



Representation of Muslims in Early Modern English Literature

Dawlat Yassin



Early modern England underwent an economic change towards capitalism when trade brought English merchants to the Middle East, North Africa and other parts of the Ottoman dominions. Motivated by good prospects of trade and profit, or merely the love of adventure and exploring new countries and new cultures, traders as well as adventurers came in contact with peoples of different religions, customs, and skin colors. In this transitional age,

English identities were conflictively altered by means of two elements: the economic and epistemological transition to a new kind of society, first, and also the relations established with a new and until then unknown culture, which was threateningly and radically Other especially because it was dangerously powerful, a culture that significantly played a role in the new economic and social scenario. (Casellas 125)

This contact resulted in a need for a set of definitions of the Self, and a drive to discover a way to conduct a communication with the Other while keeping one's own identity safe and unaffected.

The acquaintance with Muslims, their different religion, and different skin color

confronted English people directly with the question of their own identity. The need to define the self and the other becomes vital in an era where contact with different people is inevitable. According to Jean E. Howard, in this "Age of Discovery, a sense of English national identity took shape in relation to an emerging language of racial difference in which skin color and physiognomy became over determined markers of a whole range of religious and sexual and cultural difference by which the English were distinguished from various non-European 'others'" (102). The wealthy, militant Ottoman Empire was threatening to influence all cultural aspects of England and Europe. Chews recently described the Ottoman threat that started in the fourteenth century as "a cloud [that] arose in the east and from the fifteenth till far into the seventeenth the Ottoman peril hung over Europe" (qtd. in Lezra 163).

English theater reacted with a new kind of play that came to be known later as the "Turk play" or "Turkish play." Plays of this type express a desire to trade with the Muslim Other and to win "him" as a political ally, but at the same time, they forcefully emphasize the dangers of such communication. Turkish plays are haunted with anxiety at the inevitable, though desirable, contact with Muslims and are meant to

warn Christians of the physical and spiritual hazards of associating with Muslims. English theater presents Muslims as a threat to Christian monotheism and morality, as well as to the masculinity and manhood of Christian Englishmen and Europeans in general. The only form of contact with Muslims that the English theater approved was trade and materialistic exchange. A good example from Phillip Massinger's *The Renegado* is Vitelli's instruction to his servant: "We are allowed free trading, and with safety, / temper your tongue and meddle not with the Turks, / their manner, nor their religion (1. 1. 46-48).

The extremity of the Ottomans' wealth and power stunned the English, for they could not see these things as rewards to Muslims from God. They wanted an explanation of the Ottomans' wealth and military prowess that would refute any possibility that God was taking the Ottomans' side, rather than one which did not position God as condemning Muslims and their so-called "pagan" faith. The English wanted to see and believe that Muslims' power and wealth were not a reward, but rather a scourge to punish deviant, sinful Christians, mainly the Pope and the Catholics. Whereas the Protestant English defined themselves as the people of the only true religion on earth, they identified the Others as Satanic and devilish. Dark skin color helped associate Muslims with evil, for the English saw the dark skin as a reflection of dark heart and spirit.

In Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West* and Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*, Muslims are accepted by the English as trade partners and may be politically and economically equals, but their religion is identified as an unacceptable paganism. This racialized view of religion positions the "Turk" as morally inferior to the idealized virtuous Christian. In these plays, Islam forms the main constituent of Muslims' otherness and is represented as a source of

Muslims' lechery and barbarism. Skin color is another form of constructing Muslims' otherness; "Muslim" becomes the synonym of black, Moor, Blackmore, and Saracen (Casellas 63). The difference in religion is connected to blackness due to the inherent connotation of the evil and sinister nature of what is dark or black in western culture. Skin color becomes important when the words "Muslim", "Moor" and "Turk" become color-implicating vocabulary, and Muslims become connected to the descendants of Ham, who are doomed by the authority of Biblical narrative (Casellas 64). This connection supports all imagined ideas about the corruption of Muslims.

Both Heywood's and Massinger's plays present Muslimness as the identity of the morally deprived pagan: the black, evil human being. Muslims are portrayed as bloody, licentious heathens, and their religion is doomed as mere paganism and idolatry. *The Renegado* and *The Fair Maid of the West* warn the English audience against any human or cultural communication with Muslims. In these plays, Islamic culture represents a threat to English and European manhood, primarily through circumcision, which is often confused with castration. The other anxiety that these two plays reflect is the fear of miscegenation with the black heathen and the contamination of the purity of the white race. In short, association with Muslims is deemed as a threat of eternal damnation.

