

BUILDING AN ENGLISH (EARLY MODERN) IDENTITY: “RACE” AND CAPITALISM IN HEYWOOD’S *THE FAIR MAID OF THE WEST, OR, A GIRL WORTH GOLD*

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ABSTRACT

In the early modern period England develops a process of construction of national identity based on “racial” and religious differences and the adoption of capitalism. This epistemological and material transition can be perceived in much of the drama of the period, which, like Thomas Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West*, functions as much within this process as in response to it. All these changes, and the resistances to it, can be best analyzed through the semiotic notion of Juri Lotman’s semiosphere.

KEY WORDS: Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West*, identity, race, capitalism, semiosphere, early modern, English drama.

RESUMEN

Durante los siglos XVI y XVII Inglaterra desarrolla un proceso de construcción de identidad nacional basado en diferencias raciales y religiosas y en la adopción del capitalismo. Esta transición epistemológica y material puede detectarse en el teatro de la época, un teatro que, como ocurre con *The Fair Maid of the West*, de Thomas Heywood, actúa tanto dentro de este proceso como en respuesta a él. Todos estos cambios, y las resistencias que suscitan, pueden analizarse de forma óptima mediante el concepto semiótico de la semiosfera, de Juri Lotman.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West*, identidad, raza, capitalismo, semiosfera, renacimiento tardío y barroco, teatro inglés.

In the early modern period, the so-called “age of discovery,” we find in England a process of identity formation that will determine the physical and conceptual boundaries of the nation in the following centuries. Together with the slow consolidation of the Tudor-Stuart regime, and as other European national projects emerge, a new mentality appears that will come into maturity in the 17th century changing England radically. An incipient English identity flourishes around some central notions that basically include the intellectual (and moral) shift promoted by the Protestant Reformation; a reinforced centralized kingly authority; and a new economic mentality that will eventually lead to capitalism. But I am also persuaded



that these more or less material changes have to be put in relation with the construction of the realm as a symbolic territory, a territory that, in spite (or perhaps because) of its permeability, attempts to draw its boundaries and define itself in terms, firstly, of various mechanisms of racial belonging and exclusion, and, secondly, alongside the epistemological shifts taking place then and affecting the nation as a whole. I also believe that (among other texts of the period) Thomas Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West* (part 1) (ca. 1602) was engaged in this social dialogue, working within and in response to this process of construction of identity and contributing thus to the affective perception of many of these changes.

Juri Lotman's notion of the "semiosphere" appeared in 1984, although it had been prefigured in his theoretical work of the 1970s.¹ The semiosphere is the space where all semiosis (that is, the production and exchange of meaning) takes place and outside of which no semiotic process is possible, and it also is "the semi-otic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages" (Lotman, *Universe* 123), by languages meaning "texts" (the Foucauldian "discourse") and "cultures." Lotman's semiosphere, thus, is a symbolic social territory functioning around man and the community and making social (that is, semiotic) life possible. This abstract although real space (based on the parallel notion of the biosphere proposed by the Russian scientist v.i. Vernadsky), the semiosphere, determines the different cultural formations coexisting at a given time, and it also regulates the relations among these cultures within the semiosphere itself, and with other cultures and semiospheres from outside (123-214).

Cultures within the semiosphere generate texts which are intelligible and meaningful (say, notions of chivalry and honour in the 15th century), and discard others as meaningless (the code of courtly love in the 17th century). In some cases a specific text (currently alien) may be translated into the language of the semiosphere (the cult of the Virgin turned into the cult of Elizabeth in 16th century England), but in many other instances translation is impossible or inappropriate, at least for the dominant culture (usury in Christian Habsburg Spain). Yet, we find that the semiosphere is always permeable, and in fact it tends to push the most unstable structures to the boundaries, whereas those structures most rigidly organized and consequently less dynamic remain at the core of the system (the court, or the official church), unable and unwilling to change. It is in those peripheral spaces that we can find an exchange of texts unthinkable at the core; and this exchange allows for a continuous and dynamic alteration of the semiospheric boundaries and of the semiosphere as such, which can in this way reshape itself by incorporating to the core those elements initially located at the periphery in a continuous process of self-destruction and renewal.

