

Jesús López-Peláez, ed. 2011

Strangers in Early Modern English Texts

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Strangers in Early Modern English Texts is the outcome of an international collaboration of scholars whose objective is to explore the way identity is (re)produced in the texts of early modern England, considering the impact that the presence of the Other had. Inspired by, among others, Leslie A. Fiedler's seminal work *The Stranger in Shakespeare* (1972), the objective of the book is to develop a detailed and interdisciplinary study on the representation of (interrelated) "strangers," such as women, Jews, Moors, Spaniards, and the inhabitants of the New World. To this end, each chapter explores one aspect regarding the treatment of alterity in early modern English literary and non-literary texts such as pamphlets, travel narratives, plays, dictionaries, emblems and frontispieces. As a work concerned with cultural encounter and ideological conflict, the collection offers a comprehensive exploration of the historical context surrounding these materials, establishing the spatial and temporal location under study as the likely setting of an emergent epistemological shift that (from an embryonic form) led to the current Western identity configuration. Such approaches are ultimately informed in the works of several contributors by the idea of the semiosphere (as developed by Juri Lotman), and by the critical practice of cultural materialism.

In his introduction Andrew Monnickendam advances the dichotomy on which the characters regarded as "Others" were built, and discusses how this approach affected the way these strangers

were eventually judged as wicked or upright, fearful or admirable. The Mediterranean settings (and especially its islands), which can be found in the majority of the works studied, are described as peripheral locations that, from the early modern English point of view, provide a crucial geographical area where the domain of the extra-European stranger collides with the European sphere. The resulting threat that this contact would involve for Christianity, Fiedler's earlier study proposed, reveals that from the Western perspective it is the stranger who is perceived as marking the division between a familiar space and what is perceived as the alien's dominion (1973:15).

In "The Term 'Moor' in the Primary Texts of Early Modern English Plays," Luciano García explores the terminology that groups those characters labelled "Moor," "Blackamoor," and "Tawny Moor." To this end, he establishes an initial approach to the definitions concerning these categories, which provides what is perhaps the most comprehensive survey to date of early modern English dramatic works from 1500 to 1660 featuring Moors. Drawing on Lotman's study, he initially suggests that this foreign Other could be considered, at the time, to belong to one or more of the categories "non-European," "non-White," but perhaps especially "non-Christian." The evidence collected ultimately reveals that the main attribute attached to the term "Moor" was actually that of physical difference, especially blackness, but interestingly such a perception was, in turn, defined in Christian terms of "damnation," or "heathenism." García eventually confirms that, according to his analysis, the figure is typically described negatively, while the positive descriptions are rather infrequent.

"Patterns of Otherness in George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar*" (ca. 1589), by Jesús Nieto and Cinta Zunino, approaches the play by focusing on Peele's representation of the 1578 battle of Ksar el-Kebir. The chapter examines Peele's descriptions of multi-ethnic characters and finds that by inverting the representation of Moors and Portuguese, who were traditionally portrayed negatively, Peele depicts both with a hint of understanding. This was probably a reflection of England's political and economic interest in establishing an alliance with the two communities against their common rival, Catholic Spain. Indeed, while a distinction may be detected between this malicious community (represented by King Philip), and the

almost noble Portuguese Catholic (embodied by King Sebastian), the representation of the Moors combines an orthodox rejection of an alien culture with a positive view in the light of the anti-Spanish political alliance desired.

In his chapter, John Drakakis analyses the representation of "Strangers in Marlowe and Shakespeare," where the foreigner is rejected but simultaneously integrated into the European society. While the Orient is vividly present in the English imagination in concrete geographical and historical spaces, *Othello* (ca. 1604) and *The Jew of Malta* (written ca. 1590) create a frontier identity where the "enemy without" and "within" menace the individual both physically and spiritually. The plays stage the perspective of a stranger who is marginalised by the Venetians, placing this community at the centre of public judgement, while what seems to shape its identity is a reflection of European mutability or "Otherness within," conceived in the figure of the foreigner, eventually producing rejection of both the Other and the self. The conduct of strangers thus does not seem to be innate, but is caused by their imitation of the Venetians. The tragic result is exemplified by Othello's suicide, when his conflicting Muslim and Catholic identities collapse as they conveniently destroy each other.

In "Muslims and Moriscos in Shakespeare's *Othello* and Calderón's *Tuzaní*," (ca. 1604 and 1633?) Jesús López-Peláez compares the formation of analogous identities where "race" has a central role. Drawing on the Lotmanian taxonomy, he describes the development of two spaces in the English imagery that detached it from the Mediterranean sphere associated with Spanish Catholics and Moriscos, suggesting that the clash with the latter may be likewise influenced by the formation of national identities within Christianity by the problematizing the (Muslim) Other. Such a process seems to be employed by both authors by presenting Others torn between a European and a non-European self; and while Calderón insinuates the ambiguous identity of the Catholic Spaniard, indistinguishable from the Morisco, both describe a brutal Christianity, suggesting that the "enemy within" could be not only the "Other," but also the "self." López-Peláez concludes that staging a movement of segregation, integration and eventual rejection of the stranger, such instability and violence could be presented as inherently European.