In *The Fair Maid of the West*, the English are presented as morally superior and more civilized than Muslims. Mullisheg is barbarous in the way he seeks power and sexual pleasure. He raises his throne "Upon the slaughtered bodies of [his] foes" (Heywood 4.3.10), gives orders to seize Christian merchants' ships and goods to enrich his state treasury, and plans to buy sexual pleasure with his money by purchasing concubines: "Find us concubines, / the fairest Christian damsels you can hire / Or buy for

gold,” (Heywood 4. 3. 28-30). He has no scruples about using his power to attain his sexual objects, either: “the loveliest of the Moors / we can command, and Negroes everywhere” (Heywood 4. 3. 30-1). On the other hand, English superiority in the play is based on their civility and moral discipline without openly associating that superiority with other categories like religion or skin color. Reading between the lines can reveal religion as the main factor that makes the English superior to Muslims. Muslims are openly presented as pagans who make sensual pleasure their main interest in life. Whereas Muslim identity is presented in the most negative ways, Englishness becomes the synonym of virtue, modesty and beauty. Muslims are viewed as both bloody and lascivious.

The Fair Maid of the West’s chastity is contrasted to Mullisheg’s sensuality. Bess is virtuous even though she lives in a very tempting situation: she is a poor bar attendant serving wine to men who are fascinated by her beauty and want to prey upon her chastity. She also remains chaste while confronted with excessive wealth and power at Mullisheg’s court. Bess resists the temptations of love, wealth, and power and holds on to her Christian virtue. In contrast to this idealized Christian maiden, Mullisheg stands as an emblem of sensuality. He plans to include in his harem women of different races, colors, and even religions. His insatiable appetite for sexual pleasure is presented in an utter contrast to Bess’s faithfulness to both her Christian lover and her Christian virtue.

By being impervious to the Muslim king’s temptations, Bess plays the role of emasculating him. English relations with other empires were characterized by emasculation (Fuchs 61). While English manhood was threatened by circumcision, castration, and utter conversion by their relationship with the Ottoman Empire, Bess reverses the situation. In Massinger’s and his audience’s conception, the situation is: the dark,

barbarous, bloody, and pagan king is fascinated by the beauty of the fair, Christian, virtuous maiden who robs him of his manly courage and turns him effeminate. In front of this beautiful English girl, Mullisheg is led by his passion. He is ready to give up half his kingdom for her, and yet she still resists. He is unable to have her either by temptation, or by force. Bess also interferes with Mullisheg and prevents Spencer’s castration. At the end of the play, she is domesticated by marrying Spencer, the English gentleman with whom she is in love. This marriage represents the victory of the English patriarchy and the imperviousness of English manhood in relation with another powerful empire.

Furthermore, in her virtuousness and virginity, Bess can be understood as standing for the Virgin Queen, Queen Elizabeth I. The relationship that feminizes and emasculates Mullisheg can also be interpreted as England and its queen emasculating the Ottoman empire as represented by an Ottoman king: “Elizabeth I unmans the pagan king with her charms and retrieves all the English merchants’ confiscated goods as well as the life of her captive lover” (Slights & Woloshyn 254). This supports the theory advanced by many critics of early modern English drama that England’s relationship with other empires is characterized by emasculation and feminization of the Other.

Skin color also appears in its traditional western connotation in Bess’s dealing with Mullisheg. The threat of miscegenation hovers over their meeting. Whereas Mullisheg desires to have wives and concubines of different races and colors, he has gotten nothing from Bess more than kisses on the cheek. Clem begrudges Mullisheg’s black skin the kisses of Bess’s white lips: “Must your black face be smooching my mistress’s white lips/with a Moorian? I would you have kissed her a...” (Heywood 5. 2. 80). Taking into consideration Clem’s unfinished

word “a...” shows how even a low-class person like Clem cannot see blacks and whites as equal human beings. Despite being a king, black Mullisheg’s place is to kiss the white girl’s “a...” and not her face. This imagined disparity between the supposed high human essence of the white girl and the low one of the black king acts to forbid sexual intercourse between the unequal two. Therefore, it gives the English audience a reassurance against any possible miscegenation. Heywood might have meant this to be an indirect lesson to his audience to hold on to their racial pride to avoid miscegenation with the black, Muslim Other. Mullisheg’s low behavior and lack of dignity in pursuing the object of his lust, along with his black color, shows him to be utterly damned.

Despite the blurriness surrounding the effect of one’s religious affiliations on his/her behavior in *The Fair Maid of the West*, one direct comment by Bess makes it clear that all vice and virtue spring from the teachings of one’s religion and the conformity to those teachings. Religion remains a clear line between the good Self and the bad Other. When Goodluck is being rough and mean, Bess cannot believe he is Christian, for such acts and speech could not come from a Christian: “Are you Christian?” This question unfolds how idealized the image of a Christian is in contrast to the demonized image of the non-Christian Other in the English imagination.

Heywood sets Christian identity in opposition to Moorish and Muslim identity. Muslims are viewed as inferior to the English in their barbarity, violence, and bloodthirstiness. In addition to their lewdness and licentiousness, Muslims are also shown in the play to be bloody. Heywood takes too much freedom in constructing the identity of Muslims. Islam is ambiguous to the English and they can construct it the way they like. It is not difficult to attach different kinds of vices to Muslims due to the geographical and cultural distance between their

countries and England, which makes it difficult for the English public to have any credible information about them. Muslims are presented as lascivious and loose people who live solely for sensual pleasure. This imagined sensuality of Muslims is presumed to be originated in the teachings of their religion.