¹ Juri Lotman, "O semiosfere," *Semeiotiké: Trudy po znakovym sistemam* (Tartu: Tartu Riikliku Ülikooli Toimetised, 1984) 5-23. For a summary of Lotman's major ideas see *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. This book appeared in 1990, and was the first translation into English of Lotman's notion of the semiosphere.

Lotman's notions are closely connected to what Bryan Reynolds (twenty years later) has termed the "transversal territory," and which emerges in opposition to his "subjective territory." For Reynolds the subjective territory is the conceptual framework to which an individual belongs, and the mechanism "that enforces the acceptance of the society's hierarchy" and prevents his/her recognition of the arbitrariness of every social construction (in short, some form of ideology as false conscience): following Lotman, the core, or centre, of the semiosphere (Reynolds 8-13). The transversal territory (that Reynolds employs to delimit what he terms a "subnation" structured around the criminal culture of the early modern period) transcends the conceptual and emotional boundaries of the subjective territory and allows the individual and/or the community to go beyond the structured and the orderly, challenging or altering in any way the boundaries and, in Lotman's terms, translating the untranslatable, in what Reynolds calls "transversal movements" (14-22). Transversal movements involve, obviously, trespassing boundaries and subverting the ordered space of a semiosphere. Various events may launch a transversal movement, or may lead to an adaptation or a translation of external messages, what bears enormous consequences for the individual, the community, and its culture; among these consequences we may mention those of entering a new period, building an identity, or developing a new self-definition. In Lotman's words:

The powerful external textual eruptions in a culture conceived of as a huge text not only lead the culture to adapt outside messages and to introduce them into its memory but also stimulate the culture's self-development, with unpredictable results. ("Text" 379)

Regardless of various substantial differences, we find relevant similarities in both theoretical constructions, which are obviously related: firstly, both authors employ spatial metaphors to visualize abstract (but very real) spaces where meaning or culture is produced; then, for both there is a continuous process of subversion, resistance to change, dialogue and exchanges within these territories; and, finally, in the schemes of the two scholars progress involves crossing and/or trespassing boundaries and, especially, dealing with the texts and discourses of the Other.

In his seminal *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (1999) and *Islam in Britain: 1558-1685* (1998),² Nabil Matar explains how Anglo-Moroccan relations in the early modern period were not initially based on mutual hostility but on a perception of common goals, and —on the part of the English— on "anxious equality and grudging emulation" (*Turks* 8). Matar blatantly denies that, in the 16th and 17th centuries, Moroccan Muslims were the object of a colonial deprecation of the kind that England would impose on vast regions of the world from the 18th century onwards simply because "in the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, England was not a colonial power" (10). Interestingly, what we find be-

² See also D'Amico 35-8; Bullough 207-08; Matar, *Turks* 10.





tween England and Morocco is a, perhaps unexpected, attraction that was based on a coincidence of interests and common enemies, namely the advance of commerce and trade and the defeat of Spain. Indeed both Queen Elizabeth and the Saadi Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur agreed that they could benefit from a joint attack on Spain, and consequently in 1603 (the year both monarchs died) al-Mansur drafted a plan that his ambassadors presented to the Queen, to expel the Spaniards from the West Indies and invade (in order to reconquer) the south of the Iberian peninsula, the historical al-Andalus. For this invasion al-Mansur intended to obtain the collaboration of the “moriscos”³ living in Spain who would fight from within the Habsburg state, and then he would eventually, together with the English, get hold of Spain’s colonies. Significantly, in al-Mansur’s plan Moroccans would lead the expedition to re-colonize the Spanish West Indies on account of their better adaptation to the climate of those territories “where those of your countrie doe not fynde themselves fitt to endure the extremitie of heat... where our men endure it very well by reason that the heat hurtes them not.” These lands, al-Mansur suggested, both rulers would “possesse” and keep “under our dominion for ever and —by the help of God— to joyne it to our estate and yours” (Matar, *Turks* 9).

