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AFRICAN FIGURES IN ELIZABETHAN AND  
JACOBAN DRAMA

THESIS PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

ELDRED D. JONES

2nd MAY, 1962

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PREFACE

The tremendous interest in travel, discovery, and foreign trade during the second half of the sixteenth century in England led to the publication of a large number of works of a geographical nature. As new lands were discovered, scientific and popular writers recorded the facts about them, and supplemented the gaps in their information with old classical legends and, sometimes, with the products of their own imagination. This was the process by which knowledge of Africa grew in England. At the beginning of the century little was known about the continent except through the tales of Pliny, Herodotus and other classical writers. After 1550 accounts of English voyages down the coast of Africa and translations of European works on Africa began to appear. Frequently the eye-witness accounts were supplemented with whole passages borrowed from the classics in a blend of fact and fiction. By the end of the century fact had established a predominance over fiction in these accounts, and Richard Hakluyt had published a large collection of them in his Principal Navigations. In addition to this work and others dealing mainly with the coastal areas of Africa, John Pory issued in 1600 an English translation of the most authoritative work on the history and geography of the interior that was to appear in England for more than two

centuries. The work, John Leo Africanus' History and Description of Africa, was widely read. By this time trade had been established with North and West Africa, and seamen went back and forth carrying merchandise and tales.

The dramatists were not slow to realize the value of the "new" continent as a source of spectacle, plot, character, and imagery. The present study examines the background of knowledge available to playwrights through works published during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and the use they made of such knowledge in their plays.

One of the main results of this investigation is a realization of the extent to which the Elizabethans' knowledge of the continent and peoples of Africa has been underestimated by modern critics. Statements about Othello's colour and racial identity are full of suggestions that Elizabethans did not know the difference between Moors and Negroes, or that they had heard of Negroes only as slaves. Coleridge, for example, asked how we could ever suppose that Shakespeare would have been so ignorant as to make a Negro plead royal birth at a time when Negroes were known only as slaves. In our time John Draper reveals a similar state of mind when he writes: "Shakespeare seems to have realized that unlike 'Negro-land' they [the Barbary states] were organized monarchies, for Othello is descended from men of royal siege ..."  
(The Othello of Shakespeare's

Audience, 1952, p. 200.) Statements like these ignore the fact that among the published writings of English voyagers well before 1600 there were reports of contacts with West African kings like the king of Benin in 'Negro-land', and that in the pages of John Leo's book several such kingdoms in 'Negro-land' had been vividly described. Robert Greene and Ben Jonson cite Leo's work by name, while Webster and Shakespeare show signs of having known it.

Elizabethans also had plenty of opportunity to see Moors and Negroes in England. Indeed there were so many Negroes in England by 1601 that Queen Elizabeth issued an order for their transportation out of the realm.

All this is not to say that the playwrights put photographic representations of particular types on the stage. Their characters were essentially products of the imagination compounded out of fact, fiction, and fantasy. The best of them, like Othello, emerge as studies of human nature, and the lesser ones as reflections of popular stereotypes. Part of this study examines the various African characters in Elizabethan and Jacobean plays.

The term "Moor", which has been the most frequently used to sustain a charge of confusion in the minds of the dramatists, is examined along with other racial terms. In most instances the dramatists' intentions when they use these terms are clear. The original audiences had the physical image

of the characters in front of them in the theatre, and thus had less difficulty in getting the poets' meaning than we do. The practical matter of presenting the image on the stage - make-up, costuming, &c. - is also examined.

Finally some attention is given to the use made of Africa, its products and its peoples in the language of the plays. This last topic is treated in detail by R. R. Cawley in The Voyages and Elizabethan Drama, 1940, Book I, and is therefore not treated in great detail here.

My indebtedness to a great number of works will be evident from the numerous references to a wide range of scholars. My greatest debt is to Dr Clifford Leech, without whose personal help and encouragement the research for this work would never have got under way.

All references to the plays of Shakespeare are based on The Oxford Shakespeare, ed. W. J. Craig, 1914, except where otherwise stated.

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CHAPTER I

AFRICAN GEOGRAPHY AND ENGLISH WRITING  
(13th century to 17th century)

Dramatic treatments of African characters, and even references to the land and its peoples, are rare in the literature of England before the 16th century; but from the middle of that century, not only do isolated references become more numerous, but the continent's potentialities as a source of plot, character and spectacle come to be increasingly exploited. This is not at all surprising, for before the 16th century Englishmen had little interest in countries outside their own and those of their European neighbours. Even this interest in their own neighbouring lands was not a scientific geographical interest. The whole science of geography - the study of the physical, climatic and human characteristics of a territory - was generally neglected until the second half of the 16th century, when it received a tremendous impetus through the influence of a handful of passionate geographers.

There are some notable exceptions to this general statement in the period before the 16th century. The foundations of English geographical science had been laid earlier by Roger Bacon in the 13th century. His works, Opus Majus, De Fluxu et Refluxu Maris, and De Descriptione Locorum, were important enough contributions, but what was to

be of even greater importance was his scientific approach to existing knowledge, and his insistence on experiment whenever possible. For geography, this meant travel and first-hand experience. This was the spirit that was later to inspire the recorders of geographical experience in the second half of the 16th century and the early part of the 17th. There is thus a strong link between Bacon and men like Richard Eden, John Dee, Richard Willes, Richard Hakluyt, and Samuel Purchas, not to mention the numerous humbler men whose records supplied these great compilers with their material.

A large part of the section on mathematics in Bacon's Opus Majus is devoted to what is now the science of geography. Not only does he treat of the mathematical aspect of the subject, but he goes on to give a description of parts of the earth. His introduction to this section reveals the sources of geographical information in his time, as well as the ends to which he thought a study of geography should lead.

Since we have considered the facts with reference to the size of the habitable earth as a whole, it is now worth our while to take note of some more famous parts in Scripture and in philosophy, about which it is useful for Christians to know for the conversion of unbelievers, and because of diverse affairs to be transacted with the different races, and because of the advantages to the Church against the rage of Antichrist ... 1

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1. The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon, translated by Robert Belle Burke, 1928, vol. 1, p. 328.

Scripture and philosophy - the latter referring to the works of the classical writers - were the sources of Bacon's information on regional geography. When in his description of Africa he describes Meroe as being situated "at the end of the known habitable portion of the earth", he quotes Ezekiel xxvii in his support.<sup>1</sup> The Bible is also his authority on the source of the Nile: "It rises in paradise, as Scripture states ..."<sup>2</sup> When he is not quoting the Scriptures, he uses Pliny, Herodotus, Isidore, Sallust, and other classical writers. It was from ancient sources like these that Bacon's knowledge of Africa was derived. His knowledge of the contemporary state of things was naturally quite scanty. Nevertheless it is remarkable how, by bringing his scientific method to bear on these ancient writings, he frequently came nearer the truth than many later writers. His treatment of the conflicting accounts of the sources of the Nile is a good example of his method. An earlier quotation has shown that he accepted Paradise as being the eventual source of the Nile, but the question of where it emerged into our inhabited world was still an open one. He had before him the opinion of Orosius and Seneca that it emerged in Ethiopia. He also had the first-hand testimony of the two centurions of Nero who had explored the source of the river. Against these he had the opinion of

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1. The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon, ed. cit., vol. I, p. 330.

2. Ibid., p. 337.

Pliny that the source was in the West, near the Atlas Mountains.

Balancing the evidence, Bacon concludes:

Therefore Pliny's statement that ~~the~~ Nile rises at the confines of the west near Mount Atlas not far from the sea is not to be believed. For the double testimony is stronger here than the single one, and the experience of the emperor <sup>1</sup> Nero is much to the point.

This is an example of Bacon's scientific analysis, albeit of second-hand information, and of his insistence on the superior value of experience, which constitute his greatest contribution to geographical science.

For poets and dramatists the most interesting aspect of Africa was its strangeness. No other part of Pliny was more fascinating to writers than the sections in which he describes the fantastic specimens of human and sub-human life in Africa. Writer after writer was to retail these marvels without questioning their reality. Bacon, however, uses this material more cautiously. He describes only the more credible of Pliny's Africans, like the Troglodites:

These, as Pliny states in his fifth book, hollow out a cave, which serves them for a house; their food is the flesh of serpents, their voice a harsh <sup>2</sup> noise, and they lack the intercourse of speech.

He mentions the Ethiopians, and the Garamantes who, "free from marriage ties, live at random with women".<sup>3</sup> But for the processions of monstrous men in Pliny, he refers the reader back to the original:

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1. *Op. cit.*, p. 338.  
2. *Op. cit.*, p. 331.  
3. *Op. cit.*, p. 331.

There are, however, many other Aethiopians joined to these three tribes in different places, much degraded also from that which human nature should be, whose names, localities, and manners it is not within the scope of the present plea to give. All these statements from the books of Pliny and of others are sufficiently clear, and should be noted in the *Scriptum Principale*. 1

If other and later writers had treated Pliny with the same sceptical silence on such matters, the way would no doubt have been left clear for more accurate information to prevail, but perhaps Africa would have failed to fire the imaginations of dramatists and poets, and the role of the continent in the imaginative literature of England would have been less significant. (The newly found America, for instance, from which a considerable amount of new, first-hand, but less spectacular information flowed, made a far less significant impact on the writings of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists.) But Bacon wrote in Latin, and his work was not well known to many of his contemporaries. John Rastell reminds us two centuries later that knowledge of Latin was not widespread:

For dyvers pregaunt wyttys be in this lande,  
As well of noble men as of meane estate  
Whiche nothyng but englyshe can understande.<sup>2</sup>

Bacon's influence had to wait for its full impact until the middle of the 16th century. By then the 'African myth'

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1. *Op. cit.*, pp. 331-332.