Muslim identity is constructed as degenerate; they are shown in the play to follow all means, no matter how cruel and unfair they are, to attain their military and economic goals and gains. They build their kingdoms on the bones of the conquered and have no respect for human life. Mullisheg is not only barbarous and cruel in action, but he also has no shame in telling about his bloody ways of attaining the throne of Fiz, his kingdom: “Upon the slaughtered bodies of our foes, / We mount our high tribunal, and being sole, / without competitor (IV. 3. 10-13). This shows cruelty and bloodthirstiness to be the norm among Muslims.

Muslims are shown also to discriminate against Christian merchants who do business in their countries: “it is most fit /that Christians that reap profit by our land / should contribute unto so great a loss” (IV. 3. 24-27). Here Muslims are shown not merely passing laws in a civilized manner to regulate and benefit from commerce and traffic through their countries – which might be the Eastern perspective concerning the matter – but are made by the writer to arrange to specifically penalize ships and goods owned by Christian merchants. This can be a very successful way to move English audience’s sentiments against Muslims and to identify them as the violent Others who threaten English peace and interests.

Although Islam is a monotheistic Abrahamic faith, it is conceived by the West, including England, to be a kind of paganism. Heywood’s Mullisheg swears by the prophet Muhammad: “Now, by the mighty Prophet we adore” (IV. 5.

26). This line constructs Muslim identity as pagan. It suggests that Mullisheg and Muslims worship a human being, Prophet Muhammad, when in fact this kind of oath is forbidden in Islam. Muslims worship God and should swear by no one other than Him. In Islam, Prophet Mohammad is a normal human being, even an illiterate one, who has no super powers and cannot be considered mighty in any sense. Both the oath and the description of the prophet as mighty categorize Muslims as pagan others in opposition to the English Christians.

Notions of Islamic sensuality and its prophets' alleged immorality were popular in Europe and England: "Appraisals of Islam were critical of its immoral nature, and particularly the character of [prophet] Mohammad continued to appear in Europe (Curtis 33). Against the numerous appraisals, like those of Michel Baudier and Blaise Pascal – esteemed and popular French writers at the time – that considered prophet Muhammad a sensual imposter, and falsely told of a corrupted "system marked by the existence of concubines, boys used for pleasure, profligate lust, and the use of opium, Guillaume Postel was almost a lone voice in writing that most Turks were not polygamists" (Curtis 33).

Ignorant of Islam and prophet Mohammed's life and teachings, or merely motivated by cultural and political prejudice, Heywood imagines Mullisheg taking refuge in the prophet's promises and relentlessly pursuing sexual pleasures with women of different races and colors. While Spencer, Bess, and the rest of the English characters are chaste, Muslim Mullisheg is characterized by excessive sexual appetite and activities. Against this allegedly Muslim indulgence in sexual pleasure, Heywood highlights English chastity and elevates it by repeatedly referring to Bess as a virgin beauty and comparing her to the virgin queen, Queen Elizabeth. England becomes the virgin nation,

completely identifiable by contrast to Islamic licentiousness.

English identity becomes that of beauty, virtue, and true religion. The English are endowed with these characteristics, and their goodness is able to conquer the violence and lasciviousness of Muslims. The presumed cruel and lewd Mullisheg becomes peaceful and chaste through the effect of Bess's beauty and virtue. He offers the maiden no violence and sponsors her marriage with her beloved Spenser. Mullisheg is made to declare the virtuousness of the English geography and human identity: "The English earth may well be termed a heaven/ that breeds such divine beauty" (Heywood V. 1. 43-4). Describing beauty as divine connects it with virtue. Even the enemy is impressed and acknowledges the superiority of the English identity.

The contrast between white, virtuous Christians and corrupted, dark Muslims is also strongly present in *The Renegado*. Philip Massinger is more open about the power of Christian faith to preserve one's virtue, in contrast to Islam, which is assumed to promote licentiousness. Massinger makes religion the main component of his characters' identities. It forms personalities and fosters virtue or vice in its followers. While Christian characters like Paulina, Vitelli, and Francisco are holy and deeply rooted in their virtue, Muslim characters like Mustapha and Assambeg are portrayed as completely debauched. Even Manto, the servant, is used by Massinger to show the corruption of the Muslim court; Manto declares she cannot preserve her virginity there, and she considers it madness to assume she should have done so while living among lustful Turk courtiers. By contrast, Christian characters are fashioned as having the religious and spiritual fortitude to withstand all temptations and preserve Christian virtue.

Massinger does not only depict born Muslims as corrupted, but also includes converts in his stereotype of the licentious, immoral Muslim. Muslims' otherness is not identified in terms of blood or hereditary traits; rather, it is the faith that makes the whole difference between what Massinger imagines to be a virtuous Christian and a lascivious Muslim. To Massinger, shifting religions affects personalities. When Antonio Grimaldi becomes a pirate, a thief, and a rapist, he is assumed to be a Muslim convert. However, the effect of conversion to Christianity on Donusa is completely different.

