” and “worthy Othello” [Act II, i, 30, Act II, i, 38, Act II, iii, 131 & Act II, iii, 168] and by a Gentleman as “our noble general Othello”. [Act II, iii, 11] Lodovico, however, witnessing the change Othello has undergone, exclaims:

Is this the noble Moor, whom our full Senate
Call all in all sufficient? This the noble nature,
Whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,
Could neither graze, nor pierce?
(Act IV, i, 260-264)

Othello’s opponents and enemies, on the other hand, see him in a totally different way. Brabantio, Desdemona’s father, seemed to be impressed by Othello and his heroic tales and so did Desdemona. On many occasions, old Brabantio invited the Moorish fighter to tell him and his daughter more of his interesting tales about the adventures he met and battles he fought in Barbary and the Orient. This fragile friendship or tolerance of the Moor is replaced by stark enmity for the Moor once Brabantio knows that his daughter is in love with the alien Moor. He did not blame his daughter for what he thought was a stark abnormality but he accused Othello of exploiting his daughter via foul means and “sorcery”. For Brabantio, Othello, once a brave Moorish fighter, is downgraded to no more than a “foul thief” and a “sooty bosom” Moor. (Act I, ii, 62 & Act I, ii, 70) Roderigo, who is in love with Desdemona and the one who thinks that Othello does not qualify to be a suitable suitor to her, describes Othello as “the thicklips” and “the lascivious Moor” (Act I, i, 66 & Act I, i, 126). The rapidity of this downgrading may indicate that prejudice against the Moors was there all along. Yet, what could be argued here is that Moors, and foreigners, did not face the same degree of harassment they would have met in many other European cities.

Iago, Othello’s tormentor and predator, though he acknowledges Othello’s nobility, honesty, and valour, states:

549 The full quotation reads:

Pray heaven he be: [Othello acting as the commander of the army]
For I have served him, and the man commands
Like a full soldier: let’s to the seaside, ho!
As well to see the vessel that’s come in,
As to throw out our eyes for brave Othello,
(II, i, 35-38, parentheses mine)
That she [Desdemona] loves him, ‘tis apt and of great credit:  
The Moor, howbe’t that I endure him not,  
Is of a constant, noble, loving nature;  
And I dare think, he’ll prove to Desdemona  
A most dear husband…  
(Act II, i, 282-285, parentheses mine)

yet, he categorizes Othello, his military commander, as “the Moor”, the “old black ram”, the “devil”, (two times) “a Barbary horse”, an “erring barbarian” and “black Othello”. (Act I, i, 39, Act I, i, 88, Act I, i, 91, Act II, i, 225, Act I, iii, 356, and Act II, iii, 29) Though his words should not be taken at their face value, Iago suspects the “lustful Moor” to have “leapt into my [his] seat” i.e. had an unlawful relationship with his wife. (Act II, i, 290-291)

Though Iago who painted Othello in the blackest colours, it is of high importance not just to concentrate on what Iago describes Othello but it is of equal weight to observe how he speaks of other characters in the play. From beginning to end, Iago proves himself to be the enemy of all other characters in the play, including his wife whom he kills by the end of the play and he never speaks favourably of any character in the play. He exploits Roderigo’s love for Desdemona and uses it for his own advantage yet he does not hesitate to categorize him as “my young mistress’ dog…my sick fool Roderigo” (Act II, iii, 47)

As for how Othello sees himself, no matter how others tended to think of him, Othello was always confident of his own merit and credentials. In an early appearance, Othello speaks of his “perfect soul” and shows confidence that the “services” he has done to the Signory, the Duke of Venice, would counter any accusations made against him by Brabantio. Desdemona is the only character in the play who supported Othello and stood by him from the beginning to the very end. Betraying a sense of an “open” and “free” Venice which pays little attention to the “race” or “colour” of people, Desdemona declares that she loves Othello for his own and for the heroic deeds he has done and adventures he has experienced. In her own words, she saw “Othello’s visage in his mind” not in his black complexion. (Act I, iii, 252) She used to address him all the time as “my lord” and “my fair warrior”. (Act I, iii, 251) On her deathbed strangled by the one whom she loved passionately, Desdemona, when asked by Emilia about the identity of the culprit who did this horrible crime to her, replies that it is her and asks Emilia to give regards to her Lord.

Though it was typical of Moors at that time to be libidous and sexually aggressive (one thinks here of Eleazar and Aaron) Othello exceptionally shows signs of self-restrain and sexual moderation. Before embarking on his Cyprus journey, Othello assures the
Duke and the Venetians that though newly-wed to Desdemona sex and passion will not
distract him from his main task: deterring the Turkish enemies. Disturbed on his nuptial
night by the tumult caused by Cassio’s unprofessional behaviour and his unlawful
drunkenness when on duty, Othello does not hesitate to leave his marriage bed and clean
new sheets prepared by his wife to check in person the reason behind the brawl outside.

V: Arab Othello and the theme of conversion

Concerning Othello’s ethnicity and status in Venice, there are three theories. First, for
Bradley, Alan Bloom, and many others, Shakespeare was interested in Othello’s
“ethnicity” and that Othello is an alien creature in civilized Venice. Second, for T.S.
Eliot and Robert Heilman, among many others, Othello’s flaws, here jealousy and
emotionalism are human and universal. G. K. Hunter, Eldred Jones, Edward Berry,
among many others, go for a middle way option arguing that Shakespeare had been
influenced by the stereotypes about the Moors but he presented his Moors as civilized
and human beings and that Shakespeare’s aims behind introducing stereotypic
elements in the Moors was to criticize, not to sustain, such attributes.

Othello’s problem, argues Alan Bloom, is illustrated by “the fact that he is a
mercenary”. What connects Othello to Venice, continues Bloom, is his
“Christianity”. Othello, contends Wagdy Fishawy, is “a strange crop transplanted into
a strange soil; survival in such circumstances becomes a matter of mere chance.”
Emily Bartels expresses the most commonsensical view regarding Othello’s status in
Venice. Bartels states that Othello is “neither an alienated nor an assimilated subject, but
a figure defined by two worlds, a figure (like Marlowe’s Jew of Malta) whose ethnicity
occupies one slot, professional interests another, compatibly.” Bloom, however, agrees
that Othello’s main problem is that he loved, or married, Desdemona. In Othello-

550 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London: MacMillan, 1941, first published 1904)
551 T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), the chapter is entitled
“Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca”; Robert Heilman, Magic in the Web (Lexington:
Kentucky University press) 1956, p. 139, Eldred Jones, Othello’s Countrymen, p. 109, Edward
552 G. K. Hunter, “Othello and colour Prejudice” in his Dramatic Identities and Cultural
Tradition: Studies in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries (Liverpool: Liverpool University
Press, 1978, pp 31-59
553 Alan Bloom, Cosmopolitan Man in Shakespeare’s Politics, p. 47.
555 Wagdy Fishawy, Shakespeare’s Great Tragedies: A Criticism of a Criticism (Cairo: University
Press, 1985), p. 34. Fishawy is an Emeritus Professor of English at the Faculty of Languages
and Translation, al-Azhar University, Cairo.
556 Emily C. Bartels, “Othello and Africa: Postcolonial Reconsidered”, The William and Mary
Desdemona love relationship, argues Bloom, the “seeds of the ultimate failure are sown.”557

What I would like to say here is that Othello might have been seen by Elizabethan audience or readership in England as an “outsider” but to the majority in Venice he must have been ranked as a fellow Venetian and a brave leader. How Othello was described by other characters in the play till the moment he kills Desdemona may legitimize my contention here. Fellow Venetians speak well of Othello, praise his courage, and acknowledge the sacrifices he has offered to his country. During the proceeding of the hearing in which Brabantio accuses the Moor of seducing his girl, Othello is given the chance to defend himself and clear his name.

