Turning Turk: Cross Cultural Encounter in *Othello*

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Abstract

The power of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries was felt all over the continent. This might triggered a sort of anxiety in many European nations, especially England and found its way to their dramatic writings. Since the Ottoman Turks were both feared and admired, their representation in English Renaissance dramatic arena, where playwrights debated their cross cultural encounter with them, was characterized by ambiguity. This dubiety stemmed from the fact that the English nation then viewed the Ottoman Turks as powerful, savage and infidel at the same time. Though the English Monarchs tried to bridge the gap with that Muslim Empire without taking the risk of turning Turk, this indecisive discourse was popular on many levels in England in the Post

Reformation period. Furthermore, it was also fed by the memories of the crusades and the many previous confrontations between the Muslim East and the Christian West. Therefore, the recurrent references and allusions to the Ottoman Turks in the English Renaissance drama can qualify to a representational phenomenon that unveils the profundity of the crisis of the English nascent nation at that time. Consequently, the focus of this research is to examine the multidimensional context in which Shakespeare's *Othello* was produced to both reflect and engage with this phenomenon. The research adopts a new historicist approach to exploring this issue in *Othello*. In fact, the analysis of this multilayered historical moment testifies that the reproduction of the crisis in *Othello* is sophisticated and sociocultural- based.

المستخلص:

من المعروف من التاريخ بالضرورة أن الإمبراطورية العثمانية قد بلغت حداً من القوة جعلها مهابة الجانب فى كل القارة الأوربية فى القرنين السادس عشر والسابع عشر الميلاديين؛ مما أسفر عن اهتمامٍ واضحٍ لدى كتّاب المسرح الإنجليزى فى عصر النهضة لسبر أفق العلاقة الآنية وتطوراتها المستقبلية بين هذه الإمبراطورية ودولتهم الصغيرة ذات الطموحات الإمبريالية الكامنة، ويمكن القول: إن الإعجاب بالدولة العثمانية وقوتها قد اختلط بقدرٍ من الخوف والقلق منها فى ذات الوقت، ويمكن تفسير ذلك بميل المجتمع الإنجليزى بكافة أطيافه فى منتصف عصر النهضة إلى اعتبار الدولة العثمانية كياناً مختلفاً خارجاً ومارقاً عن المألوف الثقافى والدينى و الاجتماعى الغربى رغم قوته العسكرية الواضحة؛ ولذلك بدت عبارة " أن تُصبح تركيّاً" أو أن تقبل الاندماج والتحول إلى الثقافة التركية والدين الإسلامى أو أن تتصرف مثلما يفعل الأتراك المسلمين نذيرِخطرٍ

داهمٍ وسلوكٍ مستهجنٍ على المستويين الفردى والجماعى والسياسى فى المجتمع الإنجليزى فى ذات الوقت. ولقد ساهمت ذكريات الحروب الصليبية والمواجهات بين الشرق المسلم والغرب المسيحى فى إذكاء هذا الشعور المرتبك والمختلط تجاه الآخر التركى الشرقى المسلم؛ ولذلك يمكن القول إن المعالجات الدرامية لهذا الشعور فى ذلك الوقت تعكس الأزمة الناتجة عن الاشتباك الثقافى مع الآخروالطموح الإمبريالى للإنجليز فى عصر النهضة وبدايات مرحلة الحداثة. ويرى الباحث أن مسرحية *عطيل* على وجه الخصوص قد عكست هذه الأزمة وتفاعلت معها فى آن واحد؛ ولذلك يتبنى الباحث مقاربة تعتمد على مفاهيم التأريخانية الجديدة لفهم وتحليل هذه الظاهرة وتجلياتها فى المسرحية.

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The Ottoman Empire had a great power in the 16th century that had apparently been felt all over Europe. This increasing power created a kind of anxiety that disturbed some non-Muslim nations on the continent. Furthermore, this disturbance found its way to Western literatures in general and to English literature in particular. In reality, early modern dramatic arena and theatre were two of the main contact zones in which English post reformation playwrights debated their encounter and relationship with others especially, the Turks. As a result, post reformation great playwrights such as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe along with less renowned playwrights, such as Robert Green and Thomas Kyd, to mention a few, debated their nation's anxiety towards the Turks in their fictional dramatic worlds. The fear the Turkish power initiated in England and which was reflected in the post reformation drama at that time resulted in an ambivalent attitude towards Ottoman Turks. They were regarded as

great and barbarous, civilized and savage at the same time. Historically, Turks (Muslims) had been regarded as infidel, ambitious, lascivious and inherently dishonest.

In fact, it is important to assert that Elizabethan England was not engaged in an active state of disagreement or contention with the Ottoman Empire at that time. Queen Elizabeth was working hard to build commercial and diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Sultan to the extent that she was accused of betraying western Christendom. The English Monarch wanted to build an alliance with the Ottomans against her enemies on the continent without taking the risk of turning Turk. Also, the endeavor of the English government to seek diplomatic, commercial, military and other benefits by building a bilateral alliance with the Ottoman Empire hid a fear of being influenced by the Turks on the religious, cultural and ethical levels. This fear was largely reflected in an ambivalently mixed discourse towards the Turks that ranged from brother to other. Additionally, this confused discourse had manifestly found its way to church sermons, official reports, travel writings, family correspondence and most importantly to drama and theatre.

Furthermore, hostility to Islam was to some extent a social phenomenon in the Renaissance Christian world. The crusades bitter memories feeded a kind of antagonism to Islam. Gerald Maclean asserts that in 1565, the highest

Bishop of Salisbury circulated a weekly prayer for Wednesday and Friday church prayers that opens as follows:

O Almighty and everlasting God, our heavenly Father, we thy disobedient and rebellious children, now by thy just judgment   sore afflicted, and in great danger to be oppressed, by thine and our sworn, and most deadly enemies the Turks, infidels, and Miscreants, do make humble suit to the throne of thy grace, for thy mercy, and aid against the same our mortal enemies; for though we do profess the name of thy only Son Christ our Saviour, yet through our manifold sins and wickedness we have most justly deserved so much of thy wrath and indignation, that we cannot but say, O Lord correct us in thy mercy and not in thy fury. Better it is for us to fall into thy hands, than into the hands of men, and especially into the hands of Turks and infidels thy professed enemies, who now invade thine inheritance…The Turks goeth about to set up, to extol, and to magnify …. Mahumet above thy dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ, whom we in heart believe, and with mouth confess, to be our Saviour and Redeemer. (Quoted in Maclean's *looking East,* p.2).

In fact, there was a predominant feeling in the middle of the 16th century that the English nation is no longer a little entity but one that belongs to and is at the same time sharing a more global scene. With this new realization, the misdemeanor of the English was attributed to the Turks: that is to say, the Ottoman military power. One

can claim that the multiplicity and diversity of appearance, reference and associations to the Turks in post reformation and early modern drama can amount to a literary phenomenon and a dramatic sub-genre that one would call the Turks' phenomenon. In fact, the mixed discourse towards the Ottomans is an evidence of the urgency and the depth of the crisis that England was experiencing at that historical moment.

The principal preoccupation of this research paper is to explore the context within which these literary responses were produced especially in drama and how the literary text reflected and engaged with its specific time and place. Furthermore, the study intends to reinterpret Shakespeare's *Othello* (1603-4) in view of the new historicist approach to Renaissance drama. Understanding the context in which the play was produced can make this attempt fruitful. On the other hand, though Nabil Matar asserts that the representation of Islam (Ottoman Empire was by default associated to Islam then) in early modern drama, is characterized by "simplification and stereotyping" (Matar, 1998b, p.116), the examination of the operative social, cultural and political forces of the contemporary moment testifies that the representation was complex.