While conversion to Christianity transforms Donusa "from a dangerous Muslim temptress to a happy Christian wife," converting to Islam is seen as forsaking the right religion (Burton 153). The use of the term "turn Turk" for conversion to Islam connotes "duplicity and faithlessness." According to the records of travelers, Muslims are "all pagans and infidels...sodomites, liars and drunkards" where "collision and deceit were the bedrock of Turkish belief" (16). Therefore, the English conception of conversion to Islam can be summarized as Burton puts it: "To turn Turk [is] to turn from Christian virtue" (17).

Reports of large numbers of Christians converting to Islam spread all over England and Europe by merchants and travelers. Malieckal cites Lois Potter who, "working with primary resources, estimates [apostates'] population: 'the extent of conversions is uncertain, but contemporaries perceived it as enormous. William Davis, a barber-surgeon who had visited Tunis, claimed in 1614 that Turkey and Barbary contained more renegades than native Turks'" (27). This news created a need to warn the Christian population against the lurking danger and to stop losing members to the rival religion. In such a situation, nothing works better than ideology in directing people's apprehension against the new religion. This can be achieved by propaganda that distorts the image of the religion

and makes its followers, whether natives or converts, unacceptable in the English people's conception. Islam and the motives for embracing it are portrayed as base.

The convert to Islam, or the "renegade", becomes the most hateful traitor to his country and religion. Malieckal cites Nabil Matar's description of the English attitudes towards the renegades:

For English travelers, the renegade was not only a heinous apostate from religion: he was the living embodiment of Islam's triumph. Writers denounced the renegade with vehemence because they saw in him the feared prospect of Christianity's future. The renegade was the most tangible evidence of Islam's military strength; he was also disturbingly, proof of Islam's cultural and religious hegemony. The more Muslim's could point to the converts among them, the more the Englishman realized how weak his religious culture was and the more he feared the fate that awaited him should the Ottoman armies continue their indomitable expansion into central Europe and further. Indeed, by the first half of the seventeenth century, no Englishman could ignore the attacks by the Turkish navy on the south coast England and the large number of co-nationals captured in the sea and land skirmishes. (28)

Reasons behind conversion to Islam are portrayed as mere materialistic gains or social climbing. Unlike the English, the Ottomans had no social hierarchy. High offices were open to converts as well as to born Muslims. This might have been an attraction for ambitious Englishmen restricted by the hierarchy of the English society. However, Turk plays depict no successful convert achieving wealth or high social status. On the contrary, Turk plays aim at discouraging and warning Christians against contact with Muslims and the spiritual,

materialistic, and bodily losses of associating with Muslims or converting to Islam. The motives for conversion are depicted as base and materialistic, and the results of conversion involve both spiritual and physical losses. The convert loses the salvation of the true religion as well as his manhood by circumcision, which is often confused with castration.

The Renegado also denies any possibility of a sincere conversion to Islam. While Grimaldi is understood to convert to Islam for wealth and profit, Paulina acts the role of a convert in order to put off the execution of Vitelli and Donusa and to have a chance to rescue them. The pretended conversion in order to rescue fellow Christians is seen an honorable adventure for Paulina, because she neither embraces the new “false” religion nor forsakes her previous “true” one. Grimaldi’s conversion is considered base because it is done for materialistic gains while neglecting spiritual salvation. Burton goes on to say that “Sincere conversion to Islam is often considered, in the West, as unthinkable today as was in early modern England” (17).

“Turning Turk” is condemned and blackened in the eyes of the English audience. The fate of the “renegade” is also made to appear tragic. Grimaldi, after renouncing Christianity, turns to piracy and becomes a thief and a rapist. Although he is considered to turn a profit for his adopted Islamic country, he is not shown to be treated well by Muslims. Grimaldi gets involved in a quarrel with Assambeg, who strips him of all his fortune and throws him into the street to become a beggar. This is a warning that a Christian who gives up his spiritual welfare for a materialistic one must expect to gain neither.

The *Fair Maid of the West* also carries this warning against conversion or unnecessary association with Muslims. Clem loses, or almost loses, his manhood by unnecessary association with the Turks. He is an indentured servant in

England who has no prospects of advancement in the English society; while in the Ottoman society, he finds himself a royal-to-be if he relinquishes some of this cultural identity. Although Clem never intends to convert to Islam, his irrational class ambitions and unthinkable association with the Other costs him what he calls “his best jewels,” his testicles (Heywood 89).

Barbara Fuchs views Clem as an “interloper by his class” (61). He is, like the Ottomans, inferior to the English. Clem is susceptible to the threat of Islam because he is marked by his lower class, while those superior English that Fuchs sees as the “nation that coalesces around Bess” is proof of the effects of Islam (61). Fuchs is right, for none of the other English or Christians in the play are subject to forced or consensual conversion, circumcision, or castration. Only Clem, blinded by his lower class ambitions, does not “fare as well” (61).