2. *The Nature of the Four Elements*, ed. J. S. Farmer (Tudor Facsimile Texts), 1908, fol. A 2 verso.

had been established, and was then leavening the imaginations of English writers.

Another exception to the statement that the science of geography was neglected in pre-Renaissance England is Chaucer. His Treatise on the Astrolabe was still sufficiently valuable for Walter Stevens to have prepared a version of it in 1553-54.<sup>1</sup> Chaucer's knowledge of the regional geography of Africa was derived partly from the old sources - Scripture and Philosophy - and partly from contemporary hearsay. In the first category come his references to Africa as the home of Scipio, and as the scene of Aeneas' encounter with Dido, to Egypt<sup>2</sup> as the scene of the long penance of St. Marie of Egypt, and the home of Cleopatra. Africa was also a name which gave dimension to a poetic line:

Of famous folk that han ybeen  
In Auffrike, Europe, and Asye 3

- in fact, the whole world. In this same category must come Chaucer's use of "Barbarie" to designate an area which is far removed from the territory normally covered by that name. He writes in The Franklin's Tale:

The parfit wyfhod of Arthemesie  
Honored is thurgh al the Barbarie.  
(1451-2)

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1. Sloane MS. 261.
  2. Egypt is treated in this study as a part of Africa according to modern geographical tradition. Until well into the 17th century, however, it was often treated as separate from the rest of Africa.
  3. The House of Fame, III, 1338-9. The Poetical Works of Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 1933.

The scene of Artemisia's exhibition of perfect wifehood was Caria, in Asia Minor. So for Chaucer Barbarie must have been a very general term indeed. In the second category, that of contemporary hearsay, must be put Chaucer's references to the names of towns in North Africa connected with famous campaigns of chivalry during the 14th century. His knight had "riden in Belmarye" (General Prologue, 57). Belmarye is the Moroccan town, Benmarin. The knight had also "foughten for oure feith in Tramysse" (General Prologue, 62). Tramysse is Tlemcen in western Algeria. J. M. Manly, who discusses the historical background of the knight's career, concludes that Chaucer may have had in mind the career of some contemporary knight or knights, like the three knightly Scropes, who took part in the campaigns he describes, and with whom he had personal contact.<sup>1</sup>

Chaucer's one reference to the colour of an Ethiopian is significant in that it occurs in a simile. This would seem to indicate that the Ethiopian's blackness was fairly common knowledge. In The Parson's Tale he refers to St. Jerome's long sojourn in the desert as a result of which, "his flesh was blak as an Ethiopeen for heete ..." (345). (A reference to the Ethiopian's skin colour occurs in the

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1. J. M. Manly, "A knight ther was", Transactions of the American Philological Association, 1907, pp. 39 ff.

Bible (Jeremiah xlii, 25), and in the Authorised Version it runs: "Can the Ethiop change his skin?" This verse gave rise - through the emblem books - to the widely quoted proverb regarding the vain labour involved in "washing an Ethiop white"<sup>1</sup>.)

The knowledge of Africa which can be inferred from Chaucer's references is not extensive, but, even so, it was probably in advance of that possessed by all but a few of his contemporaries.

During the whole of the first half of the 15th century, only one significant work on regional geography came out in England, the anonymous Libelle of Englyshe Polycye, published in 1436. This work has been described as the earliest treatise on economic and political geography in English.<sup>2</sup> Valuable as it must have been in its sphere, the book illustrates the limitations of English geographical interest at this time. It lists the various products of potential trading customers for England, all of whom were in western Europe. Urging the adoption of policies to stimulate English trade, the author appeals to his countrymen to keep their hold of the channel ports, and on Wales. There is no suggestion of trade even with the known parts of Africa and Asia.

It is significant that even that fantastic mixture of

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1. See pp. 58-59 below.

2. E. G. R. Taylor, Tudor Geography, 1930, p. 165.



geographical information and unbridled imagination, Mandeville's Travels, which had been published a little after the middle of the 14th century in France (during the lifetime of Chaucer), did not receive an English publication until over a century and a quarter later. Once published, however, this work was to hold the centre of the poetic imagination in England for much longer than the time lag before its publication there. (And not the poetic imagination alone, for it was one of the seven volumes which Martin Frobisher carried in his ship's library in 1576.)<sup>1</sup>

Mandeville's Travels was the most significant publication in the realm of regional and human geography to be published in England in the 15th century. (Pynson's edition probably came out in 1496.) For all its fantastic flights of imagination, this book did not so much satisfy as create the appetite for information about the manners and customs of foreign lands. This was the appetite that was to be satisfied, first by the retelling of tales from the classical writers and Mandeville himself, and then gradually by the first-hand descriptions of strange lands by the voyagers, under the influence of the English geographical writers.

Mandeville's Travels did for Africa what Bacon's writings could not do; it fired the imagination of ordinary intelligent folk about the continent and its inhabitants. Many of the

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1. E. G. R. Taylor, Tudor Geography, 1930, p. 37.

commonest notions which were held about the continent by Elizabethans can be traced back to this book. It was Mandeville, for instance, who introduced Englishmen to the legend of Prester John. The famous forged letter of Prester John had been circulating in Europe since about the year 1165, but it was only after the publication of the Travels in England that its contents became generally known there.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent references to this fabulous monarch and his power soon became quite frequent both in works purporting to be factual and in imaginative writing. Mandeville describes Prester John as a fabulously wealthy Christian king living in a land full of precious stones. Indeed one of the marvels of the kingdom was a river, "and it is full of precious stones, and no drop of water ..."<sup>2</sup> It is small wonder that with such flowing resources,

This emperor has under his subjection seventy-two provinces; and in ilk one of them is a king. And these kings have other kings under them, and all are tributaries to the emperor Prester John,<sup>3</sup>

or, with his resources of precious stones, that there should be above the principal towers of his palace "two pommels of gold with two carbuncles great and fair which shine right clear upon the night".<sup>4</sup> The air of authenticity suggested by Mandeville's use of the first person must have increased

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1. See Mandeville's Travels, ed. Malcolm Letts, 1953, vol. I, p. 187, footnote 2.
  2. Ibid., p. 190.
  3. Ibid., p. 189.
  4. Ibid., p. 192.

the book's credit. The author claims to have eaten of the fish caught in a river full of pebbles but having no water. The trees that grow, flourish and die in a day, the men with horns, speaking birds (psittakes), all these the author claims to have seen.

Another interesting contribution of Mandeville's Travels to notions of Africa is his description of the inhabitants, with his repeated references to their colour, particularly when the colour was black. Of the Numidians he writes:

The folk that wone [live] in that country are called Numidians, and they are christened. But they are black of colour; and that they hold a great beauty, and aye the blacker they are the fairer them think them. And they say that and they should paint an angel and a fiend, they would paint the angel black and the fiend white. And if they think them not black enough when they are born, they use certain medicines for to make them black withal. That country is wonder hot, and that makes the folk thereof so black. 1

Of course the notion that Ethiopians were black was not entirely unknown, but it must have been passages like these which established the almost automatic association of Africa and blackness in the minds of Englishmen, an association which often persisted in spite of factual evidence that not all Africans were of that colour. Often when Mandeville makes comparisons between Africans of different colours, he bases the comparison on the colour black. Describing the inhabitants of the different parts of Ethiopia, he writes:

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1. Op. cit., p. 33.

The South part is called Mauritania, and the folk<sup>1</sup> of this part are blacker than of the east part.

Although the author here shows an awareness of degrees of blackness among Africans, yet since he never stresses the fact that some almost European complexions are found in some parts, he leaves the general impression in his readers' minds that Africans are all more or less black.

Another frequently stressed characteristic, implicit in the quotation on the Numidians given above, is the heat of Africa. This was to supply later writers with plenty of poetic notions. One more quotation will suffice from Mandeville to show how he helped to establish this notion:

Beyond Mauretania, for to wend by sea toward the south, is a great country, but it is uninhabitable because of the outrageous heat of the sun.<sup>2</sup>

The deserts of Africa, the folk of diverse shapes, and numerous other phenomena of Africa, which were to be reiterated over and over again, all these owed their general currency in England to Mandeville.

Egypt is also picturesquely described, and with it that wonder of Egypt, the Nile, with its source in Paradise, its annual overflowing, and its relationship with the prosperity of the country. (All this had been mentioned in Bacon's

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1. Op. cit., p. 112.

'White' is used in a similar way in speaking of the Albanians in relation to surrounding peoples: "And then is the realm of Albania, a great land; and it is called so for the folk of that land are whiter than the folk of other lands about it". Op. cit., p. 102.