To vouch this is no proof,
Without more certain and more overt test;
These are thin habits, and poor likelihoods
Of modern seemings, you prefer against him.
(Act I, iii, 107-09)

When he starts to maltreat Desdemona and abuse her in the presence of other people, these same Venetians do not approve him; rather they blame him for killing Desdemona and they lament the loss of someone whom they used to call “once the noble Moor”. It might be argued here that the Venetians tolerated Othello because they needed his help and leadership to repel the Ottoman imminent threat against their country and once the Turkish menace was over he was done with and removed from his office.558 Even after killing Desdemona, because law and order prevails in Venice, Othello is treated in dignity: he was taken to court where he was doomed to be put in prison. No savage or barbaric attacks were ever levelled against the Moor in civilized and law-abiding Venice.

Othello’s status in Venice and his marriage to Desdemona are among the ever-heated discussions with some of these revealing an atmosphere of “impartiality”, racism, incompatibility, or “double-standards”. This sense of partiality on behalf of the majority of critics when it comes to Othello and his marriage to Desdemona has been spotted by Eric Griffin who disapproves the incompatibility between what critics praise Venice for and, at the same time, labelling Othello as an “outsider” or a “mercenary” in this cosmopolitan city.559 Some critics like to deny Othello the status of a “tragic hero” and will prefer to label him as a fallen “cuckold” or an untailored jealous Moor coming from the far wild Africa. For those, Othello is, more often than not regarded as “a figure of

558 Virginia Vaughn, for example, argues that the Venetians were racist in their outlook of Othello in spite the fact that they needed his “military acumen”. Vaughn, *Othello: A Contextual Study*, p. 65.
559 Eric Griffin, “Un-sainting James”, p. 58.
fun” not as a tragic hero. What these critics seem to have forgotten is the sub-title of the play reads as “The Tragedy of the Moor of Venice”. The partiality, or the inability, of not a few Western critics to understand or forgive Othello may refer, from a New Historicist point of view, to the ever-ongoing misunderstanding between the two cultures. Despite the fact that Iago is far more vile than Othello and has committed many more offences than Othello whose single mishap is that he killed his wife for suspecting her to be disloyal to him, the majority of Western critics, and readers would like to concentrate on issues related to Othello’s evil behaviour; his “colour”; “race”; “religion”; “sexuality” or “un-forgiveness”. He is an outsider and a parasite whose smallest crimes are crystallized and paid for on the spot while others are given the chance to repent and be born again.

To compare Othello to his fellow Moors who appeared on the Renaissance stage, Othello fares pretty well. If put in comparison with other Moorish characters, Aaron, Eleazar, Mullisheg etc., Othello is far more human and, to an extent, European than many of the other Moors who appeared on the London stage at that time. Othello commits a crime that many husbands in early modern England perhaps might have done. Seen in an objective way, Othello’s errors, or crimes, do not match those of Iago or Roderigo. From beginning to end, Iago and Roderigo are plotting to wreck havoc on Othello with the aim of destroying him. Othello’s apparent mistakes are; appointing Cassio, rather than Iago, as his lieutenant, falling prey to Iago’s machinations against him and his false accusations and allusions against Desdemona, and killing Desdemona by the end of the play. Othello’s selection of Cassio rather than Iago as his lieutenant has been described as “foolish” but the former, according to Draper, seems to be more educated and “mathematical” than the latter. Othello’s preference of Cassio than Iago to take the post of his lieutenant was not the unique reason that led the latter to seek revenge. It was envy, argues Rajā’ Al-Naqqāsh, of the success the foreign Moor has achieved and his marriage to a beautiful Venetian aristocratic wife that fuelled hatred in Iago against Othello.

Othello’s failings are few and human. If “simplicity”, or “naivety”, was Othello’s flaw, so was Desdemona and if he killed his wife so did Iago. For the objective reader,

561 Ahmad Sakhūsh, *Tajārib Shākispīriyyah*, p. 79.
562 John Draper, “Shakespeare and Florence and Florentines”, *Italica*, vol. 23, no. 4 (1946) p. 291. The quote reads as Othello “as an efficient commander sees the necessity of the new type of officer [the educated and the experienced] and so advances to second in command the younger Cassio with higher education rather than the older and more experienced Iago”, parentheses mine.
Judging by the norms of the time in which the play was written, Othello might have a slight “excuse” in killing his wife while Iago would be denied such an excuse. First, Othello believed (or was made to believe) that Desdemona was not faithful to him and that she contaminated their marriage-bed with an illegal relationship with his lieutenant, Casio. True or not, these allegations by Iago that Desdemona is betraying her husband are reinforced by Othello’s, and Desdemona’s, gullibility and Providence that stood against them.

Reading *Othello* from a Presentist point of view, Linda Charnes pays a lot of attention to the rule chance (Contingency in her own terms) played in the destruction of Othello. Charnes reveals that “too little attention” has been paid to “Contingency” and its effect on human behaviour and destiny. She classifies *Othello* under what she terms “Contingency plays”. Echoing Foucault’s theory on power and “biopolitics”, Charnes believes that Othello is an alien in the Venetian society and that he just lent his ‘body’ (i.e., valour and military wakefulness) to the Venetian State. In other words, Othello was tolerated in Venice mainly for his manly prowess. Charnes' satirical words are revealing and worth quoting here:

> The inclusion of Othello’s body as a “part” of the Venetian whole has hitherto been authorized by a kind of temporary parking permit: when he attempts to “naturalize” himself as part of the body politic by marrying into it, he clearly parks his person in a place where it does not belong.

Charnes concludes that ‘chance’ plays an immense role in Othello’s downfall.

One would argue here that Othello’s mistake was that he did not separate between his role as a military leader and his role as a husband. As a military leader, Othello knew how to repel, defeat, or kill his enemies. He should be able to manoeuvre and retreat when necessary as well. As a commander of the Venetian army in Cyprus, Othello managed to control the situation and led the Venetians to snatch a win against the Ottomans, though it was Providence than the Venetian might that repelled the Ottoman fleet. Othello takes the decision to appoint Cassio for his lieutenant yet he does not hesitate to fire him when the latter is caught up drunk when on duty. Even when he suspects that Desdemona is not faithful to him, Othello applies a military code of practice:

---

Think ’st thou I’ld make a life of jealousy?
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No, to be once in doubt,
Is once to be resolv’d: exchange me for a goat,
When I shall turn the business of my soul
To such exsufflicate and blown surmises,
Matching thy inference: ’tis not to make me jealous,
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well;
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous:
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear, or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago,
I’ll see before I doubt, when I doubt, prove,
And on the proof, there is no more but this:
Away at once with love or jealousy!