There had already been several contacts between England and Morocco prior to this. As early as 1577 Queen Elizabeth sent her first ambassador to Morocco, the London merchant Edmund Hogan, who was well received by the Sultan Mulay Abd al-Malik (al-Mansur’s predecessor) and helped to establish a number of important mercantile agreements (on the saltpetre trade and regular commerce) in spite of securing Moroccan support to England should a war with Spain start (Bak 201-203). After some other less successful missions (Bak 202; 204-06) in August 1600 al-Mansur sent an embassy to London headed by the Fessian Abd al-Ouahed. This embassy stayed in London for nearly six months being lodged near the Royal Exchange, and was much noticed at the time: they took part in several public events, logically met the Queen, and —above all— were closely scrutinized by the people, although they were not the first Africans, black or not, to be seen in England.

In fact since 1510 Moors had appeared in Masques, and since 1522 in street pageants (Tokson, *Popular* 1-5). Also, the English had been involved in the slave trade as early as the 15th century, when English merchants in southern Spain bought, sold and kept slaves, and blacks were already being sold in England in the 16th century.⁴ Moroccans, though, belonged to a different category for the Eng-

³ “Moriscos” were the new Christians of Arab or Berber descent who remained in Spain after the Christian conquest of the Peninsula. Previously they were mudejars, that is, Muslims living in Christian lands whose creed was initially respected and protected by the Capitulations. They were discriminated against, persecuted, forced to abandon their traditions and eventually expelled in the 17th century. See Julio Caro, *Los moriscos del Reino de Granada*. (Madrid: Istmo, 1991).

⁴ See Gustav Ungerer. See also Alfonso Franco *La esclavitud en Sevilla y su tierra a fines de la Edad Media* (Sevilla: Diputación Provincial, 1979); *La esclavitud en Andalucía, 1450-1550* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1992); Consuelo Varela, *Ingleses en España y Portugal, 1480-1515: aristócratas, mercaderes e impostores* (Lisboa: Colibrí, 1998).

lish: unlike sub-saharan Africans they were outside the English colonial reach and both economically and politically could be considered as England's equal. For Greg Bak "(T)his may have been because the sultanate of Morocco and Fez was virtually a European state" (200).

In this sense Edmund Hogan's writings certainly suggest how the English tried to build a solid link with Morocco by capitalizing on the similarities of the religions of both countries: roughly, monotheism, rejection of images and idols, and opposition to the Catholic imperialism represented by Habsburg Spain. For Elizabeth, the Moroccans, Dutch and English are "joyned... in lyke profession of relygion and in the same condition of having the Spanyard our common ennemie" (Bak 216). And, for Hogan, Sultan Abd al-Malik was "a vearie earnest Protestant," known by his own people as "the christian king" (Bak 204).

Yet, all this should not make us forget that the racial divide was not ignored in early modern England or Europe. To be sure, concern with colour was ever present, as several documents manifest. Also, there was a certain awareness of differences within the African Other: the English (very specifically Londoners) did not ignore "the fact that Africans are not uniformly black" (Bak 198). It was also perceived that Spaniards or Portuguese were not as "white" (meaning "Europeans") as the English (Matar, *Turks* 3-18). In 1596 the Dutch traveller Jan Huyghen van Linschoten wrote his *Itinerario*, a travel narrative of the nine years he had spent in the Portuguese colonies in Asia. Translated into English as early as 1598, sections of this book were anthologized by Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas, consequently becoming well known in 17th century England (Kamps & Singh, *Travel* 149-50).⁵ In this book van Linschoten tries to define the differences of the various peoples he encounters in Asia, passing his judgement on the Portuguese model of colonization. One of his major concerns is that of miscegenation and mixed marriages between Europeans (Portuguese mainly) and natives (Asians), which he considers pernicious from both physical and moral points of view as these unions, by obliterating the distance between "races," reduces the difference between them and makes effective control and dominion impossible (Kamps 166). In his narrative van Linschoten not only notes how the ("yellowish") skin colour of natives seems to displace that of Europeans when they mix with locals, but he makes significant descriptions of the shades of colour he encounters in Asia, establishing nothing less than a colour gradient that marks a hierarchy of civilization based on the proximity to European "whiteness" or "fairness." More interestingly, at one point he compares these skin colours with those of ("part of the") Spaniards and North Africans:

Those [Asians] that dwell on the Sea side are a people of a brownish colour, like the white Moores in Africa and Barbaria, and part of the Spaniards, but those that

⁵ Ivo Kamps & Jyotsna G. Singh, eds. (149-150). Ivo Kamps has noted the relevance of van Linschoten's "double gaze," a notion that leads to his "double colonization," first of the colonized (Asians), then of the colonizers (Portuguese). See Ivo Kamps "Colonizing 160-66).

dwell within the land, are for colour like Netherlanders & high Dutches. (Van Linschoten 40).

Only a couple of decades later there appeared a great number of texts which had as their almost sole purpose that of vilifying Spain and Spaniards from, among others, a racial perspective: in Spanish terms, this was the Black Legend, which gave the resulting image of the Spaniard as a compendium of all kinds of evils. A considerable amount of pamphlets by Scott, Cornwallis, Reynolds, Sharpe, plus several anonymous works depicted an image of Spaniards as cruel and ambitious beasts, greedy, insolent, and comically proud and vane. Spaniards in these pamphlets were dehumanized and compared to animals (such as the wolf or the snake) (Demetriou 29-30). In the 1623 pamphlet *A Tongue-Combat* Thomas Scott states:

These men [Spaniards], (if we may call them so) [...] seeme to haue reason to no other end, but to exceed these brutes and beasts, in all sauage, brutish or devilish cruelties. [...] [N]othing is spared, but all spoyled for their pleasure: as if it were not this or that man, but mankinde, that they intended to destroy. (Demetriou 63).

Interestingly, this extreme image was presented as a consequence of past relations between Spaniards and North African Muslims in a *racial* sense, namely miscegenation, which made it possible to explain their malignant and perverted nature. Thus, a number of pamphlets explored these evil features, which they connected with the Spaniards' "genealogy" (Demetriou 29), and so manifested that ancient Spaniards either had incestuous relationships or were the descendants of a mixture of Moors, Jews and/or Goths. In the anonymous 1624 pamphlet *Boanerges* it is clearly explained:

The best friends which Spaine hath shall confesse the Castilian comes of goatish, barbarous blood, and all the rest are polluted with Mahumetan mixture, and Moorish affinitie. (Demetriou 102).

And in Thomas Scott's *Vox Populi II* (1624) a Spanish character, the "Duke of Hijaz," explains that the English hate the Spaniards because "they hold us still infected with Moorish mindes" (Demetriou 100). Furthermore, the influential Thomas Browne in 1646 arranged a vertical hierarchy of colour in which he described Spaniards and Sicilians as almost "tawny" or "black," and prior to that, in 1613, Samuel Purchas already used the concept of Europe to define a community of colour, excluding from "Europeanness" all non-whites (Neill 369).

These categorizations, which are primarily classifications based on a semi-otics of colour, serve as the basis for a discourse of exclusion that naturalizes inequality through difference and that alienates foreigners who are not part of the (early modern) national racial heritage (Smith 170; Howard 101). This is apparent in early modern stagings of racial difference, either with sub-saharan Africans or with Muslims, stagings in which it seems difficult to differentiate between racial and religious prejudice: although in the case of Spaniards it seems more likely to be the latter, the previous references suggest that both kinds of exclusion seem to work.