2. Op. cit., pp. 112-113.

less popular Opus Majus, but it takes a popular work like Mandeville's to fix such a fact in the popular imagination.) The rainlessness of Egypt, its deserts, its slave markets, the apples of Paradise, Adam's apples with teeth marks, the field where Christ used to play and the balm which grows on it, the pyramids (which the author asserts are really the barns in which Joseph had stored corn during the seven years of plenty), all these show Mandeville's blend of fact and fiction which nevertheless was very influential.

The widening of Englishmen's geographical horizons which took place during the latter half of the 16th century was well foreshadowed by some works earlier in the century. A most interesting example of such forward-looking works is John Rastell's interlude The Nature of the Four Elements. It combines scientific instruction with entertainment, the latter introduced to render the former more palatable:

But because some folk be lytyll disposyd  
To sadnes but more to myrth and sport  
Thys phylosophycall work is myxyd  
With merry conceytis to gyve men comfort. 1

The character through whom the scientific information is passed to the audience is Experience, who illustrates his remarks by pointing to a figure which appears to have been, in the words of a modern geographer,

a polar projection of the northern hemisphere

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1. The Nature of the Four Elements, ed. John S. Farmer (Tudor Facsimile Texts), 1908, fol. A 4 verso.

in plano, or a half sphere, for it showed a complete circuit east-wards from England and back to it again without a break ... 1

Pointing to this figure, Experience makes a sweep which takes in the old and, very significantly for this time, the new world. Africa too receives a one-line mention in this passage:

Loo estwarde beyonde the great occyan  
Here entereth the see callyd mediterran  
Of ii M myle of lengthe  
The Soudans contrey lyeth here by  
The great Turke on the north syde doth ly  
A man of merveyulous strengthe  
This sayde north pte is callyd europa  
And this south pte callyd affrica  
This eest pte is callyd ynde  
But this newe lande founde lately  
Ben callyd america by cause only  
Americus dyd furst them fynde.  
(C 3 recto.)

Experience, like the author of Mandeville's Travels, claims that all this knowledge has come to him through travel:

Ryght farr syr I have rydden and gone  
And seen straunge thynges many one  
In affryk europe and ynde  
Bothe est and west I have ben farr  
North also and seen the sowth sterr  
Bothe by see and lande  
And ben in sondry nacyons  
With peple of dyvers condycyons.  
(B 7 verso - B 8 recto)

This passage, even in the mouth of a dramatic character, indicates an emphasis on experience rather than on hearsay and hence on travel as the road to the right kind of geographical knowledge. Indeed the whole aim of the author

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1. E. G. R. Taylor, Tudor Geography, 1930, p. 8.

was to interest mariners in the vast areas of human knowledge which were opening up, waiting to be exploited. Rastell's Experience was a forerunner of Marlowe's Tamburlaine, who also reflected his creator's interest in the new geography by reviewing his conquests on a map.<sup>1</sup>

Rastell's main interest in this book is America. He is clearly taken with this new land which has suddenly appeared, and

That we never harde tell of before this  
By wrytynge nor other meanys  
Yet many nowe have ben there.  
(C 1 recto)

He laments that Englishmen lost the opportunity of being the first to take possession of this land under Henry VII, and urges them to make up for lost time.

John Rastell was clearly one of the more forward-looking of Englishmen (he was the son-in-law of Sir Thomas More). The passion with which he pleads the cause of exploration, makes him something of an exception among his immediate contemporaries. Yet even he shows little direct interest in Africa. His knowledge of the continent is very limited, and he barely mentions it. He places the kingdom of Prester John in India Major as was frequently done in early works. Still, compared with the earlier popular

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1. II. Tamburlaine, V, iii. The Works of Christopher Marlowe, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke, 1910, p. 135.

work, Libelle of Englyshe Polycye (1436), the widening of interest in "sondry nacyons with peple of dyvers condycyons" is clearly visible. The interlude's call to adventure as a means to knowledge and wealth is loud and clear, and this call was soon to be abundantly answered by English sea-men whose knowledge the great geographical writers later in the sixteenth century were to preserve and popularize.

The date of Rastell's interlude is not established. J. S. Farmer, in his edition referred to earlier, leaves the probable date as open as between 1501 and 1520. For many of the English mariners at that time, any venture outside the old world was a risk not worth taking. General interest was still limited to Europe and its immediate environs.

Our special interest here is in Africa, and for English publications which treated this region we have to move forward some thirty-five years to two translations of the same work. In 1554, Wyllyam Prat published his Description of the Country of Affrique, a translation of a French version of Johannes Boemus' Omnium Gentium Mores. Prat's version, which I have not seen, was followed in the very next year by another by William Waterman under a title which shows clearly that the weight of interest was in human rather than physical geography:

The Fardle of Facions conteining the  
auncient maners, customes and lawes  
of the peoples enhabiting the two partes  
of the earth called Affricke and Asie.



The material which was made available by this translation is of a different tradition from that heralded by John Kastell and continued later by men like Hakluyt - namely knowledge based on scientific experience. This work merely retails the information contained in the works of the ancient writers, as the author frankly admits. At the head of the list of his authorities is "the father of stories Herodotus the Greke", while the authority of Pliny is also constantly referred to. Throughout the work, the spirit of the storyteller rather than that of the scientist prevails. It must be noted to his credit, however, that the author excludes some of the more bizarre monsters described by Pliny, although his list is fantastic enough. This sort of story-telling literature was to hold its own, side by side with the more sober eye-witness accounts that were now beginning to be written. As late as 1611, a translation of Boemus' work was published in England by William Aston, two decades after the publication of the first edition of Hakluyt's Principal Navigations.

The effect of The Fardle of Facions was not to give new knowledge of the world, but rather to give new currency to old stories. This is all the book does for Africa. The legend of Prester John, the strange monster<sup>s</sup> and peoples, the fabulous wealth - prisoners chained with golden fetters in Meroe - the heat, rainlessness, and the large extents of

deserts, all these are described afresh for English readers. Occasionally an old subject is highlighted by the addition of some new detail or a rather more vivid description. We learn, for example, one detail (I think for the first time in English) of Prester John, "And he is not as the moste of the Ethiopians are, black, but white".<sup>1</sup> Of the Icthiophagi, we learn that after their meals, "they falle uppon their women, even as they come to hande withoute any choyse ..."<sup>2</sup> This had of course been less vividly said before. Passages like this last would be partly responsible for the association of dark peoples with lust. (This would be in line with what by mid-16th century had become part of popular lore, namely that the nearer the sun people lived, the more hot-blooded they tended to be.)

1555 was an important year in the history of geographical writing in general, and of the geography of Africa in particular, for in that year Richard Eden published, along with his translation of Peter Martyr's Decades, the first two accounts of English voyages to Africa. These two accounts, of Thomas Windham's voyage to Guinea in 1553, and John Lok's voyage to Mina in 1554-5, stand at the crossroads of geographical writing. They combine the actual experiences of observers with fantastic stories from the old sources - Scripture and Philosophy. The old fictions thus received

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1. The Fardle of Facions, ed. E. & G. Goldsmid, 1888, vol. I, p. 41.  
2. Ibid., vol. II, p. 22.

a new aura of authenticity since they now appeared in writings based partly on actual experience. These accounts must have had a great effect when they were first published, and they continued to do so throughout the century. They were reprinted in 1577 in Richard Willes' The History of Travayle, and again in Hakluyt's Principal Navigations in 1589. Their contents thus invite attention.

Eden writes in his introduction to the first account:

But that these vyages may bee more playnely understode of al men, I have thowght good for this purpose before I intreate hereof, to make a breefe description of Affrica ...<sup>1</sup>

The description which follows names principal towns in North Africa, stresses the general barrenness of the region and the fact that "Al the nations [in] this Africa the lesse, are of the secte of Machomet and a rusticall people *lyvyng* scattered in vyllages".<sup>2</sup> Adding the opinion that Barbary is "The beste of this parte of Afrike", he names the chief kingdoms of Africa most frequently mentioned in Elizabethan literature - Fez and Morocco. Moving down the coast he describes the Guinea areas:

Toward the south of this region, is the kyngedome of Guinea, with Senega, Jaiofo, Gambra, and manye other regions of the blacke Moores cauled Ethiopians or Negros, all whiche are watered with the ryver Negro cauled in owlde tyme Niger.

(fol. 344 recto)

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1. The Decades of the Newe Worlde of West India, 1555, fol. 343 verso.
  2. Ibid., fol. 344 recto.

The description of this part of Africa, the first in the English language, is quite reasonable for the period.

Lacking similar knowledge of the interior parts of Africa, however, Eden falls back on less authentic sources, and describes

the greate and myghtye Emperour and Chrystian kyng Prester Iohan, well knowen to the Portugales in theyr vyages to Calicut. His dominions reache very farre on every syde: ... His kyngedome confineth with the redde sea, and reacheth farre into Afrike towarde Egypte and Barbarie. Southwarde it confineth with the sea towarde the cepe de Buona Speranza: and on the other syde with the sea of sande cauled Mare de Sabione, a very dangerous sea, lyinge betwene the great cite of Alcaer or Cairo in Egypte and the countrey of Ethiopia.

(fol. 344 verso)

Waxing even more romantic he mentions the provinces of the Queen of Saba, the trees of the sun and moon and the region of Paradise (fol. 345 recto).