(Act III, iii, 181-196)

The Moor that this quotation presents is part a European, not a North African, Moor. A North African Moor would never tolerate the fact that his wife might be socializing, playing, singing, or dancing in front of other men while a European Moor would. This represents one of the rarest moments in which Shakespeare failed to “impersonate” his Moorish tragic hero. Otherwise, the Moor introduced here has been corrupted by Venetian, European open, values; something that contradicts the behaviour of the Moor by the end of the play. The “justice of it [killing Desdemona] pleases” is Othello’s rationale behind the killing of his wife. (Act IV, i, 205, my parentheses) Killing one’s wife, when suspecting that she has been unfaithful to him, is perceived to be more than of Moorish, Oriental, than of European nature. A Moor does not usually forgive but he seeks justice.566 Boiling with anger, Othello strikes Desdemona and calls her a “Devil!”, thus acting as a typical Moor living in Africa, not a civilized Venetian, where it is thought that women were being abused by their husbands. Lodovico, astonished by Othello’s behaviour, denounces the barbarian insult against Desdemona: My lord, this would not be believed in Venice,/Though I should swear I saw’ it.” (Act IV, i, 237-238) Insisting on effecting his justice on Desdemona “She must die, else she’ll betray more men”, (Act V, ii, 6) Desdemona, on the other hand, forgives the one who might be behind all her troubles “If any such there, heaven pardon him” (Act IV, ii, 137) The stark discrepancy between the behaviour of a European lady ready to forgive, even those who have done her harm, and the Moorish General who takes revenge against the one whom only she loves, needs no comment here.

By killing Desdemona, Othello turns Turk once more, if only symbolically.567 In other words, by killing Desdemona, Othello, many critics have argued, has undergone a

566 It is the same blemish that tarnished the image of Jewish Shylock in The Merchant of Venice.
metamorphosis. He changes, according to Bollough and Vitkus, among many other critics, from the noble Moor and a loving Christian to a savage barbarian and a cruel and an unforgiving Mohameatan.\textsuperscript{568} By committing suicide at the end of the play, Othello signals his damnation and this could, from S. Bethaell’s and Paul Siegel’s point of view, guarantee him a place in hell nearer to Lucifer and Judas.\textsuperscript{569} Realizing, though late, that he has done something wrong to the only one whom he loved and whom she loved, Othello repents his deed, recalls the heroic actions he did to defend Christianity and fellow Christians, and takes his own life as if he were taking that of a Turk who once humiliated a fellow Venetian in Aleppo:

\begin{verbatim}
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban’d Turk
Beat a Venetian, and traduc’d the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him thus.
(Act V, ii, 333-337)
\end{verbatim}

These are Othello’s last and illuminating words on the stage. Jean Klene is among the few critics who are of the idea that Othello’s suicide can be seen as “the only honorable course remaining”.\textsuperscript{570} In Elizabethan England, it was not awkward for an English “gentleman” to kill himself if his wife was unfaithful to him.\textsuperscript{571} Martin Lings too argues that Othello’s suicide is not meant to be a revolt against destiny and it is not “difficult for me [Lings] to accept his suicide as an objective act of justice against himself in accordance with some law unknown to us.”\textsuperscript{572}

It is viable here to argue that Shakespeare in \textit{Othello} might have intended to give attention to the theme of conversion that represented a menace to Europe in the Renaissance period. The notion of conversion, writes Jonathan Bates, was “crucial in the Elizabethan perception of the relationship between Europe Christianity and the Ottoman Empire.”\textsuperscript{573} Daniel Vitkus, in this regard, describes \textit{Othello} as a drama of “CONVERSION [sic], in particular a conversion to certain forms of faithfulness deeply feared by Shakespeare’s audience.”\textsuperscript{574} Shakespeare’s religious background, though

\textsuperscript{570} Jean Klene, “Othello: A Fixed Figure for the Time of Scorn” \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly}, vol. 26, no. 2 (1975) p. 148.
\textsuperscript{571} Jean Klene, “Othello: A Fixed Figure for the Time of Scorn” \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly}, vol. 26, no. 2 (1975) p. 140.
\textsuperscript{572} Martin Lings, \textit{The Sacred Art of Shakespeare}, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{574} Daniel Vitkus, “Turning Turk in Othello”, p. 145, parentheses mine.
controversial, may have its stamp on the making of the play. Peter Millard, in this regard, argues that Othello was a “deeply religious man” with Catholic background; Eric Griffin thinks that he was a Protestant while Martin Lings states that he was a Freemason. Drawing on the similarities between Islam and Protestantism, referring to the letters exchanged between Queen Elizabeth and the Kings of Morocco and Fez, and of course the Ottoman Sultans, in which both sides removed themselves away of any “idolatrous” forms of worship, Griffin, strangely enough, argues that Shakespeare punished the Moor for converting from Islam, which he saw as closer to Protestantism, than to Catholicism. Like the majority of his compatriots, Shakespeare must have been worried by the great number of his European fellow citizens who chose for different reasons to convert to Islam.

The sort of conversion that Othello has undergone is unique. Othello, from beginning to end, is keen on seeing himself, and proving himself to be, as much European and Christian as he could. Hence, he speaks bombastically of his fights against the infidel “Turks” in North Africa and Venice. It seems that he came to loath anything “Turkish” or “Mohammetan”. Thus, when he knows about the brawl outside his place, Othello yells “Are we turn’d Turks, and to ourselves d that/ Which heaven has forbid the Ottomites? For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl”. (Act II, iii, 161-163) Othello’s conversion (or one would say ‘metamorphosis’) is tri-fold. First, he converts from Islam to Christianity. He seems to be happy with his new adopted religion and shows utter dislike for the former. Living in a European city and serving as a high profile leader in the Venetian army, Othello acts, if temporarily, as a qualified General leading a sizeable European fleet. Upon the first real testing, Othello reverts to his Moorish past and acts as expected from a proper typical Moor. It might worth it here to bring to attention the fact that it is not usually easy for a convert to forget all about his traditions and culture and get himself fused into his new adopted customs and ways of life. Othello, one would argue, was in an intricate situation. By the end, the Venetian Othello could not get rid of the Moorish Othello inside him.


576 Eric Griffin, “Un-sainting James, p. 83.

577 Past or present, converts seem to be more connected to their new adopted religions or sects than people who are born on this or that religion. Converts count as the toughest fighters against their ex-brethrens and co-religionists. From among the British culprits who were involved in terrorist attacks against key targets in London on 07/07/2005, many were converts. For more detail, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/uk/4783215.stm>; http://politics.guardian.co.uk/terrorism/story/0,,1842274,00.html>; http://politics.guardian.co.uk/terrorism/story/0,,1841149,00.html>; http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/crime/article1218895.ece> (sites visited on 20/07/2006).

578 Late in the twentieth century, Mark Gabriel, an Egyptian Muslim scholar who converted to Christianity in 1994, found it difficult to eat pork or ham. Mark states that he, however, knew he
Shakespeare introduced to his audience, knowingly or not, was a combination of a Moorish and Venetian prince. Othello himself does not seem to have known this fact. The convert that Othello presents is not illogical nor does he come from the magic world: he is lifelike convert like anyone else. Typical of Shakespearian craftsmanship and uniqueness, Othello the convert is human, fallible, and lifelike in the same way Shylock the Jew is.