New Historicism is very much interested in understanding the historical context of a literary work. The proponents of this literary school hold that no literary work

is born in a vacuum, but it is a product of its specific time and place. They claim that art works usually reflect the value system of their cultures and engage with them intellectually. New Historicists show interest in two issues; how literary works reflect their political, sociocultural and historical contexts and how these works engage with their contexts by critiquing, commenting and reflecting on them. New Historicists usually adopt an interdisciplinary approach to their works. They are in the belief that literature is indivisible from other disciplines such as history, ideology, anthropology, sociology, and economics.

Stephen Greenblatt asserts that English Renaissance writers self-fashioned their characters as to reflect the cultural codes of their times. New Historicists claim that culture is a large text that can be analyzed and anatomized like a literary text. Furthermore, they claim that literary texts are better understood if they are placed within their larger texts: culture. New Historicists try to understand how literary texts participate in power circulations in societies. In fact, the New Historicism fashion started with the publication of Greenblatt's book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* in 1980 in which he alleges that we cannot understand English Renaissance writers without comprehending the historical context in which they had produced their works. Again, the Romantic period also drew the attention of the New Historicists in no small part and they allege that in spite of all the preoccupation of the Romantics with nature, digging deep

inside the texts and their contexts reveal a lot of politics, and class struggles that were going on in their minds and strong engagement with their community issues. Finally, the New Historicists emerged on the literary scene as a response to the New Criticism literary school that had preoccupied themselves with analyzing the texts away from any context. This piece of research adopts a new historicist approach to its topic.

Recent scholarship has shown that images of the self cannot formulate and develop within local boundaries only. The encounter with the other whoever he was-real or imaginary- in the post reformation period played an outstanding role in identity formation. The Muslim/Turks other was consistently reemployed in the dramatic art of that period. The other of the late Elizabethan period had always been identified and regarded as opposed to the mainstream norm. Also, that other was different, feared, misrepresented and stereotyped. Race and religion played an increasing role in this concern. Historically speaking, the long standing maritime and religious struggle between Protestant England and Catholic Spain that reached a peak in 1570s made the English monarchy think of reaching out to the Northern and Southern shores of Europe in Turkey and Morocco and even beyond to counterbalance the repeated shutting down of the Spanish controlled Antwerp that continued to be a trading port for western Europe for decades. The English Monarch was keen to open new trading gates and outlets with these

two Muslim kingdoms. Historical records assert that she opened up embassies in Istanbul and Fes late in the sixteenth century. Again, the Queen's strategic plan was to build a bilateral anti-Catholic Spanish military alliance with both kingdoms. On the cultural and literary levels, and alongside the official endeavors to construct state relationships with the two Muslim world powers of the period, the contemporary dramatists of the period were creatively engaged in exploring the nature of this unprecedented moment in their national history by drawing a representational picture of Islam and Muslims in their dramatically fictional works. Despite the scarcity of means of communications that we use now, Shakespeare had some kind of basic knowledge of Islam. Gary Taylor claims that the bard might have had an access to Richard Knolles's famous book *The General History of The Turks* (1603).He wrote:

Shakespeare apparently read Richard *Knolles's General History of The Turks* (1603), which means that he knew more about Islamic history and culture than most of us. He refers to Islam– to the prophet' Mahomet', to Morocco and Barbary and Constantinople , to Moors, Turks ,Otto mites ,sultans ,Saracens, paynims, moriscos-at least 141 times, in 21 different plays.(much more frequently than he refers to Ireland, Scotland, Wales or Hawaii). (Strange Bedfellows. *The Guardian*, 18 November, 2004).

Maclean claims that there was a widespread interest in the last decades of the 16th century in the Ottomans and their

culture. Elizabeth's endeavor to establish diplomatic and commercial relationships with the Turks partly testify to that assertion.

In the wake of Queen Elizabeth's death and with the throne of the British kingdom in the grips of King James 1 with his Catholic leanings, the Spanish threat started to decline as a result of James 1 conciliatory strategies towards Spain and the English mood went through a kind of metamorphosis and was more amenable to move towards Catholic Spain. On the other hand, England under King James 1 adopted a more unfriendly discourse towards the Ottoman Turks. The dramatic works of the early seventeenth century that took the Muslim world as its topic testify to that new perspective. Politically speaking, England of that period was isolated and with an uncertain future. Economically, she was a poor country exploring more economic chances on the continent and in the New World as well. Furthermore, the early modern period was characterized by unstable notions of religious differences that were constantly changing. The core of English Christianity was fluid after the strife of Henry V111 with the Pope. Protestant Queen Elizabeth took over from her Catholic half-sister Queen Mary and she herself was followed by the Catholic James 1. England of that period was simply dwarfed by the huge military power of the Ottoman Empire. Since England was involved in a process of national identity construction, early modern drama

reflected a fear of "the other" and a portrayal of foreignness at one and the same time. Whether England had imperial ambitions or not at that moment of her national history is a contested issue that will be debated later in this piece of research.

Research and scholarly interest in the relationship between Islam and early modern drama is not new to the area of literary studies. Maclean argues that,

Islam and the Ottomans came to play no small part in the interests, imagination and ambitions of the English throughout the early modern period. Yet, until very recently, only a few scholars of English history or literature have bothered very much about Islam or the Ottoman Empire, and very few historians have been interested in tracing or admitting to the existence of, Eastern influences upon Renaissance Europe. With notable exceptions, scholars of the Renaissance have refused to recognize how Islamic ideas or cultural influences could have had any relevance to their great theme of European resurgence, and it has only been in very recent years that the study of Ottoman sources has begun to reveal how that sophisticated imperial state not only differed greatly from traditional accounts of military conquest followed by decline into luxurious indolence, but also how Ottoman cultural life was dynamically integrated with the European Renaissance right from the start. (Maclean, 2007, p. 5).

Retrospectively, the interest in the Ottoman Empire can be back dated to 1915 when Louis Wann wrote his study "*The Oriental in Elizabethan Drama*". He asserts that from 1579 until 1642 when the theatre was closed in England, 47 plays dealt with what he calls the oriental matter. Twelve years later Grinne Rice wrote his PhD dissertation in Harvard University in the US on "*Turk, Moor and Persian in English Literature*". About a decade later, Samuel Chew finished his important study on the same matter entitled "*The Crescent and the Rose*". He asserts that Elizabethan English travelers to the near and middle east had firsthand experience of cultures and life styles of the Muslim inhabitants in these regions. Furthermore, Orhan Burian, a Turkish English drama scholar sees a possibility of uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictory discourses on the side of both the travelers and the laymen as well towards the Orient (quoted in Linda McJannet, p. 184) .Again, part of the chief preoccupation of these early studies was the historical accuracy set against the literary and aesthetic value of the dramatic representation of the Muslim world in post reformation English drama. Rica and Chew opposed Wann's assertion that the representation of the Oriental world in the early modern drama was fairer than the historical facts. On the contrary, they claim that the portrayal of the Muslim world in early modern drama added injury to insult. (Quoted in Linda Mcjannet, p. 183).

Maclean contends that this first wave of studies about the Eastern Muslim world was limited in its scope and topic exploration. It was nothing more than a recycling of old materials. That is to say a new glass, but old wine. Most probably, the notion of one-single approach was not a frivolous endeavor as it presented many misjudgments about the nature of the Turks and Ottoman Empire which had lingered in the research arena for some time. He writes:

The limitation of this first wave of surveys, and it is one that continues to reappear in studies being produced in the field today, might be called the ' single –archive approach', for none of these scholars knew or cared very much about the peoples that their European sources purported to represent other than what they could deduce from these sources…The result of this single-archive analysis is that prejudiced misinformation all too often reappears as fact, past errors resurface as reliable judgments, and before very long fantasy returns as history…Scholars recycled the early modern European habit of using the term' Turk' as though it were synonymous with both 'Muslim' and with 'Ottoman'.(Maclean ,2007,pp 5-6).