His references to the peoples of North and West Africa show some appreciation of the differences between them:

"The hyther parte is nowe cauled Barbarie and the people Moores".

(fol. 344 verso) Those in Guinea on the other hand are

"blacke Moores ... Ethiopians or Negros" (fol. 344 recto).

He describes the inhabitants of Amacaiz, the chief city of Ethiopia, as being "of the coloure of an olyve" (fol. 345 recto).

In the actual account of the voyage, the narrator seems to have been more concerned with the feud between the two captains Windham and Pinteado, and the tragedy which was played

out between them, rather than with the geographical details of the area. He does, nevertheless, give some insight into the nature of the commodities traded in - grain, gold and pepper - and he also describes the

smotherynge heate with close and cloudy ayer and storminge wether of such putrifyinge qualitie that it rotted the cotes of theyr backes.

(fol. 346 verso)

Probably the most interesting detail is that of the court of the king of Benin,

who beinge a blacke moore (althoughe not so blacke as the rest) sat in a great houghe haule longe and wyde, the walles made of earthe withowte wyndowes, the roofe of thynne boordes ...

(fol. 346 verso - 347 recto)

The description of the reverence shown to the king by his subjects, his own dignity and courtesy, must have made impressive and strange reading for Eden's first readers. The additional information that "he hym selfe coulde speake the Portugale tounge which he had lerned of a chylde" (fol. 347 recto), would have indicated not only how much earlier the Portuguese had ventured as far as Guinea, but also something of the king's sophistication. Personal accounts of strange people like the king of Benin must have fertilized the imaginations of creative writers. This is the kind of suggestion that may have led by devious ways to a black Othello.

The actual account of the second Guinea voyage, undertaken by John Lok, is even more factual and reliable than the account of Windham's. But the total work is marred - from a

scientific point of view - by an even more elaborate account (added by Eden himself) of the interior of Africa about which there was very little first-hand knowledge at the time.

Again Eden had to rely on the old writings and, it is even suggested, on his own imagination.<sup>1</sup> Even the distinctions between the various inhabitants of Africa, which in the earlier account had come so near the truth, are now blurred:

It is to understande that the people whiche nowe inhabite the regions of the coast of Guinea and the mydde partes of Affrica, as Lybia the inner, and Nubia with dyvers other great and large regions about the same, were in oulde tyme cauled Ethiopes and Nigrite, which we nowe caule Moores, Moorens or Negros, a people of beastly lyvyng, without a god, lawe, religion, or common welth, and so scorched and vexed with the heate of the soone, that in many places they curse it when it ryseth.

(fol. 355 verso)

A few pages earlier the author of this passage had been quoting a first-hand account of the impressive court of Benin. The facility with which he lapses into older beliefs in the face of first-hand evidence shows the tenacity of the old fictions, even in the mind of a geographical writer. He parades the men without heads - Blemines - along with Strucophagi, Ganaphasantes, the Icthiophagi, Anthropophagi, and all the other strange peoples of Pliny, with a gullibility surprising in such an otherwise far-sighted man. But had he not given these tales more currency, Othello's life history would have been poorer, and his language rather less picturesque.

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1. Europeans in West Africa, ed. J. W. Blake, 1942, vol. II, p. 256.

One fact of this second voyage is interesting in that it does throw some light on whether Shakespeare and other writers may have seen for themselves what Moors and Negroes looked like. Even before the English slave trade seriously began, voyagers had been in the habit of bringing back to England some of the strange people they encountered in their travels. This second voyage was no exception:

They brought with them certeyne blacke slaves,  
wherof sum were taule and stronge men, and coulde  
well agree with owr meates and drynkes. 1  
(fol. 359 verso)

The opportunities for seeing such men grew greater as the century wore on, and it seems likely that Shakespeare and his

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1. There are many other references to this practice. James Alday reports that in 1551 on the first voyage to Barbary, "there were two Moores being noble men, whereof one was of the King's blood, convayed by the said Master Thomas Windham into their Countrey of England". See The Principal Navigations, 1903-5, vol. VI, p. 137. These would have been tawny Moors, i.e. light-skinned inhabitants of North Africa. Sometimes such people were taken back in subsequent voyages to act as interpreters. See for example the account of Towerson's second voyage to Guinea in 1556 - Princ. Nav. vol. VI, pp. 216-217. This practice was not confined to Africa. William Hawkins brought back a Brazilian king from his second voyage - Princ. Nav. XI, 24. An interesting topical tract appeared after Martin Frobisher's North-west voyages of 1576 and 1577, entitled: "A description of the pourtrayture and shape of those strange kind of people which the worthie Maister Martin Ffourboiser brought into England Anno 1576 and 1577". These men were Eskimos. Stephano had similar plans for Caliban in The Tempest: "if I can recover him and keep him tame and get to Naples with him, he's a present for any emperour that ever trod on neat's-leather" - II, ii, 73-75.

contemporary dramatists had good opportunities of seeing them in London.<sup>1</sup> This account of John Lok's voyage has an interesting speculation on the reason for the colour of tropical Africans - a topic which also interested Sir Francis Bacon. The passage would also have given some information on the appearance of Negroes to anyone who had not seen one:

This is also to bee considered as a secrete worcke of nature, that throughout all Afryke under the Equinoctiall line ... the regions are extreeme hotte and the people very blacke. Wheras contrarily such regions of the West Indies as are under the same line, are very temperate and the people neyther blacke nor with curlde and short woolle on theyr heades as have they of Affryke.

(fol. 359 verso)

These first two published descriptions of Africa written by Englishmen, blended as they are of fact and legend, are likely to have been important ingredients in the amalgams which we find in dramatic portraits of "Moors". Whatever may be said against their accuracy, these accounts established the tradition of eye-witness descriptions which, as time went on, shook off the habit of copying the old tales, and grew more and more independent and accurate.

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1. W. E. Miller (Notes and Queries, April 1961, p. 138) cites two assessments of strangers in the parish of All Hallows, London in 1599 which give the names of four Negroes, male and female living in the parish. By 1601, Queen Elizabeth had cause to be "discontented at the great number of 'negars and blackamoores' which are crept into the realm since the troubles between her Highness and the King of Spain", so that she appointed a certain Caspar Van Zeuden, merchant of Lübeck, to transport them out of the country. (Calendar of Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury ... at Hatfield House, Part XI, 1906, p. 569.)



When for instance the accounts of the voyages of Sir John Hawkins give information, they usually rely on observation, and only fall short of accuracy as a result of imperfect observation. Only one of Hawkins' West African voyages was published before 1589 (when Hakluyt first published them all) and that is the account of "the third and troublesome voyage" of 1567 and 1568. This account, published in 1569, and the first written by the leader of an expedition himself, is, however, not very informative. Hawkins is mainly concerned in the Guinea section with his success or failure to obtain slaves. It is nevertheless of interest here for two reasons. First, it consistently uses the term "Negro" for the inhabitants of Africa south of Cape Blanco. (This is even more marked in the account of the second voyage written by a very careful member of Hawkins' crew who signs himself John Sparke, the younger. All the inhabitants north of Cape Blanco he calls Moors and all to the south he calls Negroes. This account was published by Hakluyt in 1589.) Secondly, the voyage is interesting as another early published account of personal contact between an Englishman and a Negro king. Hawkins writes unfavourably of the king of Mina for breaking an agreement with him. He had agreed to help the king in a war against a neighbouring king, on the understanding that he, Hawkins, would take the prisoners of war as slaves. But on the successful completion of the campaign the king did not

keep the bargain. Hawkins writes bitterly:

but the Negro (in which nation is seldome or  
never found truth) meant nothing lesse: for  
that night he remooved his campe and prisoners ... 1

(Hawkins' moral indignation at the breaking of an immoral  
bargain is merely typical of the double standards prevailing  
among participants in the African trade in the 16th century.)

By 1570, we find that England had now fully caught the  
interest in geography which had prevailed on the continent of  
Europe and elsewhere for a long time before. Richard Willes  
in his dedicatory epistle to his History of Travayle (1577)  
has some very significant lines on the subject whose importance  
is by now obvious. He writes,

Consider the fruites, the drugges, the pearle,  
the treasure, the millions of golde and silver,  
the Spanyardes have brought out of the West Indies  
since the first viage of Columbus: The great  
commodities our nation reapeth by the travayle  
of our countrey men into Barbary, Guiny, and  
Moscovia, will be a sufficient testimony unto all  
us Englishmen, what it is to be a skilful  
traveyler, what to be a painefull Geographer, and 2  
learned.

Despite the fact that Willes reproduced without amendment  
Eden's rather fanciful additions to the two Guinea voyages,  
it is clear that he had access to the most up-to-date work  
on Africa, including John Leo's History and Description of

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1. Hakluyt, The Principal Navigations, 1903-1905, vol. X, p. 65.
  2. 1577 edn., fol. iiii recto.

Africa, which was not to be published in English until 1600.<sup>1</sup>

We can accept Willes' general statement in his epistle that geography never flourished better in England than when he was writing. Geographical publications came thick and fast from now on, but, keeping our focus on publications on Africa, the next work of significance is the first edition of Hakluyt's monumental compilation, The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation, published in 1589.