Historically speaking, as has been suggested in chapter three, conversion from Islam to Christianity, to quote the words of Bates here, from “Othello’s direction [to Christianity]…, was rarer than the opposite turn.”579 If Joffer, in Heywood’s The Fair Maid of the West, chooses to convert from Islam to Christianity, Shakespeare’s Othello does not hesitate to smack the “circumcised” Ottoman “dog” for daring to hit a fellow Venetian in the streets of Aleppo. The fact behind this was sober since it was Venetians, and Europeans in general, who were humiliated, ridiculed, beaten, and castrated in Aleppo, Baghdad, or Constantinople. In spite of the fact that it was Europeans who were beaten and humbled in Aleppo, Jerusalem, or Constantinople, Shakespeare, not in disharmony with the political and public givens of his time, ran against time and history. In the same vein, Shakespeare put weight on the invasion of the Ottomans to Rhodes and the threats that the Turks might have had presented to Cyprus or Venice while in fact Rhodes, and Cyprus, was already under Turkish control by the time Shakespeare wrote his play.580 Stories about a potential invasion of Venice, or even Italy, by the Turks were known to the majority of Britons in Elizabethan time.581

VI: Shakespeare and Islam

Shakespeare introduced his readers and audience, as has been mentioned earlier, to three types of Moor: the black, Roman, villain Moor, the clownish Moor, Morocco (Portia’s

“needed to find a way to subdue the old man inside” him. (Mark A. Gabriel, The Unfinished Battle: Islam and the Jews, ( Florida: Charisma House) 2003, p. 23) In the first five chapters, Gabriel narrates his story of conversion. In the first three chapters of his second book, Islam and Terrorism, Gabriel tells his story in more details. (Mark Gabriel, Islam and Terrorism (Florida: Charisma House, 2003), pp 1-13)

580 The Ottomans invaded Cyprus in 1571 during the reign of Sultan Selim II. (Vitkus, citing George Hall’s A History of Cyprus, “Turning Turk”, p. 165.
581 The threat and the scenarios that might have been adopted by the Turks were mouthed by Lazaro, an Italian who lived and wrote his works during the time of Shakespeare. (Soranzo, The Ottoman of Lazaro, pp V2-V3) Cf. Bollough (p. 13) argues that Shakespeare might have not known that Rhodes was already in “Turkish hands” but one would say that the signs that Shakespeare knew about the fall of Rhodes to the Turks are high especially when we know that when Venice was saved from the Ottoman threat in 1570 the good news reached England rather quickly and prayers were said all over the realm of her Majesty.

164
suitors) and the North African Moors: Othello and Caliban. Only one of these Moors, Morocco, seems to be a Muslim while the others are heathens, Aaron and Caliban, or converts, Othello. Among them all Othello stands as the most important, vivid, and human Moor that Elizabethan, and to a great extent English, drama has ever seen. If Elizabethan playwrights painted their Moors in the blackest colours, Shakespeare introduced the first amicable Moorish tragic hero in the history of English drama. One would agree here with Stanley Wells in that Shakespeare was “bold and original” when deciding to make a Moor as his tragic hero.\textsuperscript{582} Alan Bloom goes in the same vein arguing that Shakespeare, in choosing a Moor to be his tragic hero, ran “counter to an established pattern of thought” and hence he had to exert a tremendous effort “to convince his readers and audience of his Moor’s nobility.”\textsuperscript{583} Not only did Shakespeare usher a revolution into black-white representation but also he made a significant departure from his, and others’, earlier portrayal of the Moors.\textsuperscript{584} Shakespeare’s works, I would like to stress here, show considerable degree of independence from the cultural, religious and literary assumptions of his time. In the meantime, this does not mean that Shakespeare was detached from the society in which he lived. His works reveal that he shared the same concerns with his Elizabethan audience.\textsuperscript{585}

The questions that I would like to raise and give answers to here are: did Shakespeare’s works, like the majority of his contemporaries, betray an anti-Islamic sentiment? And did he sympathise with Othello? Compared to his contemporaries, Shakespeare’s works do not give abundant references to Islam, or to the Orient in general, for the sake of it neither do his works reflect a considerable knowledge of the lands or the religion of Islam. Draper, in this regard, argues that Shakespeare “gives no references to Islamic literature or its art…perhaps his London audience would have resented allusions to Islam” and that is why, one would argue, Othello was depicted as a convert from Islam to Christianity than a proper Muslim.\textsuperscript{586} Scant references to Islam in the works of Shakespeare made Draper argue that Shakespeare made little or no effort to represent the “topical and oriental atmosphere that he might have known from sailors and merchants in London, or even from casual perusal of Leo Africanus”.\textsuperscript{587} What Draper might have forgotten is that it was fashion at that time to introduce Moorish,

\textsuperscript{582} Stanley Wells, et all (eds.), \textit{The Complete Works of Shakespeare}, p. 819.
\textsuperscript{583} Bloom, \textit{Shakespeare’s Politics}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{584} Loomba, citing Hunter and Cowhig, \textit{Gender, Race}, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{585} Jean Howard discusses the effect of Shakespeare’s works on his audience and how they reacted to his wrings in “Figures and Grounds: Shakespeare’s control of audience perception and response,” (\textit{Studies in English Literature}, vol., 20, no., 2 (1980), pp, 185-194). For detailed information on the political aspect in Shakespeare’s works, see Draper, \textit{Orientalia and Shakespeare}, pp 118-125.
\textsuperscript{586} Draper, \textit{Orientalia and Shakespeare}, p. 131
\textsuperscript{587} Ibid, p. 131
Oriental and Turkish characters on the London stage and, justified or not, using such characters in the fight against the Orient and what they took to be the evil of Mohammedanism. Nabil Matar goes in the same vein arguing that Shakespeare referred to “Mahomet” only once in all his writings (Henry VI) while “Alcoran” never appeared in his works. Yet, skimming the works of Shakespeare, apart from Othello, I have found no fewer than ten references to Turks, Muslims, Arabs, or Saracens.