Fuchs’ view on lower class susceptibility to conversion to Islam is also proven true in *The Renegado*, where Vitelli the gentleman escapes bodily and spiritually unhurt, and therefore remains retrievable to the Christian realms – even after sexual intercourse with a Muslim woman – while Gazet almost goes through what Clem experiences in *The Fair Maid of the West*; if there had been time to make him an eunuch before his master had to leave Tunis, it would have been done. The supposed convert Grimaldi also remains retrievable simply because he is neither circumcised nor castrated. Although Grimaldi is universally accepted by Massinger’s critics to be a convert, there is not enough evidence of his conversion to Islam in the play.

In her article “Wanton Irreligious Madness: Conversion and Castration in Massinger’s *The Renegado*,” Bindu Malieckal considers Antoni Grimaldi a “Christian who willingly becomes a Muslim and experiences spiritual emasculation” (26). If Grimaldi shows irreligiousness to his

Christian society and renounces his faith, this does not mean he has any alliance to Christianity's rival faith, Islam. Grimaldi's turning to piracy and working for a Muslim country's military does not necessitate any spiritual alliance with Islam. He might be a mercenary getting paid for his services regardless of his religious affiliations.

Malieckal offers invalid evidence of Grimaldi's conversion: Grimaldi's identification of himself as an "atheist." This does not necessarily mean conversion to Islam. By this, Grimaldi might be only announcing his renunciation of his religion and/or the codes of morality of his society, without embracing alternatives for them. Malieckal's citation of Vitkus's explanation of the usage of the word "atheist" in the Renaissance is not enough evidence that it denotes switching into another religion. Malieckal gives Vitkus' explanation of the usage of the word as:

Renegades who did convert were described as 'atheists,' a term that implied not a denial of God's existence, but refer in early modern parlance to anyone who did not conform to orthodox religious practice. Sometimes an 'atheist' was simply someone guilty of treasonous, criminal behavior" (Malieckal 29).

Therefore, a renegade was described as an atheist in the Renaissance, but the atheist can be many things other than a Muslim convert. Again, Grimaldi might be simply expressing his intention not to conform to Christian orthodox religious practices or moral codes.

However, since Grimaldi shows signs of moral degeneration by betraying his country and religion through turning to piracy, kidnapping a Christian girl, and selling her as a slave to a Muslim high official, Massinger and his society are inclined to identify his moral degeneration as "turning Turk," with all the negative implications

of this term at the time. Although the play offers no ceremony of Grimaldi's conversion nor a declaration of it by him or any other character who could be a witness to a fake or sincere switching of religions, most of Massinger's critics take Grimaldi's conversion to Islam as a fact without ever questioning it.

Grimaldi identifies himself and his fellows as pirates: "We are the Neptunes of the ocean / And such as traffic shall pay sacrifice / o their best lading" (Massinger 1. 3. 65-67). It is obvious that he is nothing more than a pirate who allies with the enemies of his country and religion to serve his personal interests of gaining wealth. Grimaldi's sole vocation is materialistic gain.

Grimaldi's evilness is blamed on Islam, though he starts acting according to his moral degeneration before arriving in Muslim countries or meeting Muslims. He is born and raised in Venice and carries the blood of his people. Whether his evilness is acquired or inherited, his society and education – and maybe, for some, his lineage – is to be blamed, rather than laying the blame on the country where he goes to serve and get paid for his services. Grimaldi's relation with Islam and Muslims is nothing more than a business relationship, and Assambeg's emasculation of his character by stripping him of his wealth is rather to be seen directed to a worker, an employee, more than it is towards a fellow Muslim or a convert. However, this interpretation does not go with Massinger's and his audience's/readers' theory of the immoral Turk Muslim acting as a scourge on the life and fortune of a faithless "runagate."

The truth about Muslims' behavior in everyday life and the way they respond to situations like that of dealing with a convert are never presented in *The Renegado*. In fact, there is no apparent intention of seeking the truth about Islamic culture or showing it, for the Turk plays were mere propaganda against Muslims, their

religion, and their culture. Islamic culture is silenced by Massinger. His portrayal of Muslims' behavior, their moral codes – of which he strips them – and their religion is all falsehood.

Massinger does not present Muslims' true identity as a people of monotheistic religion where chastity is considered the most important virtue to guard. Out of ignorance or bias, he portrays Muslims as caring nothing for chastity and religious virtue. Massinger treats Muslims as a gang that is aware of its moral perversion and holds onto its law only because it allows sensual pleasure and sexual indulgence. Muslims are not only silenced from expressing what they are or what they believe themselves to be, but they are made to utter only what supports Massinger's construction of them as the perverted others who are inferior to Christians both in their faith and everyday practice.

Both Muslim men and women are presented as debauched people whose main concern in life is seeking sensual pleasure. Francisco warns Vitelli against being involved with or even seen by Muslim women, who are lascivious and thirst for fair lovers. Massinger's Francisco dehumanizes Muslim women by comparing them to chained fierce dogs that can surpass the devil in means to procure the objects of their lust:

..., these Turkish dames / (like English mastiffs that increase their fierceness / By being chained up), from the restraint of freedom, / If lust once fire their blood from a fair object, / Will run a course the fiends themselves would shake at / To enjoy their wanton ends. (1. 3. 8-13)

Francisco's caution to Vitelli is proven true by the conduct of Donusa, who finds all means to bring Vitelli to her place and tempt him with both her beauty and her wealth. While the princess possesses money and beauty with which to tempt her prospective lover, Manto the servant never lacks means to win her lover either. She betrays

her mistress in order to achieve the object of her lust. Manto discloses her mistress's secret to Mustapha, with whom she has a sexual liaison.