The survey of material on Africa published in England before Hakluyt's Principal Navigations would seem to suggest that Englishmen's interest in Africa was confined to the west coast. This is misleading, for not only did English interest in North Africa precede interest in West Africa, but the accounts of trade contacts with the North, when they came to be published, were often fuller and much more exciting than similar accounts of the west coast. It happens, however, that most of these accounts had to wait until 1589 when Hakluyt published them. Richard Eden in the dedication to his History of Travayle (1577) had given some hint of English

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1. Willes' knowledge of the work is inferred from a passage in which he shows how geography was a common study amongst all peoples, and he writes "Afrike was described by a Moore ..." (fol. iii verso.) Leo's book was originally published in Italian in 1550. A French edition of the work was one of the contents of Sir Thomas Smith's library according to a catalogue dated 1556. See John Strype, The Life of Sir Thomas Smith, 1698, p. 140.

interest in North Africa when he wrote of "the treveyle of our countreyemen into Barbary, Guiny and Moscovia ... "

The fact that contemporary English accounts of West Africa were published earlier than those relating to North Africa may have helped to fix even more strongly the early association of Africa with black peoples. One important indirect contact between England and North Africa did, however, receive immense contemporary publicity throughout Europe through accounts of the battle of Alcazar (1579), in which not only a great number of European noblemen (including King Sebastian of Portugal) lost their lives, but in which the legendary Captain Thomas Stukeley (sometimes called the Marquis of Ireland) also died. Robert Peele's play, The Battle of Alcazar (1588-89),<sup>1</sup> had exploited this contact with North Africa before Hakluyt wrote. A play like Heywood's The Fair Maid of the West (Part I 1600-03, Part II c. 1620?), on the other hand, which was so directly inspired by the exciting accounts of trade and piracy in North Africa, would never have been written without the stimulation of materials like those found within the pages of Hakluyt.

The influence of Hakluyt's Principal Navigations far exceeded the author's primary aim, which was to put on record

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1. For a discussion on this play see pp. 84-99 below.

the "notable enterprises by sea", so as to refute the charges of "sluggish security and continuall neglect" of such enterprises, which were continually being brought against the English by continental scholars. Hakluyt produced one of the classics of English writing, and provided a compilation which served as an inspiration for men of the most diverse interests. Hard-headed practical men of business, investors, traders, sea captains, and sailors found in Hakluyt's pages a source of confidence in the abilities of Englishmen, and an inspiration to greater commercial adventures. Not least of the work's merits in this regard is that it brushed away for most ordinary people the last of those superstitious fears of unknown parts which had long stood in the way of overseas trade and colonisation. But Hakluyt inspired more than the men of business. For poets and dramatists, he opened up new venues of adventure, new sources of imagery, and new backgrounds against which to study human character. They too received new confidence in the abilities of the English. They could sing their country's praises without blushing, for the facts were now there for all to see. Not the least of Hakluyt's achievements therefore was that he indirectly influenced the enrichment of English literature. He may

have influenced the language even more directly.<sup>1</sup>

Hakluyt published tales of adventure which involved more episodes, more sea-fights, merciful deliverances, sharp practices, cruelties, treacheries, and happy endings than are contained in the most rambling of Heywood's plots. Heywood probably overreached himself in that he tried to put too many of the genuine episodes he had heard and read of, more in fact than was judicious, into a five-act play which had to preserve some degree of unity.

One reason why the North African scene was more productive of dramatic settings than the West African may have been because the North presented the dramatist with a ready-made source of conflicts in the clashes between Christianity and Islam. Here again, Hakluyt offers stories of forced conversions, heroic resistance to such conversions in the face of threats and torture, as well as the willing surrender of some to the new religion. His pages offered the willing dramatist a veritable mine of plot and character. No wonder then that the dramatists used North Africa - commonly called Barbary<sup>2</sup> - as the venue of their plays, while quite often

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1. Louis B. Wright hinted at this in a general way when he wrote: "No one has yet appraised the influence on modern English prose of the matter-of-fact relations of the voyagers; but merely as evidences of the development toward verbal simplicity many of these works deserve the study of literary historians". Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England, 1935, p. 548.
  2. Although sometimes loosely used - as in the Chaucer passage quoted on p. 12 - Barbary is "A general name for North Africa along the Mediterranean, from Egypt to the Atlantic, and from the sea to the Sahara desert". Edward H. Sugden, A Topographical Dictionary, 1925, p. 45.

painting their characters as though they came from farther south, thus combining the dramatic effectiveness of the Negro's blackness with the excitement and conflicts of the North African scene.

No attempt will be made here to give a detailed analysis of the whole of Hakluyt's material to show how it influenced the drama, because often the influence was general and indirect, lending general character rather than particular detail. But a brief survey of some of his accounts is relevant. He gives several descriptions of the marvels of Egypt. Apparently by this time Egypt had become one of the possible but expensive options in the touring itinerary of the wealthy gentleman traveller. Those who undertook the tour no doubt made the most of the distinction that such journeys gave them, by narrating their experiences in taverns and at friends' houses, and sometimes by writing accounts of their travels. Some of these found their way into Hakluyt's compilation. John Evesham's account of his tour, which started on December 5th 1586, mentions Argier and Tunis, towns frequently mentioned in the drama of the Elizabethan era, and then gives detailed descriptions of Alexandria with its underground water works for the reception of the annual inundation of the Nile, Cairo, the pyramids, and Carthage.<sup>1</sup>

Laurence Aldersay's account of a similar tour also appears

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1. Principal Navigations, 1903-05, vol. VI, pp. 35-38.

in the collection.<sup>1</sup> The narrator of "The Pilgrimage to Mecca"<sup>2</sup> also describes Alexandria and Cairo with their "notable monuments", and relates some of the customs of the Mohammedans. He describes the Nile with its notorious crocodiles which make journeying even along the banks of the river hazardous. The effect of such frequent references would be to make the names of such towns, monuments, the Nile, the animals, and the customs household words and, consequently, convenient referents and sources of association for the dramatist. Englishmen in the position of Shakespeare's much travelled gentlemen, Antony and Enobarbus in Antony and Cleopatra, would have been expected to bandy a few of these names and wonders in their table-talk. And when Antony mocked Lepidus by giving him light answers, he was only, by doing less than his duty as a traveller, demonstrating his low regard for his interlocutor.

No greater claim is made here for Hakluyt's Principal Navigations than that it brought Africa much closer and in a more real sense to Elizabethan England than earlier publications had done. Yet this is no mean contribution. Hakluyt prepared the climate of ideas on which Heywood's dramas of adventure were to thrive. His sailors' encounters with pirates, Moorish kings, renegades, traitors, and ordinary Christian sailors resisting forced conversions, provided a background

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1. Principal Navigations, 1903-05, vol. VI, pp. 39-46.  
2. Ibid., vol. V, pp. 329-365.



of association for the dramatists to evoke. When Shylock muses on the risks involved in Antonio's bond, for instance - he had an argosy to Tripolis among other places - he says to Bassanio:

But ships are but boards, sailors but men:  
there be land-rats and water-rats, land-thieves,  
and water-thieves, - I mean pirates, - and then  
there is the peril of waters, winds, and rocks.  
(The Merchant of Venice, I, iii, 22-26)

Later Antonio writes "my ships have all miscarried" and yet at the end he is informed

... three of your argosies  
Are richly come to harbour suddenly.  
(V, i, 276-277)

The pages of Hakluyt would have prepared an Elizabethan playgoer to receive such dramatic changes of fortune with complaisance.

One account from his pages is cited to show the kind of material that would have caught the eye of a general reader, or a playwright browsing for background material on the North African trade. Its title alone is suggestive of its content:

The voyage made to Tripolis in Barbarie, in the yeere 1583 with a ship called the Jesus, wherein the adventures and distresses of some Englishmen are truely reported, and other necessary circumstances observed. 1

The members of this ill-fated journey numbered among their distresses the loss of two captains by death before they had even cleared the coast of England. Arriving in Barbary after

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1. Principal Navigations, ed. cit., vol. V, p. 292.

surviving sundry storms, they were cheated by the king of Tripolis, who, after promising them an exemption from duty if they bought oil from him, later went back on his word and exacted the utmost penny of duty from them. Their business done, they set sail, only to be recalled by heavy bombardment because one of their number had smuggled a debtor on board. They were thrown into prison, and later arraigned and sentenced, two of them to death. At the intervention of an English factor, the king pardoned the Captain, but immediately afterwards changed his mind. The words of the narrator, Sanders, at this point are worth quoting:

But after-ward our joy was turned to double sorrow, for in the meane time the kings minde was altered:  
... whereupon the king sent for our Master againe, and gave him another judgement after his pardon for one cause, which was that hee should be hanged.<sup>1</sup>

Sanders' own comment on this lack of honour is also noteworthy:

Here all true Christians may see what trust a Christian man may put in an infidels promise, who being a King, pardoned a man nowe, as you have heard, and within an houre after hanged him for the same cause before a whole multitude: and also promised our Factors their oyles custome free, and at their going away made them pay the uttermost penie for the custome thereof.

One of the condemned men offered to "turn Turke" to save his life, but was executed after he changed his faith. The others, including the author, were sentenced to perpetual slavery.