To give an answer to the second part of the question, one should state here that Shakespeare’s treatment of Othello is unique. My contention, and here I agree with Jean Klene and Martin Lings, among many others, is that Shakespeare sympathised with Othello. To argue, however, that the play is void of racism is to do injustice to the play, its author, the time in which the play was composed and the audience for which it was written. We should not forget that Shakespeare, like the majority of his fellow dramatists, was writing for his living and that he was writing to the Elizabethan not to the twentieth or twenty first centuries audience. In addition to that, Shakespeare, argues David Bevington, was not ‘perfect’. What may be of relevance here is that Shakespeare, exceptionally independent and unique though he was, was writing to his

588 Matar, Britain and Barbary, p. 30. The story that Prophet Mohammad was training a dove that he used to talk to is among the myths that were circulated in Europe about Mohammad. Shakespeare was familiar with this story and he referred to it. (See also, Ellie Salem, The Elizabethan Image of Islam, Islamica, p. 48)

589 Among these references:

Many a time hath banished Norfolk fought
For Jesus Christ in glorious Christian filed
Streaming the ensign of the Christian cross/
against black pagans, Turks, and Saracens;
Peace shall go sleep with Turks and infidels
*(Richard II, Act IV, i, 82 -130)*

and

This new and gorgeous garment, majesty
Sits not so easy on me as you think
Brother, you mix your sadness with some fear.
This is the English, not the Turkish court;
Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,
But Harry Harry.
*(Henry IV, Act V, ii, 44-49)*

590 Jean Klene writes “A study of Shakespeare’s change in the manner of Desdemona’s death from that in the [original] source [Cinthio] indicates the dramatist aim to make Othello an “honorable murderer.” (Klene, Othello: A fixed Figure for the time of Scorn,” Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 26, no. 2 (1975) p. 149, my parentheses. Martin Lings takes Othello’s farewell speech as a proof that Shakespeare sympathised with Othello. He says, in this regard, “We see the Moor as we have never seen him before, with the dimension of priestly wisdom added to his royalty of nature.” (Lings, The Sacred Art of Shakespeare, p. 74)

Elizabethan audience reflecting their feelings, beliefs, tastes, and, even, prejudices. Yet, he did not follow his fellow dramatists, nor audiences, in their ‘misconceptions,’ ‘fantasies,’ or ‘cultural and religious wars’ against the ‘other’, any other. Thus, while the majority of his contemporaries, even historians, lumped the ‘Moors,’ ‘Turks,’ blackmoors,’ ‘Negroes,’ ‘Mohametans or ‘Mohammedans,’ ‘Ethiops’ together, Shakespeare showed an awareness of the differences between these categories and expressed the agonies, inner feelings, pains, or miseries they might have felt. Alan Bloom, in this context, states that there is a sort of “apparent pessimism” on behalf of Shakespeare when it comes to his portrayal of his ‘others’, Jews, or blacks, in Othello and The Merchant of Venice.\textsuperscript{592} In other words, Shakespeare did best what all others did worse or have failed to do. The greatest point in Shakespeare, argues Wagdy Fishawy (an Egyptian critic) was his ability to ‘humanize’ his characters.\textsuperscript{593} The fact that Shakespeare himself is said to have converted from Catholicism to Protestantism might have helped him to understand the sense of alienation that Othello might have undergone as well as the uncertainties he went through. So, the Othello he presented is not stigmatized for the colour of his skin. His human failings are stressed while at the same time the objective reader can sympathise with him as he falls prey to Iago’s wicked intrigues. In other words, Shakespeare did not intend to paint Othello in the blackest colours as his fellow dramatists did with their Moorish characters. No wonder then that the majority of critics do not see a determined racist element in the play.\textsuperscript{594}

This does not mean, however, that Shakespeare lacked the political sense his contemporaries showed in their works neither did he drastically challenge the political taboos of his time. While George Chapman dedicated his translation of Homer’s Iliad to the Earl of Essex, when the latter was in his political fervour acting as the viceroy of the Queen, Shakespeare wrote his Troilus and Cressida ridiculing Achilles. In other words, while Chapman compared the Earl of Essex to Achilles Shakespeare wanted to distance himself from the rebellious ambitious Earl of Essex who managed to have Shakespeare’s Richard II acted on the eve of his attempt to outset Queen Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{595}

\textsuperscript{592} Bloom, Shakespeare’s Politics, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{593} Fishawy reiterating John Middleton Murray, pp 15-16.
\textsuperscript{594} Martin Orkin is among the minority of critics who argues that there is an element of racism in Othello yet he concurs that the play fights racism. (Orkin, “Othello and the “plain face” of racism”, Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 38, no. 2 (1987) pp 168 -188. Virginia Vaughan is not sure whether the play is ‘racist’ or not. She writes “I THINK THE PLAY IS RACIST, AND I THINK IT IS NOT.” (Othello: A Contextual Study, p. 70), upper case original.
\textsuperscript{595} Bate, The Genius of Shakespeare, p. 219.
VII: The reception of Shakespeare’s *Othello* in the Arab world

Shakespeare enjoys a reputation among Arabic readers, students, and critics that no other Western dramatist has ever attained. He is not only famous among them but also loved by them. According to the majority of Arab critics, Shakespeare’s first appearance on the Arabic stage took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\(^596\) Since his arrival at the lands of the Arabs Shakespeare has never been outmatched by any other European, or foreign, man of letters. In his introduction to the translation of *Othello*, Khalīl Mutrān records his admiration of Shakespeare and acknowledges his reputation in the Arab world affirming, from his point of view, that there is definitely “something Arabic in Shakespeare”.\(^597\) Ramsīs Awāḍ, the late Egyptian leading critic and a Shakespearean translator, states that Shakespeare has won an established position in the Egyptian theatre since its early beginnings in the late nineteenth century.\(^598\) In the same vein, Khalid Amine, a Moroccan professor of comparative literature, speaks of what he called “the Shakespeare myth in the Arab world” and how he came to be classified as “the canon of canons” through the frequent translations and reproductions of his plays.\(^599\) Most of Shakespeare’s works have been translated, sometimes Arabized, adapted, or parodied, by numerous translators and writers; with Shakespeare’s greatest plays being translated more than one time.\(^600\) All the translations that were done by the late nineteenth century seem to be lost.\(^601\) In 1912, Khalīl Mutrān, an Egyptian-Syrian poet and translator, produced what came to be known as one of the most influential translations of *Othello*. Mutrān’s translation of *Othello* marvelled, and ousted, any other renderings of the play and it was held a top rank translation for decades.\(^602\) *Hamlet*,

\(^{596}\) Ramsīs Awāḍ, *Shākispīr fī Miṣr* [Shakespeare in Egypt]. Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-<āmāh Li al-Kitāb, 1986), pp 4-5. There is an English version of this book; under the title of *Shakespeare in Egypt*.


\(^{598}\) Ramsīs Awāḍ, *Shākispīr fī Miṣr*, p. 5.

\(^{599}\) Khalid Amine, “Moroccan Shakespeare: From Moors to Moroccans” <http://postcolonialweb.org/moroco/literature/amine2.htm1>, site visited on 31/05/07.

\(^{600}\) Early translations of Shakespeare’s plays were rendered from the French translations of Georges Duval, Awāḍ, *Shākispīr fī Miṣr*, p. 83.


Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, The Tempest, Antonio and Cleopatra, and Othello are among the plays that have been translated, Arabized, performed, or adapted repeatedly.

As for the history of performing Othello, the play was acted in Egypt as early as the late 1890s. It was first performed in Tunisia in the early 1910s and in Moroccan in the 1930s. In the early performance of Othello, the name of the Moorish General was Otelo, and sometimes as Atallah [a Gift from Allah]. Othello was adapted and acted under many names, Otelo, Al-Kaed Al-Maghribi [the Moroccan General], Heyal al-Regal [Men’s Cunning, in reference to Iago’s evil doings] or Atallah. Tracing the modern adaptations of Othello, Ghazoul counts three versions of the play all moulded to fit the Arab taste. The first of these has been performed in Egypt since the 1960s, with countless folkloric trimmings added to the play, under the title of Atallah. The second adaptation came in the form of a movie under the title of Al-Ghira Al-Qatelah [Murderous jealousy] and directed by Atef el-Tayeb, the late Egyptian director, in 1983. The third adaptation of Othello is a play by the Moroccan writer Abdekrim Berrchid under the title of Utayl wa al-Khayl wa al-Baroud [Othello, the Horses, and the Gunpowder] appeared in Morocco in 1975-76.