L. Carl Brown observes in line with Maclean's argument that "the West for its part has stubbornly refused to call the Ottoman Empire by its name, instead labeling this multireligious, multilingual, multiethnic polity as "Turkey' and its ruler' Turks' " .(Quoted in Maclean, 2007,p.6). To underline their racial and cultural difference "the West since time out of mind has insisted that the Ottomans were' not

like us' even while imposing, however unconsciously, a strictly Western ethno linguistic rubric upon the Ottoman Empire." (Quoted in Maclean, 2007, p.6).Thus, the term 'Turk' occupied a wide range of associations and was ambiguously employed to describe Muslims regardless of national origin. Maclean asserts that "before the term 'Muhammetan' became general, Muslims were most often simply referred to as 'Turks' even when they were North Africans or European renegades." (Maclean, 2007, p. 7). Simply, the term was to be further used for underlining characteristics irrelevant to what was then known as Turkish subjects and territories. Furthermore, the term was even used to describe English individuals who might have behaved inappropriately. In short, "to be a 'Turk' entailed a whole series of self-contradictions…Shakespeare's use of the term in *Othello* offers illuminating examples."(Maclean, 2007, p. 8).Consequently, says Maclean, contemporary Renaissance and early modern cultural studies scholars should be cautioned to employ the word 'Turk' with vigilance so as not to repeat what he calls: "The prejudiced fantasies of the past… [since] many of the figures- whether real historical people or literary characters –referred to as 'Turks' were not Turks in any sense, but rather Muslims, European converts, or characters from just about anywhere who behaved in certain ways."(Maclean, 2007, p. 8). In fact, contemporary scholars who show interest in Renaissance studies are trying to understand the core and the context in which these literary representations or images were created,

what ends they were created to, taking into consideration that these literary endeavors seem to have distorted the realities they had claimed to represent and portray.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a shift in the interest of the Renaissance drama scholars under the influence of the Civil Rights Movement ideas. They put more focus on the representation of the Moors in post reformation drama. Two of the scholars who contributed to this new research area are Eldered Jones and A. G. Barthlemey. Following that surge, the interest in the Oriental, whether he is a North Africa moor or an Ottoman Turk waned for about a decade until it was revived again with the advent of Edward Said's illuminating study *Orientalism* (1978).Said claims that English 19th century colonial activities had disguised in discursive forms and strategies in the late decades of the 16th and early 17th centuries. This new insight into the field provoked Renaissance drama scholars and researchers in the last decade of the twentieth century and the new millennium to reexamine the presence of "the oriental" in early modern drama in view of Said's newly introduced theory of binaries. Linda Macjannet sharpens the debate by asserting that Said's thesis and binary theory seem to have further influence on the representational reproduction of the Orient in pre-imperial drama, she wrote:

Said's work had other more specific effects as well. It inspired scholars to resist totalizing fictions such as 'the Oriental' and to search for more historically specific

categories for analysis. Some argued that the terms 'Moor' and 'Turk' were used as synonyms for 'Muslim' or 'Islamic' by early modern English people and thus can and should be used in that way by modern scholars. Others maintained that many texts do make distinctions among Ottomans, Persians, and Moors and that study of the representation of specific ethnicities and cultures are needed. In addition, to some scholars early modern representations of Muslims seemed textbook examples of the 'demonization of the other' and thus ripe for analysis in terms of Said's East-West binary. (Linda McJannet, 2009, p.185).

One can claim that the reproduction of the Muslim characters, whether they were Moors, Turks or Bedouins, and the employment of Islamic themes and settings in Renaissance English drama has mainly depended on textual knowledge and not on firsthand experience. It is important at this point to argue that the second wave of early modern English studies was initiated in the last decade of the 20th century by scholars who seem to have been familiar with Said's binary theory. However, Maclean contends that:

Said's own insistence that he was concerned in that study (*Orientalism*) only with Western representations of the Orient and not with any actually existing or "real" Orient has all too often, been taken to be a license to follow suit and simply to ignore entirely what might otherwise be

known about the peoples and cultures of the Muslim world. (Quoted in *Looking East*, pp.9-10).

Maclean's notion is that to produce a more credibly insightful research on early modern drama, scholars should go beyond the single archive approach by having access to archival sources in other languages and cultures. In fact, Nabil Matar, in his endeavor to dispel that myth, with a creed that not only winners should write history and with a better access to non-English archival sources, asserts in his two well researched books; *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685*(1998) and *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (1999) that the presence of the Turks and Moors was largely visible in English ports and life when Queen Elizabeth and James 1 ruled as monarchs. Matar agrees with Said's theory that the West was always keen to convert whatever knowledge it gains about the East into power especially in England's early undeclared imperial search for domination and control. He adds saying that the inability of the English kingdom to colonize the Muslim world by force of arms by the end of the 17th century was substituted by some kind of symbolic imperialism in an attempt to maintain a sense of national superiority. This is what Said himself calls discursive imperialism. That is to say, literary orientalism. The English playwrights in their attempt to demonize the other Muslim purposely misrepresented them in their fictional worlds. Furthermore, king James 1 in an attempt to build a Christian coalition with Spain against the Ottoman Turks and the North African

Berbers, considered the infidels (Turks and Muslims) adversaries to Britain. Reversely, less than three decades earlier, Queen Elizabeth viewed the same people as equal, sometimes as allies, and strategically as fearful opponents. At this phase of the research, one needs to assert that not all works produced within a certain time frame would necessarily offer similar findings and conclusions. Nevertheless, one can simply claim that the core of historicist literary scholarship is the capability of the researchers to excavate the sources to build a pattern that goes beyond the heaps of contradictory, literary and other narratives and sources in an attempt to construct a plausible argument and a sound narrative.

The nature of Muslim/Turks' representation

The queen's efforts to build commercial and diplomatic alliances with the two Muslim powers of the time were paralleled with other discursive endeavors on the side of English playwrights to explore local dilemmas. Understanding the multiplicity of these efforts offers an opportunity to grasp the nature of the representation of the Muslim Turks in early modern drama that the English – Ottoman cross cultural encounter generated. One agrees with Nabil Matar's argument that the English early undeclared imperial intensions motivated them to demonize the Muslim characters in most English pre imperial plays. The actual imperial expansion in the East and other

locations did not actually eventuate for two more centuries. The English tried to colonize Egypt early in 1807 during their war with the revolutionary France that continued from 1793 to 1815.Shortly after the end of the English French War, they extended their imperial endeavors to other countries such as India. Eventually, they colonized Egypt in 1882 while they were uniting efforts with France and other European countries to bring the Ottoman Empire to its final fall. After reviewing the English imperial building indicators and endeavors in the 18th and 19th centuries, Matar comes to the conclusion that:

If the Orientalism of the late eighteenth century, as Edward Said defines it, is colonialism as a form of discourse, then what the Renaissance English writers produced was merely a discourse- without colonialism- that was generated by superimposing the discourse about the conquest of America on Islam. The Renaissance witnessed the birth of a British /European discourse of conquest that preceded the development of the other constituents of conquest, namely technological superiority and capitalism. Once the Ottoman and the North African Muslim dominions began their military and commercial decline in the eighteenth century, British and other European writers turned to their discourse about Americans and the Indians during the age of discovery and imposed it on Islam. (Matar, 1998b, pp. 17-18).

In his attempt to prove his assertion, Matar insists that English literary descriptions of Muslims and Native

Americans are similar. This similarity even showed in the accounts of English men going native or turning Turk in both texts respectively. Nevertheless and in spite of the engaging insight in Matar's line of argument, one sees that the similarity he refers to is still under researched. Daniel Vitkus, one of Matar's early English imperial intentions theory subscribers, claims that "it is important to acknowledge that the idea of empire arose in England long before there was a real, material empire on the ground", (Daniel Vitkus ,2003,p. 6).The study of England's entry into the global (Imperial) scene, he adds, should not start with Maritime campaigns and expeditions into the New World, but more appropriately with clashes, wars and cross cultural encounters with the Arab Muslims in the Crusades, the Saracens, the North African moors and the Ottoman Turks later in the 16th century.