Sanders was put on short rations, and subjected to various forms of forced labour, including a spell in the galleys. In spite

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1. Principal Navigations, ed. cit., vol. V, p. 300.

of all these vicissitudes, like Antonio's ships, Sanders "richly came to harbour". He succeeded in sending a letter to his father in Devonshire and another to the English ambassador in Constantinople. By a chain of influence his father got the Queen to intervene with the great Turk himself, who ordered the release of the survivors, and full restitution of all their losses. The rest of the narrative shows God's vengeance on the perfidious king of Tripolis -

the kings plagues and punnishments, which  
Almighty God at his will and pleasure sendeth  
upon men in the sight of the worlde ...<sup>1</sup>

This particular account did not supply the plot for any play that we know about, but it is the kind of account that would have helped to supply background material for plays set in North Africa. The conduct of the king of Tripolis was of the kind that established the "Moor-Mahometan" as a shifty and untrustworthy character. When in The Fair Maid of the West, Mullisheg, king of Fesse, upon ascending the throne makes the following promulgation:

then give order  
That all such Christian Merchants as have traffique  
And freedome in our Country, that conceale  
The least part of our Custome due to us,  
Shall forfeit ship and goods (IV, i),<sup>2</sup>

Heywood was merely putting on the stage a character straight out of the voyages. We notice, too, how before Bess Bridges

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1. Principal Navigations, ed. cit., vol. V, p. 308.
  2. The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood, 1874 (the Pearson edition), vol. II, p. 312.

would allow Mullisheg to touch her, she makes him swear point by point to offer no ill-usage to her or her company.

Goodlack reads the terms of the oath:

First, libertie for her and hers to leave the Land at her pleasure.

Next, safe conduct to and from her ship at her own discretion.

Thirdly, to be free from all violence, eyther by the King, or any of his people.

Fourthly, to allow her mariners fresh victuals aboard.

Fiftly, to offer no further violence to her person, than what hee seekes by kingly usage, and free  
intreaty. 1

Such distrust of a Moorish ruler is only justified by the recorded conduct of rulers like the king of Tripolis which gave rise to generalisations on the perfidy of Moors. Indeed, Heywood's play went on long enough to make Mullisheg, once generous and friendly, run true to recorded type by repudiating all his solemn vows and attempting a violation of Bess, a violation of honour which makes it easy for characters in the second part of the play - even the Moorish Queen Tota - to utter the generalisation, "The Moors are treacherous".

Viewed from this distance of time and critical detachment, the character of Mullisheg as shown in the two parts of The Fair Maid of the West is inconsistent, but it is easy to see how such a character would have been acceptable to a journalistic type of dramatist like Heywood, and how a public, prepared by

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1. Dramatic Works, ed. cit., vol. II, p. 322.

merchants' testimonies of similarly unpredictable Moorish rulers, could see nothing dramatically wrong with his portrayal of the character. If it could happen in life, it could happen in a play. Even the return of Bess Bridges and her crew to England through Italy - a rather unnecessary circumstance from a dramatic point of view - finds a parallel in our specimen account. Without suggesting that this particular account was the inspiration for Heywood's rambling drama, it is easy to see how it or a similar one could have been a background inspiration.

The sections on Africa in Hakluyt's Principal Navigations embrace not only the north coast but the west also, some of the accounts of which had been separately published earlier. The dramatists do not seem to have concerned themselves with specific references and incidents from the accounts of these West African voyages possibly because, as has been mentioned before, the West lacked the sharp ready-made religious conflicts of the North African situation. All that the dramatists seem to have borrowed from the west coast is the physical appearance of some of their African characters, who derive most of their traits, however, from the characteristics commonly attributed to the inhabitants of more northerly parts.

Something has been said earlier about the use of colour and racial terms in the isolated accounts of Africa which had been published before Hakluyt's Principal Navigations. One

look at this work in this regard might be of some interest. One general statement could be made about the use of terms like "Moors", "black Moores", "Negroes" as used in Hakluyt. The references show a remarkable degree of consistency and very little confusion.<sup>1</sup> In our examination of the separately published accounts, it was shown that Richard Willes had a broadly satisfactory use of terms in his first account, but that he appears to have lapsed into vagueness in his second. Hawkins consistently used the term Negro only for the inhabitants of the west coast south of Cape Blanco. This consistency is generally observed in accounts published by Hakluyt. The account of Hawkins' second voyage written by John Sparke the younger is a model of precision on this subject. For instance, when he writes of the inhabitants of Cape Blanco he uses the terms "Moors" and "Barbarians", the latter in the strict sense of natives of Barbary:

In this place [Cape Blanco] the Portugals have no holde for their defence; but have rescue of the Barbarians, whom they entertaine as their souldiers, for the time of their being there and for their fishing upon that coast of Africa, doe pay a certaine tribute to the king of the Moores. The people of that part of Africa are tawnie, having long haire without any apparell, saving before their privie 2 members.

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1. Lois Whitney in his article "Did Shakespeare know Leo Africanus?" (P.M.L.A. XXXVII, 1922, pp. 470-483, particularly p. 477) cites the confusion I have examined in the account of the second Barbary voyage. (See p. 28 above.) In the corpus of material published by Hakluyt, however, this is rather like the exception which proves the rule.
  2. Hakluyt, Principal Navigations, ed. cit., vol. X, p. 14.

When he moves further down the coast to Cape Verde he writes "These people are all blacke, and are called Negros, without any apparell, saving before their privities".<sup>1</sup> A similar distinction between Moors and Negroes is observed in the other West African voyages published by Hakluyt. The account of James Lancaster's voyage to Malacca is interesting from this point of view. He also uses the term Negro for the inhabitants of "the hither side of the Cape" (of Good Hope). When on the other side of the Cape he encounters people of a different colour, he stops using the term Negro, and writes:

Within few dayes following we came to an Iland an hundred leagues to the North-east of Mozambique called Comoro, which we found exceeding full of people, which are Moores of tawmie colour and good stature, but be very treacherous and diligently to be taken heed of. 2

This particular account was written by Hakluyt himself from a report. It is uncertain how much editing he might have done of the other accounts, but it is significant that he did not change Willes' confusing terminology which is cited on p. 28 above. So it may be concluded that among the voyagers the significance of these terms, Moor and Negro, was clear.

The influence of Hakluyt's publications on popular books

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1. Hakluyt, Principal Navigations, ed. cit., vol. X, p. 15.
2. It must be noted, however, that these same people of Comoro are described in another account of the same voyage as being "black and very comely". (vol. X, p. 195) I am inclined to believe that black is used loosely here to mean dark-complexioned in the way it is sometimes used even of Europeans. Otherwise the coupling of black with very comely would be very strange for an Elizabethan.

can be seen in a work published by George Abbot in 1599, under the title A Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde. (Between 1599 and 1673, it ran through nine editions.) Instead of repeating fantastic tales from the classics as earlier writers had done, he acknowledges ignorance where he has no information, and treats the classical fantasies with contempt:

From beyond the hills Atlas maior, unto the South of Africa, is nothing almost in antiquity worthy the reading, and those things which are written,<sup>1</sup> for the most part are fables.

He makes a distinction between the Moors and Negroes, using language which shows his awareness of the difference between them:

... all the people in general to the South lying within the Zona torrida, are not onley blackish like the Moores, but are exceedingly blacke. And therefore in olde time, by an excellency, some of them were called Nigritae; so that to this day they are named Negros, as then whome, no men are blacker.<sup>2</sup>

Abbot was not completely emancipated from the influence of the classics and ancient stories, however, for he refers to Hercules setting up his two pillars as though this were fact, and to Prester John as though he were alive, and still "a prince absolute". He writes of the monsters of Africa which were bred when "contrary kindes have coniunction the one with the other" at the few watering places in the wilderness of Africa. (Francis Bacon also used this explanation.)<sup>3</sup> His readers were once again reminded of Egypt - Alexandria, Cairo and the Nile -

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1. A Briefe Description, 2nd edition, 1600, fol. F 2 recto.  
2. Loc. cit.  
3. Works, ed. Spedding, Ellis and Heath, 1868, vol. II, p. 492.



Carthage and Dido, the Mountains of the Moon, Mount Atlas - "it seemed to touch heaven with his top" - and other locations in the common currency of Africana.

Knowledge of the African coastline and of the coastal peoples was growing in England, but knowledge of the interior was still small. It was still peopled in most Englishmen's minds with the imaginary beasts and peoples of the classical writers. The most authoritative material on the interior of Africa was contained in John Leo's book, The History and Description of Africa, which had been published in Italy in 1550. It had also been published in France, but only a few Englishmen knew it - those who were sufficiently earnest students of geography to get the most modern books on the subject, wherever they were published, and who in addition could read a foreign language. A French edition is listed among the contents of Sir Thomas Smith's library in a list dated 1566, and Richard Willes, in his dedicatory epistle to The History of Travayle, mentions the work.<sup>1</sup> Englishmen who could not read a foreign language, however, had to wait for John Pory's excellent translation in 1600.

The influence of this book on geographical thought was widespread although its effect on the imaginative literature of the period seems to have been less dramatic than the influence of the classical writers, and of the English travel accounts

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1. See Footnote 1, p. 33 above.

published by Hakluyt. But we know for certain that Robert Greene and Ben Jonson among the playwrights knew the book. It is hardly likely that they would have been the only two who did. There is evidence to support the belief that Shakespeare and Webster also knew it.