Among the bizarre adjustments introduced by Sheikh Salama Hegazi and his theatrical troupe in the early productions of Othello, and Romeo and Juliet, was introducing singing and belly-dancing sessions in interludes between acts and after the end of the play. The reason for that, argues Ramsīs Awāḍ, was to relieve the Arab audience, who are used to stories and adventures with happy endings, from the highly potential sense of agony, or sadness, they might experience when watching Othello killing his faithful wife and then killing himself or when Romeo and Juliet are estranged from each other and end up dying by the end of the play. Furthermore, Sheikh Salama Hegazi, the director of Salama Hegazi (a theatrical troupe under his name) changed the sad ending of original Romeo and Juliet to a happy one where the lovers reunite and get married by the end of the show. After the demise of Salama Hegazi Troupe, George Abyad Troupe could not get rid of the alterations added to Shakespearean plays and singers, panegyrists, and belly-dancers continued to flourish side by side with Shakespeare’s tragic heroes. It seems, however, the belly-dancers that George Abyad introduced in his troupe were so much more proficient, beautiful, and eye-catching, than

---

603 Mutrān (trans.), Utayl, the introduction.
605 Awāḍ, Shākispīr fī Mīqr, p. 92.
607 Awāḍ, Shākispīr fī Mīqr, pp 69-70.
608 Ibid, p. 77.
those of Salama Hegazi troupe that female audience got angry with their husbands who were saluting and clapping their hands in appreciation for the performance of the singers and the belly-dancers.\textsuperscript{609}

In 1916, Cairo University held a commemoration service to celebrate the passing of three hundred years of Shakespeare’s death.\textsuperscript{610} Arab readers and critics have been trying ever since to find the faintest correspondences between the works of the Bard and other Arab writers. Being under British occupation did not prevent the Egyptians from loving Shakespeare and his works. Arabs’ love for Shakespeare seems to have no bounds. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Bard was given an Arabic name; Sheikh Zubair by the Lebanese-Egyptian poet and writer Ahmed Faris Al-Shidyaq, 1804-1888).\textsuperscript{611} Martin Lings, the late renowned British critic, a convert Muslim, went even further than Arab writers arguing that Shakespeare’s plays betray a Sufi sentiment.\textsuperscript{612} Another exclaimed: was Shakespeare Muslim?\textsuperscript{613} Not only was Shakespeare exploited by Arab critics to fill the gap between the East and West but most recently British Muslims sought the help of the Bard in their attempts to bridge the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain.\textsuperscript{614} Shakespeare and his plays, especially \textit{Othello}, argues Patrick Spottiswoode, could be used to entrench the multi-faith dialogue between the British Muslim community and the society around them. Teachers were given the chance to see at first hand Muslims praying at mosques. They discussed with them their concerns about Islam. Patrick Spottiswoode, in this regard, observes:


\textsuperscript{610} Awāḍ, \textit{Šākispīr fi Miğr}, p. 7.


\textsuperscript{612} Martin Lings raised this idea in a conference held November-December 2004 in \textit{The Globe} under the title of \textit{Shakespeare and Islam}. (Shamin Miah, “AND I SHALL NOT LOOK UPON HIS LIKE AGAIN”, \textit{Q-News}, Jan. 20 05, p. 33. See also, Mursi Saad El-Din, an \textit{Ahram Weekly} columnist, “Plain Talk”. (\textit{al-Ahram Weekly}, Nov. 4-10, 2004, issue no. 715, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2004/715/cu3.htm>), site visited on 30/05/06. For counter argument, see Vanessa Thorpe who argues that the suggestions that Shakespeare’s works bare similarities with Islamic Sufism are unlikely. (Vanessa Thorpe, “Sufi or not Sufi? That is the question”, \textit{The Guardian}, <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,11,1334860,00.html1>, site visited on 30/05/06.

\textsuperscript{613} The editor of Aljazeera.com (different from Aljazeera Arabic TV Channel) commenting on the \textit{Shakespeare and Islam} season. (<www.aljazeera.com/cgi-bin/reviews/articlefullstory.asp?serviceID=5835>, site visited on 30/05/06) Under the title of “Shakespeare in the service of Islam?” wrote another; Shahed Amanullah editor of www. Altmuslim.com. Shahed argues “If the Muslim urban legends were compiled into a book… the heart of it would be the claim that Shakespeare was a “secret Muslim”, site visited on 30/05/06. <http://www.altmuslim.com/perm.php?id=1355_0_26_0_c27>, site visited on 30/05/06.

\textsuperscript{614} For this see the article on www.aljazeera.net website on 24 December 2004 under the title of “UK Muslims get help from the Bard”, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/archive/archive?ArchiveId=786>, site visited on 30/05/06.

170
We have had professors teaching *Othello* and they’d never been to the mosque. So we took them to a mosque and they were able to ask questions and get answers. I am sure they will never teach the play the same way again. I am not sure how big the ripple will be. It started with Othello and Shakespeare, but it is much bigger than that now.\(^6\)

This shows not only British Muslim or Arabs use of Shakespeare but also a multi-cultural Britain taking advantage of the Bard and his works to promote and cement its multi-cultural stand with the aim of building a better, and tolerant multi-faith, society. The reception of Shakespeare in contemporary Britain, marked by strong presence of Muslims as well as the high tension between the West and the Muslim world is instructive in how Shakespeare can somehow be seen as a representative of a past that foresaw, or can be used as, a way of seeing, the present of a multi-cultural Britain.

On the other hand, these attempts to find similarities between Shakespeare’s stories and Arabic folklore or to forge a connection between Shakespeare and Islam did not impress Ferial Ghazoul’s, and some others. For Ghazoul, such exertions by these Arab critics represent “a dominant orientation in a historical era in which the intellectuals of the subjugated Arab nation wanted to demonstrate their cultural standing by asserting that their heritage was no less than the legacy of the colonizers”.\(^6\) In her reading of *Othello*, Ghazoul argues that, I would distance myself from Ghazoul here, because the relationship between the modern Arab world Europe, and the West in general, is that of power on behalf of Europe and of “dependency and subjection” on behalf of the Arabs, the Arab readership or audience will experience divergent reactions (when reading or watching Shakespeare’s plays) ranging from “pleasure” at being included in “the canon” of the powerful Other to anger at the way their fellow Arabs are portrayed by the Other.\(^6\) What Ghazoul seems to have forgotten is that *Othello*, or Shakespeare’s works in general, have received so much positive critical applause in the Arab world that no other work of art has ever seen. Ghazoul, and her peers, failed to grasp the fact that Shakespeare’s *Othello*, (Shakespeare’s others in general, be they the Moors or the Jews) is among the most appealing plays to the Arab audience and readership.