In the Post Reformation era, the proper noun the 'Turks' was a reductive term commonly employed in the cultural practices of that period to refer to a multitude of peoples who inhabit and populate the region from Mauretania to Turkey. During this previously mentioned era the English creative writers showed an unprecedented interest in figuratively describing the Muslim world in general and the Ottoman Turks in particular. That literary preoccupation with the World of Islam amounts to an innovative phenomenon that many a critic call 'the Turkish Plays'. In fact, the Islamic religion and the Ottoman Empire

were considered as synonymous in the English pre imperial literary discourse. Furthermore, the textual description of Islam was influenced by the country's commercial and political bridges with the Ottoman Empire. The conciliatory and containing attitude of Queen Elizabeth towards the two great Muslim powers of the early modern era was completely different from the more hostile and opposing approach of James 1 to the same two Muslim powers; namely Morocco and the Ottoman Empire. Exploring that discrepancy and how it was reflected in the representation of the Muslim World in the dramatic works after the passing away of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 is beyond the scope of this research. Surprisingly enough, the interest of the same English playwrights in the New World did not materialize until later in the seventeenth century. Since the establishment of the Anglo –Ottoman early trade and diplomatic relationships during the last two decades of the sixteenth century and till the death of James 1 about sixty literary works were produced that handled Islamic settings, characters or themes. Of course, not all of their associations and references are necessarily Ottoman.

The Turk as a catch-all word for Muslims

Historically speaking, it may be useful to claim that since the fall of Constantinople in 1457, the use of the crusades-related word "Saracens", a catch –all word for Muslims, gradually declined in the English literary discourse. "Saracens" was usually used in that discourse to describe the nomadic tribes of Iraq, Syria and Arabia that

used to harass the southern regions of the Roman territories. With the ascendancy of the Ottomans over the world scene and following their colonization of most of the Arab World, the religious opponent was renamed and "the Saracens" gave way to the 'Turk'. The renaming of the long time oriental opponent was employed in the service of a new state ideology of the English Monarch. In their endeavor to formulate a national identity and examine local and foreign threats and fears, and even understand the post reformation world players, English playwrights and political leaders had no room but to turn to the Turk without actually turning Turk themselves.

As the Ottoman Empire controlled the 16th century global scene, they influenced the English culture without home consent. It may be claimed that the attempt of the English playwrights to represent the Muslim Turks in the early modern drama could be an attempt to downplay the overwhelming influence of the Turks on the English culture and life then. The post reformation era was historically the long moment of the Ottoman and not the English or even the French. The Ottoman Empire politically and militarily controlled the great region that stretched from Algiers to Syria and from the two holy Muslim cities to the borders of Vienna. In fact, the Ottoman Turks established their Empire on the debris of the falling Byzantine Empire. After the seizure of Constantinople and until the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683, they almost surrounded Italy, that the West

considers the center of culture and civilization in the modern early period and during the age of the Renaissance.

The Ottoman Empire simply spread over three world continents. That geographical expansion played a great role in the appearance of different approaches in the attempt to understand the nature and the core of that Empire. That is observed in the different representation of the Turk in plays written by Shakespeare such as *Othello* (1603-4) and by Christopher Marlowe such as *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587-1589) written about 15 years earlier than *Othello*. As previously mentioned, the depiction of the Turks in English Renaissance drama is characterized by inconsistency. It ranges from villainy to nobility. In spite of the fact that English Renaissance playwrights showed interest in portraying marginal and peripheral groups-Irish, Jews, women, and black moors- the Ottoman Turks did not fall by any means within that classification. They were not marginalized either in the English reality or in the English imagination. They were positioned in the center of both the English literary and political preoccupation, (Brotton, 1997, p. 91).

Unlike Said's argument that the West has always insisted on having the upper hand in its cross cultural encounters with the other, the examination of the Ottoman Turks' presence in early modern drama intends to understand the context that inspired and gave meaning to that literary construction. As the English experience in both Catholic regions of their islands and the New World was

different, one believes that the forces that inspired the representation of the other in the Ottoman regions were different as well. Hence, the attempt to understand the context is essential in understanding the nature of that representation. In fact, it is common sense to say that the Ottoman Turks did not share religious foundations with the English like the Jews and the Irish. Contrary to that, they subscribed to a non-Christian religious notion and ideology and their cultural heritage was not by any means based on Greco-culture and civilization.

Nabil Matar notes that employing Said's theory here is off point. To claim that Islam was dominated by Christianity in the early modern period is unimaginable. Any attempt to retroactively apply Said's concept to the early modern drama experience is open to challenges and may be aesthetically and scientifically inaccurate, (Matar, 1998a, p.13).The Anglo-Ottoman encounter and experience were different from those of the Irish and the New World. One would even claim that it was even different in its nature, depth, and power relations; that is to say, the schemata of difference and representation, from the Orient list model that dominated the nineteenth century Anglo-Muslim cultural encounter according to Said's theory. Early modern England was militarily weak and economically unstable and poor and could not compete with or challenge the Ottoman Sultan unlike the pattern that dominated the nineteenth century and in which England had the upper

hand in both the cross cultural encounter and the global scene, (Matar, 1998a.p.8). Again, the range of the reproduction of the Ottoman Turks in drama which this research is trying to explore does not claim to be all inclusive of all the period's representational writings. The use of the Ottoman Turks in the period's dramatic works was partly a metaphor rather than an actual or authentic analysis of the subject. Unlike the New World that was represented as a place of easy religious dominance, the Orient was otherwise described as a site of creedal risk taking where Christian believers are vulnerable to religious faith conversion or at least to apostasy,(For a discussion of this issue, see Goldberg,1983,pp. 179-246).

Identity formation and the anxiety of religious conversion

As a result of the English commercial and maritime activity in the Mediterranean, hundreds of sailors and seamen on both sides-north and south-were sometimes captured and had to stand trial in the other country. Tens of these captives either voluntarily or unwillingly converted to Islam to obtain liberty from captivity. In fact, English anxiety about the ability of the Ottomans to convert English citizens to Islam was enormous. The English Monarch, in an attempt to counteract this unusual practice denounced the act and considered it heretical. Inside England, there was a campaign to convince sailors and seamen to endure suffering or attain Christian martyrdom rather than convert to Islam. Those who switched back to Christianity and forth

to Islam and back again were skeptically regarded as returned renegades who may hide a kind of menace lurking in the dark. Protestants converting to Islam were usually viewed by the writers as potential danger .In order to condemn these conversions and to align them with the devilish Turks; English writers distanced themselves from these escapists and showed more commitment to Christendom. They even accused each other of "Turning Turk" or acknowledging Turkish behavior. In fact, Post reformation English scholarship tends to highlight English Ottoman trade and textual representation of the Turks in early modern drama, (Maclean, 2007, pp. 34-36).

In fact, the role played by Islam in the formation of English identity continues to be contested in contemporary early modern scholarship. One may claim that Said's examination of the East – West cross cultural encounter seems to have established a trend that may have expanded and complicated cross cultural boundaries. The critical debate around Said's self and other binary theory seems to have intensified the problem complexity. In fact, early modern dramatic texts showed a remarkable interest in the political and religious other. Bartels notes in her study *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello* (2009), that the early anxieties that the post reformation English playwrights voiced at that time drew the attention of the nascent empire that the Ottoman Turks cannot be marginalized if England plans to play a role in the global

scene, (Bartels, 2009,p.28).The religious instability that England went through in the Renaissance era with the adoption of Protestantism on the side of the upper and middle English classes and a great number of the church of England clergymen, the fear of Protestants backsliding towards Catholicism along with the conversion to Islam created an anxiety –driven discourse about Turks, converts and renegades.