Robert Greene in his Farewell to Follie cites the love of "Abusahid king of Fez for the wife of Cosimo de Cheri, as Leon in his description of Affrike setteth down".<sup>1</sup> Lois Whitney makes a strong circumstantial case showing that Shakespeare not only used Leo's information on the character of Moors in drawing the character of Othello, but that the suggestions for Othello's 'history' came from the life of John Leo himself as given in Pory's introduction.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the correspondences between John Leo's career and Othello's account of himself are striking. John Leo had not been royally born but according to Pory "his parentage seemeth not to have been ignoble", and his intercourse had been mainly in the courts of princes. Like Othello he had been a traveller, had been captured and sold into slavery and had been converted to Christianity. (Miss Whitney probably strains the case when she tries to show verbal correspondences between Pory's words and Shakespeare's. She tries to parallel for instance Othello's "hills whose heads touch heaven" (I, iii, 141) with

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1. Life and Complete Works, ed. A. B. Grosart, 1881-83, vol. IX, p. 297.
  2. "Did Shakespeare know Leo Africanus", P.M.L.A., vol. XXXVII, 1922, pp. 470-488.

Pory's description of Atlas "whose tops of incredible height rising out of the midst of sandy desertes, exalt themselves above the cloudes". Abbot's description "it seemed to touch heaven with his top", in his Briefe Description quoted earlier,<sup>1</sup> is much closer, and no doubt there were others. Miss Whitney's case is good without this sort of evidence.) This scholar also selects several passages from Leo's descriptions of Moors from which Shakespeare may have derived some suggestions for Othello's character: passages on the soldiership of Moors, their credulity, their capacity for love, their high regard for chastity in their wives, their jealousy, and the fury of their wrath. Most of these suggestions are in crude form, but it is possible to see how Shakespeare could have worked from such crude materials. (Even Cinthio's story can be called crude.) Leo writes for instance on the subject of their regard for chastity: "whomsoever they finde but talking with their wives they presently go about to murther them".<sup>2</sup> Also,

by reason of jealousie you may see them daily one to be the death and destruction of another, ... they will by no meanes match themselves unto an harlot. <sup>3</sup>

If Shakespeare read Pory's translation of Leo, then he could hardly have been confused about the colour of the Moors and Negroes. Pory in his introduction is meticulous about

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1. Cf. pp. 46-47 above.

2. The History and Description of Africa, ed. Robert Brown, 1896, vol. II, p. 233. (In quotations, u, v, and i have been modernised.)

3. *Ibid.*, I, 154.

the difference between the two kinds of Moors.<sup>1</sup> He writes:

Moreover this part of the worlds is inhabited especially by five principall nations, to wit, by the people called Cafri or Cafates, that is to say outlawes, or lawlesse, by the Abassins, the Egyptians, the Arabians, and the Africans or Moores, properly so called; which last are of two kinds, namely white or tawnie Moores, and Negros or blacke Moores. <sup>2</sup>

He mentions colour in many places. He writes of the people of Adel in Ethiopia, "the people of Adel are of the colour of an olive", and of Barbora in the same section: "The citizens are blacke people, and their wealth consisteth most of all in flesh" (I, 52). Of the dwellers on either side of the river "Senaga" he writes:

Moreover it maketh a separation betweene nations of sundrie colours: for the people on this side are of a dead ash-colour, leane, and of small stature; but on the farther side they are exceeding blacke ... <sup>3</sup>

Also,

the river Senaga is the utmost northern bound of Negros, or nations extremely blacke; howbeit upon the bankes thereof are found people of sundry colours, by reason of the varietie of women. <sup>4</sup>

Leo in the body of the book also distinguishes between tawny and black Moors. (Shakespeare himself had shown even before the Pory translation that he understood the distinction by describing

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1. The distinction had been made even earlier. For instance Andrew Borde had written in 1547 of the inhabitants of Barbary: "Ther be whyte mores and black moores." The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, X, 212. He makes a similar distinction on p. 189.
  2. Leo, History, I, 20.
  3. Ibid., I, 18.
  4. Ibid., I, 83.

Morocco as a "tawny Moor" in The Merchant of Venice.) Yet Shakespeare makes Othello black, corresponding in features to Leo's description of Negroes: "The inhabitants are extremely black, having great noses and blabber lips".<sup>1</sup> Leo also furnished material on Negroes who could claim to be "men of royal siege". For instance, he writes of Abu Bacr of the town of Cabra:

I my selfe am acquainted with Abu Bacr, sirnamed Pargama, the kings brother, who is blacke in colour,<sup>2</sup> but most beautifull in minde and conditions.

(This comes very near the Duke's description of Othello:

If virtue no delighted beauty lack,  
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.  
Othello, I, iii, 291-292.)

John Leo, apart from opening up the interior of Africa to his readers, also threw some light on old topics, treating them in rather more detail than the earlier works. The travel literature before 1600 had produced references to the inundation of the Nile and its relation to the prosperity of Egypt. But there does not seem to have been anything as clear as his description of the Nilometer:

Upon another side of the Island standeth an house alone by it selfe, in the midst whereof there is a fouresquare cestern or chanell of eightene cubits deepe, whereinto the water of Nilus is conveied by a certaine sluice under the ground. And in the midst of the cestern there is erected a certaine pillar, which is marked and divided into so many cubits as the cesterne it selfe containeth in depth. 3

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1. Leo, History, III, 830.  
2. Ibid., III, 826.  
3. Ibid., III, 879.

Malone was the first to suggest that Shakespeare may have based Antony's description of the measurement of the Nile on this passage (Anthony and Cleopatra II, vii, 20-26). This has been generally accepted. Antony's statement - especially "The higher Nilus swells, / The more it promises" - represents only a rough and rather inaccurate paraphrase of Leo's account which contains an important qualification that is ignored by Shakespeare, probably in order to demonstrate Antony's inebriation:

But if it [Nilus] ariseth to the eighteenth cubite,  
there is a like to follow great scarcitie ... and  
if the eighteenth cubite be surmounted, all Egypt  
is in danger to be swallowed up by the inundation 1  
of Nilus.

The mocking description of the crocodile which Antony gives to Lepidus also seems to have been based on a proximate passage from the same book:

This cruell and noisome beast commonly frequenteth  
the rivers of Niger and Nilus, and containeth in  
length twelve cubites and above, the taile thereof  
being as long as the whole bodie besides, albeit  
there are but fewe of so huge bignes. It goeth  
upon fower feete like a Lizard, neither is it above  
a cubite and a halfe high .... Some prae upon 2  
fishes onely, but others upon beasts and men.

The details of Antony's description are given in an order similar to that of Leo's: shape and size, method of propulsion, food and (in Shakespeare) the additional detail, cause of death. Shakespeare merely omits the most vital details from each fact and adds the ludicrous conclusion to indicate Antony's contempt for Lepidus:

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1. Leo, History, III, 880.
  2. Ibid., III, 950.

It is shaped, sir, like itself, and it is as broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with it own organs; it lives by that which nourisheth it; and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.

(Antony and Cleopatra, II, vii, 48-52)

Another passage in Leo dealing with the relationship between the crocodile and its "tooth-picker" seems to have inspired a passage in Webster's The White Devil. Flamineo, in what he calls "a dried sentence, stuft with sage", tells the story of the crocodile and the little bird trochilus. The relationship between the crocodile and the bird was described by Pliny and others, and was frequently used by Elizabethans to symbolize ingratitude, as indeed it is used here. But Flamineo's account corresponds so closely to Pory's rendition of Leo, that it may have been derived from it:

The crocodile, which lives in the river Nilus, hath a worme breeds [sic] i'th teeth of 't, which puts it to extreame anguish: a little bird, no bigger then a wren, is barbor-surgeon to this crocodile; flies into the javes of 't; pickes out the worme; and brings present remedy. The fish, glad of ease but ingratefull to her that did it, that the bird may not talke largely of her abroad for non-payment, closeth her chaps intending to swallow her, and so put her to perpetuall silence. But nature loathing such ingratitude, hath arm'd this bird with a quill or pricke on the head, top o'th which wounds the crocodile i'th mouth; forceth her open her bloody prison; and away flies the pretty tooth-picker from her cruell patient. <sup>1</sup>

(The White Devil, IV, ii, 224-235)

John Pory's version of Leo reads:

The crocodiles by reason of their continuall

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1. The Works of John Webster, ed. F. L. Lucas, 1927, vol. I, 159.

devouring of beasts and fishes, have certaine peeces of flesh sticking fast betweene their forked teeth, which flesh being putrified, breedeth a king of wormes wherewith they are cruelly tormented. Wherefore the saide birdes flying about, and seeing the wormes, enter into the crocodiles jawes, to satisfie their hunger therewith. But the crocodile perceiving himselfe freed from the wormes of his teeth, offereth to shut his mouth, and to devour the little birde that did him so good a turne, but being hindred from his ungratefull attempt by a pricke which groweth upon the birds head, he is constrained<sup>1</sup> to open his jawes, and to let her depart.