Like their women, Muslim men are also lascivious. While men oppress women and restrain them from enjoying what Massinger and Donusa assume to be allowed in Islam, men are not restrained, and they openly seek their sensual pleasures. Assambeg keeps a Christian virgin captive and tries to seduce her. The presumed convert Grimaldi also openly invites his friends to get drunk and repair to their whores: "Come, let's be drunk! Then each man to his whore" (1.3.81). Muslims are portrayed to have no spiritual aspirations. They are incapable of exerting their will to guard their chastity or to limit their sensuality. Grimaldi expresses an alleged Muslim hate of exerting the will and exercising patience and self-restraint in spiritual practices such as fasting. Once he quarrels with Assambeg, Grimaldi feels like forswearing piracy, which he loves and makes his living on. Grimaldi says he hates to fore swear piracy as much as he hates fasting: "I hate/ as deadly as I do fasting, or long grace when meat cools on the table" (2.5.8-9).

Like Heywood, Massinger contrasts the virtue of Christians to the looseness of Muslims. He set virtuous Christian characters in opposition to loose Muslim ones. On the female Muslim side, Manto has lost her virginity a long time ago and still keeps a sexual liaison with Mustapha, and the Ottoman princess shows strange aggression in perusing the object of her lust. On the other hand, the virtuous Paulina, like Heywood's Bess, resists all temptations of love, wealth, and power and preserves her virginity. English and Christian dignity and integrity are preserved by virgin females who pass through all hazards and come out virtuous, victorious, and virgins.

Christian men, like their women, are not

lacking in the sense of their chastity and virginity. While Vitelli slips one time, he proves to be still redeemable. The next time he sees the Muslim temptress, he gathers all his Christian resources of virtue and resists the fatal woman's temptations to the point that it affects her and ends in her conversion to the religion that can produce such formidable chastity. In complete contrast to Vitelli, Assambeg goes on in his unrelenting but unsuccessful pursuit of Paulina. This technique of contrasting virtuous Christian Characters to lewd Muslims serves to intensify the sense of both Christian virtue and Islamic vice.

In surveying the fortitude with which Christian virgins – both male and female – resist Muslim temptation, a group of questions comes to the surface. First, why did the extremely licentious Turks Mullisheg and Assambeg, while desperately desiring the Christian Bess and Paulina, not rape them? Second, why is Vitelli allowed to slip once and remain redeemable, while the females must go through their whole stories with immaculate honor, not one single mistake to blemish their chastity? Is it because once they slip, they will not be redeemable, or is it because they represent Christian and English honor more than the men do, according to the double standards concerning male and female sexuality? On the other hand, the Muslim Donusa is allowed to have sex with Vitelli and remain redeemable and an accepted candidate for “revirgination” through baptism.

Both Bess Bridges and Paulina escape the execution of Turks' lustful designs and preserve the purity of their body and spirit. According to Juan Luis Vives, a Spanish scholar who lived between 1493-1540, “Chastity offered women protection from soldiers and tyrants and has been universally respected throughout time. Chastity creates an aura of impermeability for the chaste woman – an invisible but detectable barrier no man can penetrate” (qtd. in Ritscher 12). This is

the most likely explanation of Mullisheg's inability to ravish Bess. However, it can be argued that a holy relic that Paulina wears around her neck is what protects her from Assambeg. Francisco mentions that the relic combined with continuous prayer will protect Paulina from any violence: “This on her breast she wears and does preserve / the virtue of it by her daily prayers” (Massinger 1.1.150-1). The connection of the relic with prayer – which is an expression of faith – suggests the role Paulina has in making the holy relic effective via her pious personality. It is first and last Paulina's innately chaste nature that activates the holy relic and protects her from rape.

In a patriarchal society like that of the early modern English, a woman's chastity is not her own but her father's or the nearest male guardian's. Paulina and Bess do not own their chastity and therefore they cannot dispose of it any way they like. Being set in a foreign country, their chastity becomes that of their countries, religion, and culture. On Paulina and Bess hangs the honor of the whole Christendom that should be shown proof against Islamic temptations. In the same sense, on Donusa hangs the honor of the Muslim empire that the Christians will disgrace both by her sexual intercourse with Vitelli and finally by her conversion to Christianity. Burton thinks Massinger's treatment of the “Islamic threat...carefully interlaces patriarchy with Christianity casting Muslim women as temptresses, but also apostates” (151).

While Paulina and Bess are made insusceptible to any actual intercourse with Muslim men, Donusa is made the temptress who seeks and succeeds in having intercourse with a Christian man. Sexual intercourse is considered polluting to the female body and spirit, which necessitates protecting Christian woman from contamination through being involved in sexual activities with Muslim men. Conversely, Donusa's female sexual transgression is not

considered polluting and her virginity remains retrievable. Conversion to Christianity erases the sins she committed while a “heathen,” and allows her to be reborn anew and innocent by the power of Christian faith.