Thomas Heywood's first part of *The Fair Maid of the West* has traditionally been considered an instance of adventure drama, of the kind that "uses incident to cancel [philosophical] matters" and "to replace subtlety with simplicity," preventing, by means of "swiftness of movement [,] ... any significant meaning from arising" (Heywood xv).⁶ Indeed, the play has many of the attributes of adventure literature, such as speed, abundance of fantastic matter, shock and surprise, stock characters, or conventional morality, among others. Yet we should not be misguided into thinking that Heywood's play rejects deep concerns, remains unaware of major epistemological issues, or refuses to get involved into some of the most relevant transformations of the period. Precisely because *The Fair Maid of the West* is popular art it necessarily (if inadvertently) articulates a discourse on many contemporary issues: the role of women in late Elizabethan England; the fluidity of identity in a changing (English) world increasingly surrounded by Muslims and Spaniards; and the new economic mentality and the importance of money as a true representative of some reality beyond.

Writing about the causes of the English Revolution Christopher Hill wrote in 1940:

Something like an industrial revolution took place in the century before 1640, stimulated by capital liberated at the dissolution and plunder of the monasteries, or acquired by trade, piracy and plunder from the New World or by the slave trade.

According to Hill a huge liberation of capital was instrumental in making possible the significant economic development of England between 1550 and 1640, and this capital proceeded in a great part from "piracy" and "trade," the two "economic" activities profusely dramatized in Heywood's play. Certainly the play shows an enormous concern with the new economy, from its subtitle (*A Girl Worth Gold*), through its content (there are more than forty references to money or economic issues throughout the play, more than to any other topic),⁷ to its denouement, with the king of Barbary granting trading privileges to English, French and Italian merchants favoured by Clem, Bess and Spencer (v.ii.43-153). Jean Howard has noted how Bess Bridges, the oxymoronic "virgin in the tavern," embodies different roles: insofar as she is a virgin she is Queen Elizabeth, and as a woman in love that eventually marries her beloved she is a middle-class entrepreneur (107-09); Bess also dresses and behaves alternatively as a man or a woman according to the circumstances, as she herself explains (iv.ii.87-88); and she may even become the darling

⁶ All references from this edition.

⁷ See especially (and among many others) the episodes about Spencer's loan and gift to Bess (1.2.84-88; 1.3.30-34); the different and continuous reckonings by Bess or by other characters (1.3.49-53; 1.4; 2.1.60-64, 112-45; 2.1.112-21); Spencer's will (2.2.72-99; 3.2.48-54; 3.4.86); Bess' testament (4.2.28-42); piracy (1.1.6-8; 4.4.127-29, 159-61); or trade with Moroccans (4.3.15-23).



of the king of Morocco as she pursues her own interests and works for the (economic) benefit of European merchants in trouble. Her importance in a reading of the play which, like this one, attends to the production of an English identity, exceeds the identification of Bess and Elizabeth: Bess is “the personification of the poet’s ideal of English girlhood... English shrewdness, English valour, and English loyalty and patriotism” (Cromwell 95).

But, regardless of her proteic nature and specific role in every different section of the play, Bess never ceases to be a woman immersed in the new capitalist economy, permanently aware of the financial dimension of relations (including sexual or even sentimental ones), convinced that everything has a price, and willing to fight her way through this new *milieu*. Her journey from poverty to prosperity is, obviously, a limited metaphor of the transformations that England was experiencing, and an example of the correct way to do business. The same does not apply to her servant/employee Clem, who wrongly attempts to change his status by dealing with the Muslim Other in its own terms, namely, by almost becoming an emasculated man. Laughably, Clem believes Spencer has been offered some honours that he is rejecting when he offers to occupy his place as an eunuch (V.ii.99-131). Clearly, Clem is trying to stand for a gentleman, disturbing the social scale at a historical time in which it is not clear how and why this should be allowed, and not even whether it is good. Clem, of course, does not want to be “gelded” when he aspired to be “gilded” (Fuchs 60-61), but even this emasculation is presented in economic terms, as a case of losing his “best jewels” or having tickled his “current commodity” (v.ii.127; 130). That Clem is nearly punished for a grotesque attempt at social mobility is central to my reading of the ambiguous relations established between *The Fair Maid of the West* and the new economic mentality.