In "Alterity in William Shakespeare's Plays *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*," Rüdiger Ahrens analyses female awareness, exploring the ways alterity and plurivocality are eventually silenced to restore social order. In a comparative study with two 1977 adaptations, *Variations on The Merchant of Venice*, by Charles Marowitz, and Arnold Wesker's *The Merchant*, Ahrens argues that in the original works the heroines are characterised by their self-fashioning and awareness, and, while Wesker describes emancipated female characters, Marowitz seems to focus on a more racial subject, where women are dominated by male characters. Conversely, the intensity of such metaphysical conflicts is epitomised in *Othello*, where the Machiavellian, hypocritical schemer Iago is paralleled by the protagonist's unbalanced self, moving from nobility to iniquity and unavoidably overpowered by evil. Ahrens concludes that in Shakespeare there are diverse forms of alterity and plurivocal voices, and while there is a struggle between good and evil, fostered, among other factors, by alterity, order is finally restored.

José Ruiz's essay, "The Image of the Great Turk after the Ottoman Conquest of Famagusta and Marc Antonio Bragadino's Martyrdom," draws our attention to what was one of the most disturbing episodes that influenced generations of continental and English writers, the Ottoman capture of Famagusta in 1571. He examines the works of the Venetians Paulo Paruta and Count Nestore Martinengo and the Genoese Uberto Foglietta, as well as their English translations/adaptations. It was events such as the fall of Cyprus that instigated the proliferation of European chronicles alleging the barbarous tortures of the invaders, a form of literary production that nurtured the Black Legend of the Turkish, Ottoman, and Muslim sphere which had been taking shape since the 16th century, but which marked so vividly the European imaginary that can it be found in Western textual representation up to the 20th century. As Ruiz suggests, the image created during this period stained the Muslim or Middle Eastern image in a way from which it has yet to recover.

This form of propaganda is taken up in "Spanish Genealogy as Portrayed by English Protestant Pamphleteers during the Spanish Match Negotiations (1617-1624)," Eroulla Demetriou's examination of how the "Black Legend" was evoked in another context. The Prince of Wales' marriage plans with the Infanta María instigated

ferocious attacks on Spain, as the English pamphleteers promoted the image of cruel and treacherous Spaniards, which was allegedly aggravated by their coexistence with the Moriscos and their prevalent position in the Catholic world. However, even if “purity” was considered menaced by both, the latter was perceived as even more threatening than the Muslim influence. In focusing on the genealogical tree and the genes of the Spaniards, Protestant pamphleteers such as Thomas Scott considered them accountable for their alleged evil nature, and consequently their blood had to be prevented from contaminating the English royal family. Demetriou suggests that references to their genes and “race” were likely intended to strain the image of this community, ultimately associating racial and religious aversion.

In “Blackness and Moorishness in English Iconography,” María Paz López-Peláez addresses this early modern representation of the Muslim and African communities, and its contribution in the consolidation of negative attitudes towards such Others in England. She argues that the works of Andrea Alciato, Geoffrey Whitney, Henry Peacham, Thomas Scott, and John Ogilby, among others, were particularly influential in the construction of an identity markedly affected by notions of “race” and difference. Drawing on the Lotmanian pattern, López-Peláez describes a situation where the English community separates what is “familiar” from what is “foreign” and “menacing,” and while attitudes towards the African moved from dread to rejection, the Muslim was associated with the fearful Turk. Such descriptions ultimately associate English interests and experiences with these individuals: while the black African is considered almost non-human, a mere commodity for the slave trade, the Muslim is a cruel enemy related to the conquering Ottoman. Both views eventually strained indelibly the perception of the stranger, enhancing stereotypes of inferiority, and immorality.

With her contribution, “Patterns of Female Exploration in Delarivier Manley’s *Oriental Plays*,” Yolanda Caballero focuses on the heroines Homais, in *The Royal Mischief* (1696), and Almyna, in *Almyna: or The Arabian Vow* (1707). In these plays Manley seems to defy the contemporary conviction ascribing to the English, male, white individual a position of centrality, locating alien (Muslim) societies at the margins of civilisation, and where the foreign woman was even more remote. The contribution is particularly appreciative

of Bernadette Andrea's conclusion that such a picture was intended to appease any seditious English woman by emphasizing her independence when compared with that of the subdued and "intellectually weak" Muslim woman (227, citing Andrea 2007:83). With Homais – who explores and eventually transgresses the fixed boundaries by "invading" the male domain – and of Almina – who challenges the commonplace of the soulless nature of women – the pioneer "frontier writer" conceives female utopic spaces, breaking the boundary that separates Eastern and Western women, who join in a struggle against male authority.

To conclude, with its wide-ranging approaches, the book not only provides an important source of information for any scholar or student interested in comparative cultural studies or literature, it offers a multidisciplinary approach to Otherness developing since the early modern period. The chapters explore the textual and semiotic impact and the historical and social influences that shaped the creation of national identities influenced by, but also further encouraging, different representations of what was considered "Other." With the evidence on show, such formations were specific to early modern England, but eventually their ramifications spread worldwide providing a revealing perspective on the extant Western ideology.

References

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