Donusa’s rejection of the dark Mustapha in favor of the fair Vitelli should be condemned as unjustified female changeability. Burton suggests that Massinger offers a mode of justifiable feminine changeableness, for “religious and cultural conversion necessarily endows female changeability with different meanings: it sanctions forms of ‘infidelity’ which would otherwise invite censure” (151). At the end of the play, Donusa is rescued from death and leaves Tunis as a happy, faithful, and pious Christian wife who has desired Christian martyrdom over continuing a “pagan” life as a Muslim. Despite her proven female changeability, Massinger endorses her unfaithfulness to Mustapha because changing the man went along with changing the religion.

Vitelli also remains unpolluted despite his sexual liaison with a Muslim woman. This retrievability of Vitelli is essential to two central themes in the play. First, the resistibility of Christian manhood to Islamic threat, and second, to the conversion of Donusa which disgraces and emasculates Assambeg as a person, and the Ottoman Empire and Muslims represented by him. By virtue of his male body, Vitelli can afford to sin and repent without the hazard of eternal loss that someone in a female body would suffer in a similar situation. Sexual intercourse with a Muslim woman temporarily pollutes Vitelli, but once he can stand up for his Christian virtue and resist the Muslim temptress, he is ready to be saved and reclaimed for the realms of Christian grace. However, his fortitude and sincere commitment to his religious principles affects Donusa and wins her to the Christian side. Despite the fact that Donusa’s conversion lacks the seriousness of a true and honest conversion to

anyone critically reading the play, it still has a sentimental effect on an audience that sees and hears a convert condemning her former religion and embracing their own and praising it as true.

In creating a Muslim female character and making her a candidate for conversion to Christianity, Massinger white-washes her skin to reflect a potentially pure soul who can be admitted into Christian grace. While the exactness of Muslims’ skin color in the two plays remains indeterminate, both Massinger and Heywood manipulate skin color according to their ends without paying attention to racial facts. We never know the race of Mullisheg, Assambeg or Mustapha. While Mullisheg, the king of Fiz, might be a dark North African, Mustapha the Basha of Aleppo must be a Caucasian, for though some natives of Aleppo might have olive-colored skin, most of them are fair and white. As to Assambeg, who is the viceroy of the Khalipha in Tunis, he is most likely a Turk by nationality and must be of white skin like Donusa. Their color is most comparable to that of the Italians. Again, the depiction of skin color is not accurate; rather it is constructed according to what the writer wants to say about the characters’ state of soul.

Massinger’s propaganda is not only directed towards Muslims, but it also targets the religion itself. This might have been a strategy against the threat of Christian conversion to Islam by showing it as moral depravity and a way to utter condemnation for its followers. Massinger wants to believe, and tries to convince the English audience, that Islam is the reason behind his imagined Muslims’ moral looseness. Massinger’s Donusa says that her “religion allows all pleasure” (Massinger 1.2.50). Massinger pretends that in the Quran a Muslim woman’s sexual indulgence is punished with death only if the lover is found to be Christian (4.2.146-9). He shows the English audience that Islam accepts out-of-wedlock sex as long as the partner is not Christian, a strategy that naturally

invites the audience's contempt of such a law and leads them to identify Muslims as the utter others and inferior enemies.

This piece of legislation Massinger imagines is completely foreign to Islam. The punishment of sexual transgression for an unmarried male or female is the same regardless of the religion of the partner. In Donusa's case, the Quranic punishment is death neither for her nor for Vitelli. In fact, it is flogging of seventy whiplashes to each of them, a punishment more merciful than death for an unmarried sexual transgressor. However, Islam punishes the adultery of a married person by death by stoning, and the same punishment is set for both males and females. This punishment for adultery is the same as that of the first Abrahamic faith, Judaism, the religion that Christianity accepts as its lawful precedent and the source of Western civilization. This law connects Islam with its precedent Abrahamic faiths and proves it a continuation of both Judaism and Christianity, at least in Muslim's views, but Massinger presents it as a proof of Islamic cruelty.

Massinger does not only fabricate legislation and attach it to the Quranic law, but he also omits essential elements of Islamic faith in order to render it pagan and idolatrous. Like *The Fair Maid of the West*, *The Renegado* never mentions Allah, which is the Arabic word for God. Allah is the God of Muslims, who is the same God in Christianity: the God of Abraham. Muslims in the play never mention Him, as if they deny His role in their life. God is absent from the life and speech of Muslims in both *The Renegado* and *The Fair Maid of the West*. This omission seems a tradition in the Turk plays that aim at stamping Muslims and Islam with an alleged irreligiousness and heathenism.

Instead, Muslims talk only of their prophet, as if he is the deity they worship. While Muslims believe in the prophet as the messenger of God

who called for worshiping only one God, the God of Abraham, and guarding one's virtue, as in Christianity, Massinger and Heywood imagine and present the prophet to the English audience as the head pirate. Writers like Massinger and Heywood were able to use such falsehood in their plays because of the pre-conception of the prophet as an imposter.