Unlike the majority of his fellow Arab critics and writers, Ibrāhim Ḥamādah argues that Shakespeare has little or nothing to do with Arabs. In a full-length book Ḥamādah busied himself with refuting the ideas propounded by Arab critics and scholars who have been trying to find similarities between Shakespeare and the Arabs on the one hand and


\(^6\) Ibid, p. 2.
between Shakespeare and Islam on the other. In a recent video-conference based in London, Jerry Brotton tried, to an extent in vain, to promote the idea that Shakespeare was tolerant of other faiths and the works of Shakespeare demonstrate an awareness of the cultural and commercial relationship between the Muslim world and England in the Elizabethan period. Brotton was speaking from the British Council in Cairo via video conference links to Arab and Muslim Shakespearian scholars gathering in British Council branches in Tunisia, Karachi and London. Many of those present seemed not be moved by the points raised by Brotton with one of them, Ahmed Salah, arguing that “Shakespeare attacked whatever that was not white or European”\(^6\)\(^1\)\(^9\) Gary Taylor goes further by stating that the relationship between England the Muslim world was a “love-hate” one and that England maintained friendly relations with the Muslim world only for political and commercial reasons. For Taylor, seventeenth century Shakespeare was interested in Islam for the same reasons it “interests Tony Blair” in the twentieth and twenty first century: “it was [and has been] simultaneously threatening and promising”.\(^6\)\(^2\)\(^0\) On the other hand, radical Muslims liked to react to Shakespeare’s “damned” art in their own way: banning it, wreaking havoc on those who are involved in it whether they were players or onlookers. In March 2005, a suicide bomber chose to take his life and the lives of those who were watching Twelfth Night in a theatre in Qatar.\(^6\)\(^2\)\(^1\)

**Conclusion**

What I want to establish in this chapter is that Shakespeare might have some clues to stories about his patriots being smacked and insulted in Aleppo. Hence I suggest that the stories of Cavendish and Manwaring, if only in the verbal form, are among the major sources of the anecdote of a fellow Venetian hit by a Turk in Aleppo. I tried to put the case for Shakespeare’s choice of Venice than any other Renaissance European city to


\(^{621}\) “Car bomb targets theatre in Qatar”, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4365039.stm>
serve as a setting for the play. When it comes to the image of Moors in Shakespeare's plays, I argued that Shakespeare's Moors are portrayed in a way that is independent and unique yet not very detached from the time or society in which the plays were written. Othello may have some elements of the stereotypical Moor of his time but he is far more human, influential, and independent. Though the play was acted before King James I and his men, Shakespeare, unlike the majority of his contemporary dramatists, seems not to have been involved in the then fashionable habit of worshipping his King and stigmatizing the “Others” and “foreigners” to amuse the King and his retinue. The Ambassadorial Moroccan delegation that visited England in 1600 seems to have taken its toll on the making and the tone of the play, I presume in this chapter, as it did with a couple of other dramatists, as has been suggested earlier. I agree with those critics, such as Matar, Vitkus, and Bates, who argue that the ambassadorial Moroccan visit to England in 1600, and the high possibility that Shakespeare had the chance to see the Moroccan delegation in the face, influenced the way Shakespeare presented Othello. The last point I raised was that I referred in some detail to the reception of Shakespeare’s works in the Arab world. I argued that Arab reactions to Shakespeare’s works are divergent and that these ranged from utter fascination with the Bard and his cannon to absolute rejection of all that is Shakespearean ending up with someone who took his life in a suicide attack against those who gathered to watch a Shakespearean play.


Interaction between the Muslim world and the West preceded the jihad and the crusade wars. On ascending the throne in 800, Frankish Charlemagne was sent an “elephant” by the Abbasid ruler Harun al-Rashid as a token of friendship. The relationship between the Muslim world and Europe has not ever been static or antagonistic all the time. All in all, there were periods of war, peace, truce, or stagnation. During the period under study, it was the West that sought to build friendly relations with the East not the other way round. Gary Taylor, in this regard, classifies the historical ties between England and the Muslim world in the Elizabethan age as a “love-hate relationship”. Taylor argues that the Islamic power at that time was “frightening” and that it was enticing to maintain good relations with such a power. One would agree here that the West has always been pragmatic when it comes to the relationship between the East and the West. In the early modern period, the West wanted to seek knowledge and material from the then superior East and export finished products to the Orient. In the present time, the West is keen on maintaining healthy ties with the East for its natural resources (oil, gas) and petro dollar revenues.

When it comes to Morocco and the image of Moors, generally speaking, the relationship between Morocco and England was a friendly one. All along, the relations between the two monarchs were of special nature in spite of the fact that violations happened from time to time from both sides. As has been pointed out in the introduction and throughout this thesis, the Anglo-Moroccan alliance was at some point so strong that the two sides fought side by side in the Cadiz expedition to punish the Spanish (the common enemies of the Moors and the English) and planned to restore the contender of the Portuguese to his Royal seat and to challenge the Spanish interests in the Atlantic and the West Indies. Matar describes the relations between England and Morocco in the Elizabethan period as oscillating between “cooperation and conflict, trade and piracy”. Elizabethan London, states William Dalrymple, had “a burgeoning Muslim community which encompassed a large party of Turkish ex-prisoners, some Moorish craftsmen, a number of wealthy Turkish merchants and a ‘Moorish solicitor’, as well as an “Albion Blackamore” and a “Turkish rope-daunser”. One can add to these, the large number of Moors who fled the Spanish Inquisition between the late fifteenth and the

early seventieth century. European reaction to seeing these exotic and atypical Moors at home towns in Europe or mingling with them in their native lands in North Africa was varied and contradictory. There was, Vitkus argues, a sense of ‘attraction’ and ‘repulsion’ of the Orient; its world, culture, religion and people.\textsuperscript{626} This ambivalent and conflicted portrayal of the Moors can be found in travel literature and literary works alike.\textsuperscript{627}

However, it should be noted here that the Moors, historically speaking, were not so much abhorred by Elizabethan Englishmen as many of their European foes; mainly the Spanish and the French. The then anti-foreign sentiment (whether anti- Spanish, French, Dutch or African) was common. The Moors, though different in religion, and in colour, were treated by Britons no worse than, may be better than, any other European, Dutch, Flemish, Spanish or French, aliens, pirates, merchants or ambassadors. A Moorish ambassador, as Matar points out, raised as much suspicion and intrigues as any other ambassador:

Significantly, there were never any anti- Muslim riots in London in the way that there were anti-alien riots. Muslims never roused English xenophobia perhaps because there were not many Muslims as there were Dutch, or Walloon families, and because no Muslim ruler ever threatened England in the manner of Philip II with his Armada.\textsuperscript{628}

Thus, the advice of Sir William Harborne [Queen Elizabeth’s Ambassador to Constantinople] to Richard Foster, who was to start his new job as her Majesty’s ambassador to Tripoli, in Syria, was to advise him to beware of the French, and the Venetians.\textsuperscript{629} The Spaniards, too, were painted in a far gloomier picture than the Moors. The anti-Spanish element is deeply expressed in the majority of plays invoked in this study. An English dissident, Mary of Scots, was described as the “bosom-serpent”.\textsuperscript{630} Therefore, it was not the Moors alone who were ridiculed or misrepresented on the London stage in Elizabethan England.