Matar asserts that early modern England had known Muslims in reality and not in fancy, travel writings, diplomatic accounts and family correspondence as some English mercenaries fought in Muslim armies until they were recalled by an edict of James 1. His theory is that early modern England never thought of the Muslim world in isolation. Almost all playwrights of that period such as Shakespeare, Marlowe, Peele, Kyd, Heywood, and Dekker wrote plays that included Muslim characters. Vitkus refers to 1570 as the beginning of a noticeable increase in the maritime commercial endeavor in the Mediterranean Sea on the side of the English fleet. This found an echo, she says, in a surge of plays written by Shakespeare and his contemporaries who set the action of these dramatic works in the Mediterranean. Tens of plays written from 1570 - 1630 deal with Islamic themes, characters or settings, (See *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*, 1989).

Fears of converting to Islam gave rise to further fears of miscegenation. One would agree here with Said's argument that English identity formation could not have

developed without engagement with the non –English "other" whether in reality or in literary texts. "The other" was no doubt a necessity to measure against one's identity formulation. That process started early in the 16th century and continued right away to the twentieth century and even beyond. It is early modern English drama that played out these anxieties by portraying what an English Christian can go through if he or she decides to venture into Muslim territory or accept the "Islamic faith". They highlighted the fact that converting to Islam or "Turning Turk" was the tentative consequence of venturing into the Muslim arena. Though the threat was religious in nature, it was also presented as to involve the body as well in the guise of cultural contamination. Again, the threat of sea piracy in the Mediterranean, the capture of English men and women by Turkish corsairs, the fledgling phenomenon of Protestant Britons converting to Islam or "turned Turk", the encroachment of the Ottomans in Southern Eastern regions of Europe, the memories of the holy wars and the crusades, the Islamic conquests and presence in Iberia, and the Christian Reconquista increased the fear of the Europeans in general and the English in particular and stirred the European consciousness of the danger that lured not too far from home. The crisis led the English writers of the post reformation period to stereotype the Turks in demonizing imitative figures. Early modern scholarship asserts that these literary representations were motivated by fear and anxiety as well as an intention to build cultural domination.

Though the English laymen were physically removed from the Ottoman threat that was felt in the Southern and Eastern regions of Europe, English dramatic writers were always referring to the urgency and immediacy of that threat and danger as the news of the Ottoman wars was circulating in most of Europe. Shakespeare relocates the setting of *Othello* (1603-4) from Venice to Cyprus as the Ottoman fleet was about to attack the Island. Was the English nation only curious about the others or were they paving the road to their would- be empire is a pressing question. Nevertheless, with the advent of Said's *Orientalism* (1978) a trend appeared among early modern scholars that advocates the ideological formation of early modern European identities. These scholars assert that European identities were not developed within locally drawn lines, but in the clash among cultures. To Said, Orientalism is "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in the Western experience," (Said, 1987, p. 1). He contends that European scholars did not actually study the real Orient, but the Orient as it is fancied and imagined by the West. Their point of departure was a self –constructed approach and perspective of the Orient. The west never studied the Orient as it is in reality, but as something different, exotic and inferior. That approach was always based on creating a self –invented Oriental other. Said postulates that Orientalism provides an evidence of the interdependence between trade, society, politics, textuality, and history. He continues to argue that "the cultural role played by the Orient in the West connects

Orientalism with ideology, politics, and the logic of power," (Said, 1978, p. 24).

Furthermore, Said insists that the interest in studying the Orient as other was politically motivated especially in the eighteenth century and later so as to justify imperialism and hegemony. Orientalism to Said is a politically constructed doctrine preying on the Orient as it was recognized as racially inferior, economically underdeveloped and culturally backward. In short, to Said, the Oriental "other" is an ideological construct not a geographical territory. Many modern scholars have called Said's notion of "otherning" into question. Vitkus asserts that Said himself produces the same binary model which he condemns in Western accounts of the East. The North African Moors as well as the Ottoman Muslims were a geopolitical factuality to the Britons of the Renaissance era. They were to be known, approached and feared at the same time. The geographical proximity to England and the power of the Muslim Empire may have inhibited the English playwrights from depicting the Turks as exotic. However, they were portrayed as the other though, he adds. To say that Said's theory of the binary oppositions is applicable only to the orient list endeavor of the 19th century is a contested idea. One believes that Colonialism started as an intellectual idea and as a kind of discursive imperialism and continued to manifest itself in literary works, travelogues, news reports, official and family correspondence,

commercial treaties, captivity narratives, chronicles, geographical accounts, and historical studies long before the imperial conquests of the colonies in the 19th century.

Though western colonial tycoons did not embark on colonizing the East until late 18th century, there is nothing to prevent one from believing that they did not entertain the idea. Again, while these powers were building their cities upon the hill in the New World in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the Ottomans were simultaneously trying hard to colonize southern eastern European territories. In fact, the second half of the 20th century marks a surge in the scholarly endeavor that showed an interest in studying how these relations commenced, persisted, developed, and were regarded by the nascent English nation, and its creative writers.

Turning Turk

The concept of "Turk" seems to have entered English language and imagination when the Turkish tribes were still migratory before the first Ottoman Sultanate was established in 1299. As the tribes were constantly involved in inter-tribal disputes, strives and wars, it was not unusual for the late 13th and early 14th century England to view them as barbaric, savage, uncivil and inhuman. The Turks took over Constantinople in 1453 and brought the eastern Roman Empire to its final fall. Following these new developments on the European scene, the Turks were looked at as stunningly powerful, great and undefeatable. When these

new geopolitical and military accomplishments found their way to the English popular, social and creative imagination, the negative image that the Turks were barbaric and uncivil was accompanied with another image of the Turks who are racially different, religiously pagan, militarily stronger, and civilisationally savage. The phrase *'to turn Turk'* could be understood to cover a range of negative meanings, including a change associated to the mark of circumcision on the body of Muslim men. The view that circumcision is related to excessive lust suggests that European Christians also viewed it as a source of cultural denigration. By the end of the 16th century; the phrase was commonly used to describe deceitful acts or lasciviousness. Virginia Vaughan remarks that "the expression 'to turn Turk' dated from the fourteenth century". Furthermore, it "could mean to turn into an inhabitant of Turkey, or to become a Muslim, or, in a third sense, to be a 'cruel, rigorous or tyrannical man: anyone behaving as a barbarian or savage: one who treats his wife hardly: a bad-tempered or unmanageable man," (Vaughan, 1994, p. 31).

Among the three definitions the second and third ones were the most common among the Elizabethans. Captives' conversion to Islam for whatever reason they had and the resistance of the English state to that practice are common knowledge now among early modern scholars. In fact Vitkus asserts that between 1592 and 1609 about 70 to 80 English ships fell in Turkish captivity or to roaming

pirates' ships in the Mediterranean (Vitkus, 1997, p. 152). The Turks were accused of trying to convert faithful Protestants from the right path to the path of the damned and sinful human beings. The desire to do so "was frequently figured as a sexual/sensual temptation of virtue, accompanied by a wrathful passion for power,"(Vitkus, 1997, p. 145). Converting to Islam was regarded as a kind of physical transgression. Furthermore, sliding back to Catholicism was seen in similar terms as a kind of spiritual prostitution that will simply transport sinners to hell. Turning Turk was metaphorically employed to mean getting a ride to hell with a seductive race or simply deviating from the right protestant path.