From the onset, the conflict is clearly established as one having to do (among other things) with class and money (Bess’ class is lower than Spencer’s), and gender (the assumed accessibility of a girl in a tavern), and it is synthesized in the motif of the innocent girl as an object of (capitalistic) consumption. Indeed, Bess is evaluated (and priced) from all angles, especially the economic (by Roughman especially: II.i.19-21), and she, aptly, buys the king of Morocco’s favours with kisses (v.ii.79). This central conflict is what puts Bess in a critical position and what provokes Spencer’s transgression and flight (I.ii.87-135). Almost comically, Bess recognizes to be “ecstasied” (I.iii.42) when, as a consequence of this misfortune, her beloved Spenser suddenly changes her status and condition by entrusting (and actually giving) her most of his fortune as he has to leave the country after killing Carroll. Indeed, the play depicts Bess’s social and economic progress from being a girl in a tavern (that is, part of the upcoming “proletariat”: the two first scenes of the play), then becoming a capitalistic entrepreneur who owns her own business and employs others (from I.iii.52), until she finally leaves the relatively traditional business of renting a tavern to engage in, arguably, the most lucrative activity at the time: piracy. Like Hill in the quotation above, Barbara Fuchs also points at the material (i.e., economic) importance of piracy, but at the same time she comments on its symbolic, or conceptual, relevance:



Because piracy in the period after the war with Spain threatens the possibility of trade, yet often results in an accumulation of riches, it increasingly interferes with England's conception of itself as a merchant state. (46)

Piracy, arguably one of the most important activities in the birth of English capitalism, paradoxically threatens that same development since it ultimately endangers free trade, the corner stone of capitalism. Hence the complex and ambiguous treatment and nature of pirates, privateers, or renegadoes, who, standing at the boundaries of the English semiosphere, establish a contradictory relation with it.

To conceptualize England as a semiosphere basically implies to consider it both as a symbolic *and* physical territory which functions as a civilized and ordered space. This location defines itself against all external spaces, which are associated with the chaotic, uncivilized and—in some cases, as we will see—non-existent. Spain and Islam are the two major external and alien semiospheres, whose discourses are untranslatable for the English. As the chorus explains:

The French and Dutch she [ie, Bess] spares, only makes spoil
Of the rich Spaniard and the Barbarous Turk. (iv.v.7-8)

It is precisely at the boundaries that these discourses may encounter, and to a certain extent they engage in some form of dialogue. For Jean Howard (106, 110), Bess's ship, significantly called *The Negro*, stages a fantasy of national harmony and unity, so that English identity, she claims, is built metaphorically on colour difference:

...a fraternity of subjects within an imagined community defined in part by a bounded geographical essence and in part by cultural and racial *differences* from other such imagined communities. (101) [Her emphasis]

Similarly, Barbara Fuchs also states that “[*The Fair Maid of the West*] is straightforward in its definition of an English identity against the Spaniards and the Moors” (57). To be sure, this does not mean that Spaniards and Muslims play the same role. For the racial (or colour) politics of the play, the discourses of these two alien communities, their “texts,” are not equally untranslatable.

The title of the play is particularly significant: according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* “fair” appears for the first time in 1550 and already in opposition to “dark.” A “fair” maid of the West (the Western semiosphere, that is) is set aboard *The Negro*: the ship serves, in the first place, to stress the “fairness” of Bess as a representative of the English. Furthermore, for the language of race of early modern drama “Muslim” often meant “black” (regardless of the acknowledged existence of “tawny Moors,” as I explained above), and this was a signifier of evil, permanent antagonism, and chaos. Terms such as “Aethiopian,” “Moor,” “Blackamoore,” “Negro,” “Saracen” and even “Indian” were close synonyms in much creative writing of the period. Indeed, for Clem (who stands for the early modern English middle man), “Mauritanians,” “Moors,” “Saracens,” and “Barbers” (v.i.121-31) are just different ways to refer to the same reality, just like for him, Spaniards are also “Don



Diegos" (iv.iv.110). Although occasional allies, Moors, *qua* Africans, were the sons of Ham, and this immediately associated them (through the authority of the Biblical account of Ham's narrative) with lust, animal sexuality and concupiscence. Hence Mullisheg's depiction as a powerful king completely ruled by his passions:

MULLISHEG.- But what's the style of king
Without his pleasure? Find us concubines,
The fairest Christian damsels you can hire
Or buy for gold, the loveliest of the Moors
We can command, and Negroes everywhere.
Italians, French, and Dutch, choice Turkish girls
Must fill our Alkedavy, the great palace
Where Mullisheg now deigns to keep his court. (iv.iii.27-34)

More striking still is the spurious mixing of his duties and his lust, which make him be ruled by Bess in the above mentioned last scene of the play. The contrast with the Virgin Queen (ambiguously alluded to by Bess) is thus complete: apart from articulating his delirious male erotic dreams of creating a harem with women from all over the known world, Mullisheg repeatedly offers to load Bess and her followers with gold just on account of Bess's beauty (v.i.37-38; ii.36-37), exchanges kisses for royal pardons (v.ii.79), and makes his decisions in an irrational, whimsical manner (v.i.83; v.ii.48-153). Although an ally of the English since he advances the interests of English (and European) merchants, and depicted under a favourable light as a ruler within whom "lust shall not conquer virtue" (v.ii.119), Mullisheg cannot escape his identification with African irrationality and lust. To this identification also responds Clem's attempted emasculation; if this scene can be understood in economic terms (as we suggested) it does also bear some relevance for the early modern perception of the sexuality of Muslims. As a way to conjure the many conversions to Islam of Englishmen (Vitkus 3-7), the play warns that to give to the customs and beliefs of Islam implies effeminacy through nothing less than castration (Howard 114-15).

Heywood's play, as we suggested, also identified another alien or external semiospheres, namely that of Spain, the major European power at the time. The competitiveness of Bess's enterprise aboard *The Negro* becomes open hostility and hatred when she deals with Spaniards. Unsurprisingly, there are no Spanish (or Portuguese) merchants among those favoured by Bess at the court of Mullisheg: Spain only appears as a hostile, dangerous, and dehumanized rival, an obstacle to England's project of construction of a national identity based on commerce and economic and political expansion. Besides, Spain's only economic activity seems to be the transportation of gold stolen from the West Indies.

The opening lines of the play describe as "gallant" Englishmen those who come to Plymouth to "purchase from the Spaniard" and "tug with them/For golden spoil" (i.i.8-10); in other words, the privateers and corsairs who wait for Spanish galleons near the Azores to rob them of the gold plundered from the Spanish colonies. Noticeably, the play distinguishes between those Englishmen who, like Goodlack, "seek abroad for pillage," and those who, like Spencer, do it "for honor...

No hope of gain or spoil” (i.ii.8; 9-12), somehow signalling the latter as representatives of the old episteme previous to the apparition of the English new state.

Indeed there is a sustained concern with honour, especially in the first acts of the play, as a way to justify piratical actions and the society that sustains them, a concern that vanishes as soon as Bess commences her open actions at sea and arrives in Morocco, when the true face of trade and expansion is presented. In this scenario, Spaniards are absolute Others, economically, politically and morally: they become a text that interacts with England’s semiosphere at the permeable boundaries (ie, at sea) and which turns out to be untranslatable, both morally and politically. This untranslatability is conspicuously manifested in the episode of the “other” Spencer’s corpse, which shows the degraded moral standards of Spaniards, regardless of their pretended allegiance to the (parallel) Christian semiosphere:

1SPANIARD.- (...)

Because they [Spaniards] held him [the other Spencer] for an heretic

They straight remov’d his body from the church

BESS.- And would the tyrants be so uncharitable

To wrong the dead? Where did they then bestow him?

1SPANIARD.- They buried him i’th’fields.

