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

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Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted by
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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.

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A B S T R A C T

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.
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CONCLUSION

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