In addition to absenting God from the life and speech of Muslims and replacing Him by Prophet Mohammad, Massinger offers a direct accusation of Islamic paganism. Islam is portrayed as heathenism where humans are made into idols and places are sanctified. Muslims are called the "Mahomatan sect", as if they worship the human being, their prophet (4.2.154). Donusa describes the Khalipha or Sultan's person as sacred (I. 284), and Assambeg swears by his life and fortune (3.3.93-4). Muslims are imagined not to differentiate between earthly and divine love. Mustapha sanctifies the place of his mistress's abode and compares its sacredness to Muslims' sacred places in Mecca.

While Muslims believe Christianity is a true religion sent by God, Massinger is willing to obscure this Muslim belief and fashions Muslims as having nothing but scorn and contempt for Christianity, its people, and its deity. In *The Renegado*, Muslims dehumanize Christians by calling them names like dogs and showing scorn towards them and their religion. In Islam, such an attitude can put a Muslim outside the sect, for a main pillar of Islam is to believe in the true message of the Christ and the Bible. While these two writers present Islam as paganism, Muslims believe Christianity is a monotheistic, Abrahamic faith. The Quran makes a clear distinction between Christians and Jews on one side and pagans on the other. The Quran calls Christians and Jews "Peoples of Holy Books" – meaning the Bible in its Old and New Testaments – and accepts them as citizens within an Islamic State, while pagans who worship any deity other than

the God of Abraham are not allowed to exist within Islamic realms. Muslim teachings such as this one do not suit Massinger's project of propaganda. He denies Muslims their main belief, which is a continuation of the former two Abrahamic faiths. Massinger looks at Muslims as a gang of perverted individuals that holds together by no legitimate or honorable law or religion.

Against this bleak picture of Islam and Muslims, Massinger's and Heywood's Christian characters are made solid in their faith. They hold onto their Christian virtue and resist Muslims' material temptations and sexual seduction. Both male and female Christians in these two plays hold tight to their religious ideals of chastity to the point that affects and invokes the admiration of Muslim characters like Mullisheg, Assambeg, and Donusa. By the end of the play, the patient believers are rewarded and saved, winning with them one "reformed" soul to be saved, Donusa. Massinger uses Donusa's conversion as a proof of the falsehood and debauchery of Islam by making a born Muslim realize this fact and give up her previous depraved ways to embrace a faith that is proven true by the divine conduct of its followers. Massinger and Heywood's plays warn an English audience against conversion to Islam by showing how doomed Muslims' practices are and how blessed it is for the Christian to adhere to his or her religion.



Works Cited

- Burton, Jonathan. *Traffic and Turning Islam and English Drama*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005. Print.
- Casellas, Jesus Lopez-Palez. "Building An English (Early Modern) Identity: 'Race' And Capitalism in Heywood's *The Fair Maid of The West*, Or, A Girl Worth Gold." *Revist Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*. 54 (2007): 55-68. Web. 4 April 2010.
- _____, " 'What Good News from Barbary?' Nascent Capitalism, North African and the Construction of English identity in Thomas Heywood's Drams." *Atlantis* 29.1 (2007):123-40. Web. 30 March 2010.
- Curtis, Micheal. *Orientalism and Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2009. Print.
- Fuchs, Barbara. "Faithless empires: Renegadoes, and the English Nation." *ELH*. 67.1 (2000): 45-69. Web. 30 March 2010.
- Heywood, Thomas. *The Fair Maid of the West*. Woodstock: Dramatic Publishing, 1995. Print.
- Howard, Jean E. "An English Lass among the Moors: Gender Race, Sexuality and National Identity in Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*." *Women, Race, and Writing in the Early English Period*. Ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker. New York: Routledge, 1994. 101-17. Print.
- Lezra, Jacque. "Translated Turks on the Early Modern Stage." *Transitional Exchange in Early Modern Theater*. Ed. Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson. Hamilton: McMaster U P, 2008. 159-180. Print.
- Malieckal, Bindu. "'Wanton Irreligious Madness': Conversion and Castration in Massinger's *The Renegado*." *Essays in Arts and Sciences* 31.2 (2002): 25-43. Web. 30 March 2010.
- Massinger, Philip. "The Renegado." *Three Turk Plays*. Ed. Daniel Vitkus. New York: Columbia U P, 1999: 240-344. Print.
- Prophet Mohammad. Hadith: *Sahih Bukhari*. Compiled during his lifetime (810-870): 6:60:79. *Sahih Bukhari*: 83: 37. *Sahih Muslim*. Compiled during his lifetime (817/818-874/875): 17:4196. *Sahih Muslim* 17:4209.
- Quran*, Soura: Al Nour. 24. 2. 350. Print.
- Ritscher, Lee A. *The Semiotics of Rape in Early Renaissance English Literature*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009. Print.
- Slights, William W.E. and Shelley Woloshyn. "English Bess, English Pirates, English Drama: Feminism and Imperialism on the High Seas." *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 33.2 (2007): 252-75. Web. 1 April 2010.