BESS.- Oh, still more cruel! (IV.iv.43-47)

This characterization had much to do with a prevalent discourse that, as I have suggested, did not accept Spaniards, Europeans and Christians as they appeared to be, within the English semiosphere. Indeed, by 1624 the Puritans had come to define Spaniards (as we saw in the pamphlets) as non-Europeans and as an alien race descended from the Moors (Breslow 73). The “tyrants” are epitomized in the Spanish captain that Spencer captures in act IV: their cowardice contrasts Spencer’s English courage; their cruelty and arrogance, English generosity; their degenerate nature, England’s “natural” order:

SPENCER.- Degenerate Spaniard, there’s no noblesse in thee,

To threaten men unarm’d and miserable

Thou might’st as well tread o’ver a field of slaughter

And kill them o’er that are already slain.

And brag thy manhood. (IV.i.14-18)

From what we have discussed it can be concluded that Heywood’s text defines the English semiosphere horizontally (or transversally) in economic, religious, racial and moral terms, and as much for what it is as in response to what it is not. This semiosphere is (somehow ambiguously) characterized as (proto-)capitalist, Christian and Anglican, white and European, masculine, courageous, and generous. But this heterogeneity of discourses and texts is also organized vertically within the new semiosphere, since not all are equally accepted, arranged or structured depending on their relation with the previous episteme.

As I have suggested, in *The Fair Maid of the West* the English semiosphere has to deal horizontally with Spain’s discourses and texts, which are, as we have



seen, alien to the spirit of capitalism, allegedly Christian but malignantly Catholic, arrogant and cowardly. And also with Islam (or Morocco), which although apparently portrayed in the play as politically and even morally closer to England, introduces the possibility of fracture and displacement through effeminacy, conversion, blackness, lust, and tyrannical government.

However, it cannot be said that this new English semiosphere is neatly delimited in the play just by a horizontal opposition to these other known spaces. If boundaries are, in themselves, permeable and (unlike the core) not rigid or fixed, these certainly seem to be especially porous when it comes to deal with the residual elements of an old semiosphere. Economy is decidedly the major activity in Heywood's text and trade appears to have replaced the heroic epics of the old gallant society, but the play, through the motif of piracy, enters into paradoxical conflict (as we saw) with it. As the example of Bess and *The Negro* shows, the limit, or the boundary, between trade and piracy is especially blurred, and this calls into question, in the words of Barbara Fuchs, "the adoption of trade as a part of national identity" for early modern England (65). The new models of economic accumulation problematize the adoption of a new identity based on these activities. The transformation of England's economic structure, as Hill argued decades ago, implied much more than the introduction of certain financial or agricultural methods replacing the old ones:

This was in itself a moral as well as an economic revolution, a break with all that men had held right and proper, and had the most disturbing effects on ways of thought and belief.

This "break with all that men had held right and proper" implied a challenge to the old episteme, a vertical movement from England's semiosphere to a new transversal territory, in which both the perception of what there was (the old system, with its chivalric and gallant society uninterested in economic profit) is still as powerful as the perception of what is to come (a Protestant capitalist new state).

As *The Fair Maid of the West* appears to dramatize, these were difficult and insecure movements. The conflictive horizontal perception of the Other (Spaniard or Muslim) was ambiguous and based, simultaneously, on old racial prejudices, current religious differences, and new economic interests. These Others were understood as belonging to an-other semiosphere, as non-organized, formless and chaotic entities, and the tendency of the English semiosphere was to oppose them by expanding and ignoring what it encountered either as non-existent or as incorrect. As we saw, there is a tendency in the play to ignore Muslims' religious identity in order to signify them by their ethnic otherness ("Mauritanians," "Moors," "Saracens"), and Spaniards are ridiculously reduced to "Don Diegos" as dehumanized stock evils; also, conversion to Islam (circumcision) is mistakenly associated with emasculation, and piracy is turned into both a traditional heroic action and a more or less acceptable or legitimate commercial activity.

That the play deals with all these issues and does not seem to resolve any of them is hardly surprising since it was produced, as I suggested, as much within a



specific process of construction of social identity as in response to this same process. That it expresses doubts and fears only goes to show how difficult it is for a new semiosphere to consolidate: against other discourses, and also against itself. Threateningly, in the insecure world of Bess Bridges anyone can be worth gold in more than one sense.

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