It should be noted here that the fate of captives, any captive, at that time did not differ radically from one country to the other or from one religion to the other. In North Africa, Spain, or Italy, European or Moorish captives did not differ significantly nor would it appear, notes Ellen Friedman, that “in general the Muslims treated their captives with greater cruelty than was found in Christian societies.”\textsuperscript{631}

\textsuperscript{626} Vitkus, “turning Turk”, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{627} Bartels, “Making more of the Moor”, pp 434-435.
\textsuperscript{628} Matar, Turks, Moors, and Englishmen, p. 42. See also, Hoenselaars, Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries, pp 16-17.
\textsuperscript{629} Kenneth Parker, Early Modern Tales of Orient (London: Routledge, 1999), pp 9 and 52.
\textsuperscript{630} Allison Weir, Elizabeth the Queen, p. 293.
\textsuperscript{631} Ellen Friedman, “Christian Captives at ‘hard labor’ in Algiers”, pp 627-628.
shortage of food and dreadful loneliness away from family and friends. It happened, however, that many Britons preferred to fall captive in the hands of the Moors rather than the Spaniards while the majority of Moors would have preferred to fall captive to a British than a Spanish captor.632 Richard Haselton, a contemporary of Heywood whom he might have in mind when writing *The Fair Maid of the West*, had the luxury of trying both Moorish and Spanish slavery. Haselton preferred Moorish slavery to Spanish slavery.633 In a similar vein, in 1736, six Moors were taken captive by Portuguese captivity to its Spanish counterpart. Two of these Moors managed to escape to a British ship captained by one Daves. They thought that the British sailors would take them to British shores where it would be easier for them to sail to Morocco but the captain sold them to someone from South Carolina. They had to serve as slaves for fifteen years only to be set free when their master went bankrupt.634

When it came to the representation of Moors in Elizabethan drama, I conclude that the image of Moors was not static, though stereotypal; it was varied, inconsistent, contradictory and illogical. As the relations between Morocco and England ranged from friendship to enmity so did the image of Moors. When sketching out the plays that were written in the Elizabethan era, the reader may find the raging Turk; the good Turk, the voluptuous, treacherous black Moor, and the noble Moor. The trend at that time, however, was that in general the “others” (be they blacks, Moors, Spaniards, French, or Irish) would be the villains, the plotters, and the killers while the white natives would be the courageous men and defenders of country and Queen. Sins and crimes have been committed by the black and the white peoples since the dawn of history but the key point is, I would agree with Elliot here, that when the white man commits a crime this does not indicate or involve “an inherent judgment of his race or the nationality to which he belongs” as it does with the black man.635 This is exactly what is happening today, when

---

632 Richard Haselton and his captivity in Morocco and Spain is the clearest example in this regard. Haselton served as a captive in Morocco for some time before he had the chance to escape to Spain where he thought he would meet a better luck. To his surprise, Haselton was treated badly by his fellow Spaniards and he was asked to kneel down and pray to certain ‘images’ but the English captive, not contrary to English gallantry, refused to kneel down and spat on his Inquisitor. The bad usage and ill-treatment he received in Spain made him escape once more but this time back to Morocco. (Richard Haselton, *Strange and Wonderful Things that Happened to Richard Haselton* (London: 1595), reprinted in Vitkus’s (ed.), *Piracy, Slavery*, pp 73-93) Haselton story is mentioned in Fisher’s *Barbary Legend*, p. 134.


634 Colley, *Captives*, p. 58.

a black or a Muslim commits a crime, even though little, his/her racial and religious background would come to the front.636

However, the key point that I tried to establish throughout this thesis is the representation of Moors in the period under study (as has always been) was always politically motivated. That is why the prudent reader will notice that that Moors with darker skin were more often painted in the darkest colours; merciless conspirators, haters and murderers, than those light or brown skin Moors. Muly Mahamet, Aaron and Caliban may fit in this category. North African Moors, however, fared well on the London stage. Abdelmelec, Muly Hamet and Othello come in this category. If nothing could have washed the black Moors white the friendly ties between Morocco and England positively affected the way Moors from Morocco were represented on the London stage. The majority of critics and scholars quoted in this study, Draper, D’Amico, Matar and Brotton (among many), are of the idea that the amiable relations between England and Morocco did have a positive effect on the way North African Moors were represented on the London stage in the Elizabethan period. Amongst the few scholars who argued that the relationship between Morocco and England did not affect the way Moors were portrayed in Elizabethan drama is Thoraya Obaid.637

Scrutinizing the appearance of Moorish characters in Elizabethan drama against the historical and political background in which these plays were written, I have found that the image of the Moor was more often than not politically motivated. It turns out that it was the political element rather than the religious, racial or cultural ones that played the leading role when it came to representing the ‘other’ in Elizabethan England. It might not have been safer (or wiser) for Elizabethan dramatists to flatly oppose, challenge, or criticize the political line of the period. Those who did boldly challenge and question the political taboos at that time ended up penniless or in jail. Thus, John Marston (and Robert Greene) was imprisoned and his manuscripts burnt for his anti-James I writings at the turn of the seventeenth century.638

In the course of this study, it emerges that the image of Moors was negative and stereotypical but never static or monolithic. The image of Moors vacillated from an era to another according to the political givens of the moment. Not only did the image of Moors differ from one dramatist to the other in tally with the political moment one dramatist, Heywood in this study, gave two contradictory representations of the Moors in the two parts of one his plays; The Fair Maid of the West, Part I and Part II. Elizabethans

636 Having a quick look at the newspapers these days the reader may be shocked by the way they prioritize stories to be published. The death of a black or Asian man or a boy would never be given the attention given should the victim have been white or European.

637 Obaid, “The Moor Figure in English Renaissance Drama”, p. 576.

638 The story was mentioned in Alfred Farag, Shākispīr fī Zamānh wa Zāmānīnā, pp 22-23.
viewed Islam, argues Colley, though accepting that it is a monotheist religion, as “inferior”. Colley, however, agrees that the anti-Muslim sentiment prevailing in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was similar to the anti-catholic sentiment current at that time. While Muslims believe that the God of Jews, Christians and Muslims is One and the same God, Elizabethans used to compare between the God of Mahamet and the Christian God and between Mahamet the Prophet who married many wives and Jesus Christ the son of God who married none.

To give an answer to the question I raised in the introduction: did Elizabethan dramatists manage to portray or ‘impersonate’ the Moorish character? The answer I would give is NO. My conclusion is that the majority of Elizabethan dramatists (exceptions include Shakespeare and Marlowe) failed to represent the Moorish characters. With the exception of Othello, the idea of poetic verisimilitude is clearly absent in all the plays cited in this study.

639 Colley, Captives, p. 125.
Primary Sources

Hakluyt, Richard. *The Principal Navigations, voyages, traffiques & discoveries of the English nation : made by sea or over-land to the remote and farthest distant quarters of the earth at any time within the compass of these 1600 yeeres*, 6 vols. (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1903-1905)


Secondary sources


____________, *Shākispīr wa al-yahūd* [Shakespeare and the Jews] (Beirut, Arab Diffusion Company, 1999.


Lewis, Peter. “Cornish Slaves of the Sultan” *Daily Mirror*, July 2, 2004