Othello's context

It is now common knowledge to claim that Muslims made some kind of noticeable appearance in the English theatre in the second half of the 16th century that Shakespeare found it unsurprising to make the prince of Morocco woo the Venetian Portia in apparent confidence in *Merchant of Venice* (1596-1598) without hurting the sensibilities of the English audience. In *Othello*, it is argued that the key issue is Islam, and not blackness. It is the Ottoman threat that puts the play in motion and makes the setting relocate with the main characters to Cyprus. It is in this new setting that Othello is haunted by what one calls inner Islamic (Turkish) ideas. The only way to come to terms with these haunting religious ideas was to murder Desdemona. That is to say, he wanted to unload his heavy

heart and anxiously engaged mind from her with all what she represents to him.

"Turning Turk" at that time was also associated with the potential monopoly and authority a Muslim Turk gets over a Christian woman. That also meant the permanent giving up and desertion of her Christian identity and values. Furthermore, Turning Turk meant conversion to Islam, betrayal of Jesus Christ and subversion. In fact, the geographical proximity and the attraction of the Muslim world along with the trade and economic opportunities it offered to the then despairing England and the antagonistic attitudes of the Catholic world to Anglican England all played a role in the coinage and the routine use of the idiom, to" Turn Turk" and not just its different otherness. Again, the phrase also connotes faithlessness and duplicity and migrating from the right religion to infidelity and paganism. The reference was to a religion and not to an African race. The scope of the meaning was broad and malleable enough so as to include all Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire and not being limited to native subjects of Turkey. At times, the horizon of the phrase was further expanded to encompass North African moors, Arabs and all Muslims wherever they are. At its farthest meaning, the idiom referred to those who behave like a Turk or turned Turk themselves and it is here that the phrase is associated with indefinite negative meanings.

Eventually, the phrase "to Turn Turk" gradually found its way to everyday English language use combining meanings that had little to do with the original phrase. Many early modern plays tackled that theme and dramatized how a Christian woman facing that seduction and temptation could escape with her physical and spiritual virtue intact. Some critics are in the belief that modern anxieties about racial miscegenation are sometimes read back to that period. Furthermore; early modern playwrights associated a Christian female losing her sexual virtue to a Muslim Turk to the defeat of a culture and a religion to another. Vitkus asserts that though trade aroused England's ambitions for economic power and imperial aspirations, it also intensified her fear of cultural penetration and submissiveness. Turning Turk, she adds, was regarded as the devil's way to undermine the protestant Christian faith, (Vitkus, 2003, p. 51). She claims that *Othello* draws on maritime endeavors and piracy in the Mediterranean and that it can be interpreted in the context of the Turkish presence and conflicts in that sea. *Othello* simply reflected the English anxieties in the early modern era (Vitkus, 2003, p. 78).Turning Turk also meant the possibility of losing one's cultural identity and selling out to another culture. There was an insistence on the side of the post reformation writers to maintain a negative image of Islam and Muslims in the English Renaissance drama, (Burton, 2005, p. 22).

In fact, a substantial number of English Renaissance plays that employed Islamic topics as their theme framed

their settings by putting their plays in North African locations and Mediterranean Islands. Tunis, Morocco, Algiers and Fez are repeatedly used as settings in these plays. Furthermore, small islands such as Venice, Cyprus, Malta and Rhodes are manifestly employed as sites of action. Dramatic writers simply used real sites of historical and colonial conflict as setting locations for their plays. The presence of the oriental people -Muslims and moors- in English cities and ports and the curiosity their arrival provoked at that time made them useable dramatis objects that could be employed to metaphorically discuss local and national fears from the Turks. The theatre stage was then the place of reflection on the newly faced and explored notions of racial, cultural and religious forms of difference. Ania loomba says that the early modern theatre was a tool for shaping new social structures and a vehicle for enhancing cultural change. This literary genre played an essential part in strengthening certain notions of difference that were building up in the horizon. The stigma of turning Turk or converting to another Christian faith reflected new formulations of national identity in that period. The cross cultural encounter with the unknown other and the anxiety this contact triggered gave birth to the dramatic phenomenon that one calls the Turk phenomenon in the early modern period. The many plays that showed an interest in Islam and Muslim people tried to seek different answers to many unanswered questions; who are we? And

how different we are from other races and religions? *(Loomba, 2002, p.8)*.

Early modern English anxiety

Linda McJannet claims that early modern history of the Turks played a great role in building this English ambiguous anxiety about the Ottoman Turks. Until the first English history of the Turks appeared in 1570 as part of the second edition of *Acts and Monuments*, most of the information and knowledge on the Turks available to the English readers were derived from translations written on the continent. It was John Foxe who wrote *History and Tyranny of the Turks* as part of the previously mentioned treatise. He alleges that all the Turks are devilish by nature and lack human feelings. Unlike the anti-Turks tone and attitude of the Foxe's book, another more favorable, but ambivalent study on the, nature, unity and organization of the Turkish Empire was released in 1603 entitled A *General History of the Turks* by Knolles. The English writers were caught between these two opposed perspectives and simply created an ambiguous image of the Turks. Thus history fed the cross encounter anxiety with Ottoman Turks and Drama reflected it at the same time.   Tracing recent and contemporary research in this area can offer illuminating insights into this field. One of the most important books that studied the relationship between England and the Islamic faith in the first half of the 20th century is Samuel Chew's *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance*(1937).This study handles many of the issues

that still draw the attention of contemporary scholarship such as the relationships between England and the Ottomans , the ambiguity with which the English viewed the Muslim Turks, the sea piracy in the Mediterranean, the issue of Westerners turning Turk and at last the commercial relationships between East and West.

Other respective research followed in the following decades. The most popular of which are Dorothy Vaughn's book *Europe and the Turk: A Pattern of Alliances, 1350-1700* (1954) and Robert Schwoebel's *The Shadow and the Crescent: Renaissance Image of The Turk, 1453-1517* (1969).Though contemporary scholars acknowledge their debt to these modern studies, they still feel uncomfortable about their Euro centrism. That is to say; the analysis of this relationship was tainted with what MacLean calls "single archive approach" that modern early drama scholars adopt or the one-sided archive treatment. The results of which is "that prejudiced misinformation all too often reappears as fact"(Maclean, 2007, p. 6).That is why Said's *Orientalism* (1978) stands as a counter defensive study to what Maclean has described as the single –archive approach research. In fact, many Renaissance plays can be employed to give evidence to the phenomenon that one calls Turks plays, however Shakespeare's *Othello* is the one that the scholar has chosen to reread and revisit in the light of the theoretical base and context created in the first half of this research.

Othello reconsidered

In *Othello* (1603-4), it is quite explicit that Iago's complaint that Othello's overlooking of his military competencies as an army leader introduces us to the confrontation between Christians and infidels. He vents his anger out early in the play. He says: "And I/of whom his eyes has seen the proof/At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds/Christians and heathen." (1.1.27-30).The Moorish general was leading the Christian armies against the heathens. That scene, no doubt, echoes the Elizabethan cultural and political anxiety at that time. Furthermore, there are multiple signs and connotations that the danger lurks inside the community and not only outside it. Jonathan Bates asserts that in *Othello*, the social peace is threatened from within and not from without, (Bates, 2004, pp. 289-308).

In fact, fear from Islam in the Elizabethan age was expressed in xenophobic language and was also used metaphorically to caution against unreliable Christian conduct. It is believed that the Elizabethans' elite and intellectuals based their comprehension of Islam and the Ottomans on knowledge derived from travel accounts, captivity narratives, diplomatic reports, political documents and other personal correspondence. These were the available sources in England then to know about Islam. In spite of the queen's endeavor to build political and business relationships with the Ottoman Empire and the Moroccans, on a claim that there is a doctrinal sameness between Islam

and Protestantism in their rejection of the idolatrous images which characterize the Catholic faith of Spain, her attitude towards Islam was ambiguous. That ambiguity disappeared with the accession of James 1 to the throne in 1603 and whose reign continued to 1625.His Catholic faith motivated him to ally with the Catholic kingdom of Spain against the Turks. War against the infidels was a priority for him then. The emphasis on the issue of the "moorishness" of the protagonist and his use of witchcraft to seduce the Venetian lady of Venice in act one reflects the anxiety of the English society towards the aliens who seek assimilation into its fabric.

As the moor is described as "the Barbary horse", "lascivious Moor", "old black ram" and "devil", there is a possibility that he is a Muslim who had earlier converted to Christianity in his attempts to assimilate into the Venetian society. In the brawl scene, Othello, the convert in reverse, who may have been baptized as a Christian, scolds his army fellows who are behaving like the Turks by fighting in the street. His language in the scene sounds paradoxical to the extent that Shakespeare made him kill Desdemona to assure us that it is Othello who is now behaving like the Turk. He simply killed the only proof that he is socially assimilated into the social fabric. The meaning is that he reconverted to Islam and consequently to unreliable Turkish conduct. Most probably Othello is now denied Christian salvation as he slides back to the ranks of the infidels. The issue of

Christians converting to Islam or back to the Catholic faith in the Elizabethan age was a puzzling phenomenon and the phrase "to turn Turk" was used to stigmatize those who betray their country or protestant faith in either way. Besides, Iago's Spanish name may have referred to the Catholic danger that might be lurking in the English society and culture and that could bring back chaos to it. In fact, Iago is dramatically employed as a functional Turk masked as a citizen who brought barbarity and Turkish misconduct back to the English society.

There is no doubt that Shakespeare used history in his plays in a very skillful way and never intended his texts to be openly polemical. On the contrary, he was always keen to implant political issues in the tissues of his text through interpersonal encounters. A quick reading of his other plays such as *Merchant of Venice* (1596), *Hamlet* (1599), *Julius Caesar* (1599), Antony *and Cleopatra* (1606), and *Macbeth* (1606), gives evidence to this argument. Furthermore, the bard did not employ his texts as platforms for political propaganda, but he handled cultural, sociopolitical and to some extent geopolitical issues in his plays. It is that approach to drama that made his texts open for new interpretation in new cultural contexts. The criticism Othello voices against the disorderly conduct of his soldiers in the brawl scene reflects Shakespeare's warning of the danger such misconduct may pose to the civil order in England. The possibility of Iago being a closet

Turk may not be exclusive to him. It can be expanded to include the protagonist as well.

> Othello: What is the matter here?
> Montano: Zounds, I bleed still.
>   I am hurt to th' death.
> Othello:
>   Hold for your lives!
> Iago:
>   Hold, ho, Lieutenant, sir, Montano,
> gentlemen!
>   Have you forgot all sense of place and duty?
>   Hold! The General speaks to you: hold, for
> shame!
>   Othello:
>   Why, how now, ho! From whence ariseth this?
>   Are we turned Turks and to ourselves do that
>   Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?
>   For Christian shame, put by this barbarous
> brawl. (2.3.156-166)

It is crystal clear that the bard is sharing the fear from Islam with his contemporary playwrights and audience. This time, fear is taking the shape of a corrupt, undisciplined and rotten Christian society. Furthermore, Shakespeare is ringing the bell against judging by appearance. Early in the play, he acquitted Othello from the accusation of being dishonest as a moor. He wanted to make his audience think to discover the unexplored cause of

Othello's problem. By making Iago's conspiracy a main driver of the plot; Shakespeare was also drawing the attention to the same mistake of being distracted by Iago's appearance and accusations against Othello. Similarly, Desdemona's father warns the Venetian citizens early in the play of being deceived by appearances as he thinks his daughter did with him: "Oh, she deceives me ...Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds/by what you see them act" (1.171-172). Brabantio is ironically foreshadowing the fall of the protagonist who was deceived by his blindness to perceive the disjuncture between reality and appearance in the Venetian society and who himself deceived the entire society by his elopement with Desdemona. It is Othello's naivety that made him trust Iago's insinuations that both reality and appearance should match together. Thus, he simply pulled Othello's leg in his entrap. In a moment of self-realization, Othello confesses that the devil may not be hanging around, but hiding inside oneself. Hence, he repentantly accepts his entire responsibility for being tricked by Iago. He then sees himself as " the base Indian (who) threw a pearl away/richer than all his tribe" (5.2.343-345). Therefore, one may see his committing suicide as an act of self-cleansing of all that is Turkish in him. Again, Shakespeare made Othello kill Desdemona as a punishment for those who fall in the habit of deceiving others. Brabantio informs Othello early in act one that Desdemona deceived him and may also do the same to her husband, "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see /she has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.289-

290). Less than forty years later, England witnessed her civil war and the overthrow of the monarch under the blows of the puritans.

To *Othello*'s other characters, the moor is black, but his blackness does not drive the plot forward. Moorishness is not an essential issue in the characterization of the play. The duke satirizes Brabantio's inefficient ability to judge foreigners in particular and people in general by asserting that "if virtue no delighted beauty lack/your son-in-law is far more fair than black" (1-3-290-291).Shakespeare seems to have shied away from the temptation of portraying Othello as the evil stranger. On the contrary, he presented him as the victim of a white man, Iago. When Othello meets the Duke early in act one, scene three, he manages to convince him and of course the Elizabethan audience to whom Shakespeare wrote the play, that his character does not by any means fit in the stereotypical image of the uncivilized African moor. His position as a non-Venetian and non-European army leader defending European territories against the Turk is justified at this point in the plot and his post as a general is shown to be fairly attained. Therefore, his racial difference is of no great significance to the plot.

Othello is described as a person haunted by the racial discrimination Iago exercises against him early in the expositional scenes of the play. Shakespeare, in his attempt

to build up the protagonist's tragic nobility, portrays Othello as split and psychologically flawed; a moor from North Africa, a non- Venetian military leader in search of assimilation, a potential Christian convert in reverse and at last a Turk in disguise. Killing Desdemona and committing suicide at the end is his only way to bring back his deeply fragmented and uncemented self. It is all these factors that work in collaboration to lead him to death. There is a possibility that Othello's race and skin color do not mean anything to Shakespeare. His race is only important to the narrative development of the play, but not to the interpretation and the connotations of the text. His skin color is only used as a marker of difference for the immediate action and as a distraction from the main issue of the play from act one.

It is open to challenge to argue that Shakespeare harbored a thought that jealousy is a main trait of black moors. Desdemona informs her audience that "my noble Moor/Is true of mind, and made of no such baseness/As jealous creatures are." In a personal conversation with Emilia, she maintains this line of argument: "I think the sun where he was born/Drew all such humors from him." (3.4.26-31). Again, in act one, scene three, Brabantio acquits Othello of the pending accusation that he seduced his daughter by practicing witchcraft on her. We are assured that this baseless accusation is an invented illusion.

Brabantio: Is there not charms
         By which the property of youth and maidenhood
         May be abused? Have you not read, Rodrigo
         Of some such thing?

Roderigo: Yes sir, I have indeed.
           (1-1-169-172)

When Othello is offered a chance to defend himself by one of the senators, he says:

I do beseech you,

Send for the lady to the Saggitary,

And let her speak of me before her father.

If you do find me foul in her report

The trust, the office I do hold of you

Not only take away, but let your sentence

      Even fail upon my life.

         (1.3.115.-121).

Furthermore, Desdemona, in her defense of Othello, asserts that the accusation of being abused by her husband's use of witchcraft is nothing more than a fallacy and her testimony quickly settles the issue before the duke and the senators as well. The fact that Othello walks away free from the court is that these accusations are not taken seriously by

the governing elite. Again, Shakespeare implicitly connotes that summoning the young lady to the court is evidence that she did not marry Othello under the spell of magic. In spite of this acquittal, the question raised: why Othello, Who could have married Desdemona with the approval of her father upon the basis of his enthusiastically acclaimed princely birth and his competencies as a military leader, elope with Desdemona and marry her in secret? The only logical interpretation is that the moor is skeptical of his worthiness as a match to her.

Shakespeare realizes the origin of Othello's feeling of unworthiness and makes Iago his dramatic tool to cast light on Othello's psychological illness that is finally cured by murdering his white wife and then committing suicide. In order to distract the audience away from the sociopolitical issue-threatening the civil order in England by Turing Turk-Shakespeare employs the relationship of Othello and Desdemona and Iago's conspiracy as the main driver of the plot. The accusation of practicing witchcraft and being an untrustworthy moor is almost overlooked and is sometimes returned to when needed. In one of his weakest human moments, Othello remembers that: "Her name, that was as fresh/As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black/As mine own face." (3.3.389-391). Stephan Greenblatt asserts that by approaching the end of the play in act five, we harbor a feeling that Othello had already eroticized himself, built up his otherness as a non-venetian expatriate and prepared the audience for the resolution of the unresolved

secret(Greenblatt,1980,   pp.222-254).Unlike   Marlowe, Shakespeare did not create Turkish characters in his plays, though he employed the phrase "Turning Turk" to caution against the threat of the Turks as a military power and the possible collapse of civil order from within. In fact, the Turks' negative image as unreliable maritime power was actually operative in the Elizabethan popular imagination and the empire itself was a menace to Christendom, (E. Jones, 1968, pp. 47-52).E. Jones claims that Shakespeare as a product of the Elizabethan age might have shown an unpremeditated interest in the danger that the Ottomans posed to England to secure a kind of popularity for his play.

The image of the Muslim Turks that the Elizabethan playwrights endeavored to create in their plays was a reflection of social and existing facts. Again, the cursory revisiting of the two issues of witchcraft and blackness and the skillful employment of the conspiracy of Iago against his senior leader in the later acts are only used in *Othello* as dramatic plot drivers. Right from the moment we hear about the threat of the Ottoman fleet to Venice, the action is relocated to Cyprus and Othello is obviously reaffirmed as the capable military leader who is now tasked with taking all necessary procedures to defend his state territories. Until this moment in the plot, the implicit meaning is that the legitimacy of the marriage is no longer disputed. The urgency of the threat made the Duke and the senators roughly investigate the tool Othello may have used to entrap

Desdemona. As the winds push the Turkish fleet away from Cyprus between acts one and two, Shakespeare turns the audience's attention from the outside danger to the inside threat that is lurking in the society. Consequently, the Turkish maritime power is metaphorically metamorphosed to mean "Turning Turk". In his attempt to maintain the dramatic suspense among the audience, Shakespeare keeps them blind to the flaws in Othello's character and employs Iago as his tool to educate them in the inner perplexed reality of the protagonist. Iago's conspiracy to destroy the moor and bring his social assimilation attempt to a holt could not have been completed without the former's realization that Othello does not have enough confidence in his social status. Shakespeare clues to what he means by the internal threat by making Iago confess that he may be a "Turk". That is to say; a dishonest person who is in the habit of tricking people. Shakespeare lets Iago tell Desdemona, after the news flies with the destruction of the Ottoman fleet in a strong tempest that he may be a Turk (deceitful), if his jest is untrue.

> Desdemona:　O, fie upon thee, slanderer

> Iago:　　　　　Nay, it is true, or else I am a Turk:　　　(2.1.114.116).

In fact, the development of the dramatic world of *Othello* depends on the political context in which it is set. Nabil Matar argues that the charm, fascination and allure of Islam were noticeable in Post Reformation era that a

substantial effort was exerted to demonize its followers and denounce those who converted to it. Besides, there was also a systematic process on the social, cultural, creative and religious levels in which historical facts and information were usually overlooked if they sound inconvenient to that end. English playwrights metaphorically used the phrase 'to turn Turk' to caution against the danger that may be lurking inside the English society. In the same fashion, churchmen accused the Muslim Turks of being infidel, heathen and barbaric and repeated these characteristics in their sermons. Again, the inability of England to dwarf and dominate the Ottoman Empire on the global scene made a considerable number of English playwrights misrepresent this new power in drama. The long standing rivalry between the West and the East, according to Said, played a significant role in the cultural encounter between these two poles in the early modern period. Misrepresentation was their only way to confront Islam: simply to fantasize in drama about Islam and the Turks. Fantasizing Islam was only part of what one calls imperial envy that reflects early imperial aspirations on the side of the English nation.

Closure

In conclusion, though Muslims made a remarkable appearance in English cities and ports, English intellectuals, most probably, derived their knowledge about Islam and the Turks from largely unreliable sources. Unlike Said's binary

theory that claims that Orientalizing the East was a textual phenomenon, Matar argues that the textual representation of the Turks, and the Islamic/Turkish cultures was part of the process of English identity formation in the early modern era and that ignoring the historical facts about it was done on purpose. The Ottoman Empire was a global existing power that the English nation and its intellectuals had feared, admired and wished to conquer at the same time.

Said, on the other hand, was concerned with Orientalizing the East in the post Napoleonic period in which Europe emerged as a powerful imperial power. Equally important, Said's theory is partly insightful as it described the demonizing of the Muslims early in the post reformation age as a kind of discursive imperialism that turned this knowledge later into institutionalized real power. One can assert that early English accounts about the Ottomans qualifies as a form of orientalism , to use Said's term, as they sound like a discourse that attempted to constitute subjects. Matar argues that the former was a discourse without imperialism. As England viewed the Ottoman Empire from a relatively weak position, the representation of this great empire hid imperial envy and varied from fantasies to admiration and from brother to other. In addition, the description of the Turks as backward, vulnerable, infidel and, oriental harbored a feeling that this vast empire and its lands are waiting to be conquered, defeated and colonized.

In fact, the conflict of early modern England with Catholic Spain to colonize the New World for commercial reasons developed into a kind of imperial envy towards the Ottoman Empire that stretched over three continents. Fantasies about the Ottomans were strategic and interested. The misrepresentation of the Ottoman Empire by early modern English dramatists illustrates the interdependence of material interests and cultural changes. Furthermore, identity formation of the English nation could not have developed based on local boundaries only. They decided to restructure their new national identity in terms of the global scene they greatly wanted to put a foot in. Cross cultural encounters helped the English to restyle themselves according to the Knowledge they attained for over a century from their quite involvement in the 17th century global scene.

The concept of imperial envy is better suited to describe the pre-colonial era as it combines love and hatred, likeness as well as difference. The restyling of England continued for about a century and when revisiting the representation of the Ottoman Empire and the imaginative writings about them and the colonial endeavors of the English in the 17th and 18th centuries, we discover how these early cross cultural encounters helped the English shape their identity as a nation with imperial ambitions. In the later centuries, one believes that imperial envy gave way to a different feeling of superiority and indifference that led

England to build its imperial power. Turning Turk was Shakespeare's metaphor to alert his audience against potential civil disorders that may endanger their civil peace. Othello himself ended up fully aware of his racial difference and inferiority to the Venetian community in which he sought assimilation and integration. Consequently, Shakespeare's message is that the danger is neither related to the Ottoman Empire nor the unreliability of the black moor, but to the vulnerability of the citizens to be corrupted. In other word; it is to copy the unreliable conduct of the Turks. Those who are seduced are more dangerous than the external threat of the Ottoman Empire. Civil strives and conspiracies are as injurious to the civil order as the military threat of the Muslim Turks. By the same token, Shakespeare's message is that internal corruption is not disconnected from external threats. Furthermore, it is this moment of self-realization that underlines the notion of the symbolic similarity between the Islamic faith and the corruption that may penetrate the Christian world. Shakespeare's final word is that preoccupation with the other-Jews, Italians, and Muslims- is a distraction from the more dangerous threat of corruption that may be lurking inside the European society.

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