John Leo's book is knowledgeably cited by Ben Jonson in his Masque of Blackness:

Pliny, Solinus, Ptolemey, and of late Leo the African, remember unto us a river in Aethiopia, famous by the name of Niger; of which the people were called Nigritae, and now Negro's: and are the blackest nation of the world. <sup>2</sup>

The year 1600 in which Leo's book was published in English could be taken as a major landmark in the spread of knowledge of Africa in England. Other books were to follow, among them Samuel Purchas' Purchas his Pilgrimage in 1613. But Purchas could do little better on the interior of Africa than reproduce a large section of John Leo's History and Description. The fantasies of the ancients had been finally laid. Travellers like Sandys were to corroborate with eye-witness accounts, but nothing as fundamental or dramatic as Leo's History was to be added to Englishmen's knowledge of Africa until the famous nineteenth century telegram of Speke and Grant "The Nile is settled".

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1. Leo, History, vol. III, 951-952.
  2. Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 1925-1952, vol. VII, 169.



Popular geographies after 1600 passed on the new knowledge contained in larger and less generally accessible books like Leo's History and Description. Robert Stafforde's little geography book, A Geographical and Anthological Description, which first appeared in 1607, and Peter Heylyn's larger Microcosmus (1621), which acknowledges Stafforde as one of its sources, are two typical examples of 17th century geographies.

Stafforde was still capable of misleading <sup>b</sup>y generalisation - the main and probably necessary fault of such a short work - but there is in his work a striking absence of fantasy, and a reliance on good authority. He quotes Pliny's aphorism "Africa aliquid semper oportat Novi", but illustrates it by listing only real animals: "Elephants, Lions, Leopards, Hyppopotomos, Crocadiles, and such like".<sup>1</sup> A good example of misleading generalisation occurs on the same page when he describes the inhabitants of Africa as: "generally very black, of countenance rude, barbarous, and of uncivil behaviour, addicted to all sorts of religion".

One very interesting feature of Stafforde's book is his summary of national characteristics, which throws much light on Elizabethan notions of foreigners. It is not surprising that after Leo, and probably more significantly after Othello, one of the prominent characteristics of the inhabitants of

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1. A Geographical and Anthological Description of all the Empires and Kingdomes ... in this Terestriall Globe, 2nd edition, 1618, pp. 37-38.

Barbary is that they are "most jealous of their wives".

Heylyn's book<sup>1</sup>, being larger, could afford to be less general than Stafforde's. Where Stafforde had described Africans vaguely as generally black, Heylyn describes the Moors as being of a "dusky colour" (p. 371) while Negroes are "letty coloured" (p. 379). The Aethiopians are "generally olive tawny, excepting only their king himselfe, who is also of a white complexion", and the Egyptians are described as "not blacke, but tawny and browne" (p. 387). These two books illustrate in their varying degrees the proper use of good contemporary authority that was now available in England.

Only two more books printed after 1600 need be specially mentioned, because they happen to have had a direct influence on a play. They are Theophilus Lavender's edition of William Biddulph's The Travels of Certaine Englishmen (1609), and George Sandys' Relation of a Journey begun An. Dom. 1610 (1615).

(The latter seems to have used the former very considerably.)

W. G. Rice has shown conclusively that Philip Massinger used the information contained in these books quite extensively in his play The Renegado.<sup>2</sup>

Philip Massinger did not borrow his plot material from these books, but he borrowed passage after passage on the

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1. Microcosmus, 1621.
  2. "The Source of Massinger's The Renegado", Philological Quarterly, vol. XI, 1932, pp. 65-75.

customs of Mohammedan peoples from one or other of them (probably from Sandys'). Massinger's use of his background is so extensive and so specific that it probably constitutes a unique example of the use of travel books in 17th century drama. Other dramatists were content to borrow a detail or two from such works. If Massinger's use is not typical, it nevertheless gives us a final confirmatory example of the interest that travel and geography books had for 17th century dramatists, and thus illustrates the ultimate debt of English drama to the stimulus given to geographical writing in England by the passionate geographers of the second half of the 16th century.

#### Africa and the Emblem Books

The first English emblem book, Geoffrey Whitney's Choice of Emblemes, was published in 1586, or fifty years after Andrea Alciati's Emblematum Liber on which it was based. But as Rosemary Freeman points out, the works of the continental emblematisers had been familiar to English readers long before Whitney's book was published in their country.<sup>1</sup> The considerable influence of these books on the literature of Renaissance England thus goes back almost to the date of Alciati's first book. (Edward VI owned a 1549 edition of Alciati.<sup>2</sup>) A few of the emblems in the continental emblem books, some of

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1. English Emblem Books, 1948, p. 47.  
2. Freeman, loc. cit.

which were copied in the English ones, involved African subjects, and are thus of some interest here.

It seems very likely that it was the wide influence of the emblem books which accounts for the great popularity of the Elizabethan proverb on the theme of washing a black Moor white.<sup>1</sup> Although the ultimate source of the concept is the Bible - Jeremiah xiii, 23 - yet it only appears as a popular proverb towards the middle of the 16th century. The first occurrence recorded by Morris Palmer Tilley is 1542<sup>2</sup>, by which time Alciati's Emblematum Liber, in which he used this concept for his emblem of "Impossibile", had run into several editions. Alciati's emblem is most interesting in view of the form which the English proverb took. It consists of a drawing of two men washing a black man, with the following accompanying lines:

Albus Aethiopem, quid frustra? an define noctis  
Illustrare nigrae nemo potest tenebras. 3

Alciati's drawing was the inspiration for Whitney's in his Choice of Emblemes under the motto "Aethiopem lavare". Whitney accompanied the drawing of two men washing a black Moor with the following verses:

Leave of with paine, the blackamore to skowre,  
With washinge ofte, and wiping more then due:  
For thou shalt finde, that Nature is of powre,  
Doe what thou canste, to keepe his former hue:

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1. See Chapter VI, p. 281, notes 1 & 2.
  2. A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the 16th and 17th centuries, 1950, p. 190, E 186.
  3. Alciati's Emblems in Their Full Stream, ed. Henry Green, 1871, p. 67.

Thoughe with a forke, wee Nature thruste awaie,  
Shee turnes againe, if wee withdrawe our hande:  
And thoughe, wee ofte to conquer her assaie,  
Yet all in vaine, shee turnes if still wee stande:  
Then euermore, in what thou doest assaie,  
Let reason rule, and doe the thinges thou maie.<sup>1</sup>

Alciati's emblem and Whitney's form of it combined to give great popularity to the proverb that it was vain labour to try to wash an Ethiop white.

There was an even more direct application of the emblem - as an inn sign. S. C. Chew records in The Crescent and the Rose (1937) that there was a tavern in London called "The Labour in Vain" (p. 523). He also (rightly, I believe) sees a connection between this tavern and Zanthia's words in The Knight of Malta:

When I have serv'd  
Your turns, you'll cast me off, or hang me up <sup>2</sup>  
For a sign, somewhere.

Chew does not mention the emblem books, but it seems highly probable that it was the drawing in the emblem book rather than the proverb which provided the inspiration for the sign. The sign in turn gave rise to the nickname of the tavern - "The Devil in a tub".<sup>3</sup>

Cesare Ripa also used an African in an emblem. In his Iconologia, Africa is represented by a woman described as "una donna mora".<sup>4</sup> The face and arms in the first edition (Rome, 1603)

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1. Whitney's Choice of Emblemes, ed. H. Green, 1866, Part I, p. 57.
  2. The Works of Beaumont & Fletcher, ed. Arnold Glover and A. R. Waller, 1905-1912, vol. VII, p. 89.
  3. See Chew, op. cit., p. 524.
  4. Iconologia, Rome, 1603, pp. 335-337.

are unshaded, but in a later edition (Siena, 1613) "una donna mora" is shaded black (Part II, p. 67). The first English edition of Ripa does not appear until the beginning of the 18th century, but when it does, the phrase "una donna mora" is translated "a blackamoor woman".<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare, like many of his contemporaries, came under the influence of the emblem books, and he even created a few of his own emblems in his plays. One of these, the device on the shield of the knight of Spain in Pericles, contains an Ethiopian:

And the device he bears upon his shield  
Is a black Ethiop reaching at the sun;  
The word, Lux tua vita mihi.  
(II, ii, 19-21)

Henry Green, who discusses the provenance of this emblem, concludes that "Failing in identifying the exact source of 'the black Ethiop reaching at the sun', we may then not unreasonably suppose that Shakespeare himself formed the device, and fitted the Latin to it."<sup>2</sup>

Africa's influence on the emblem literature was not great, but what influence there was passed into general currency with the great popularity of the emblem books themselves.

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1. Iconologia or Moral Emblems by Caesar Ripa, ed. P. Tempest, 1707, p. 53, fig. 209.
  2. Shakespeare and the Emblem Writers, 1870, p. 162.

CHAPTER II

AFRICA IN ENGLISH MASQUE AND PAGEANTRY

The English masque had only a short vogue. From its emergence as a distinct art form with a name of its own, to its disappearance as a significant form, the period stretches over less than a century and a half. Reckoning from the days when by the combined efforts of Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones the masque rose to its final form, the period shrinks to a little over three decades. But, from its earliest beginnings to its disappearance, figures from Africa frequently contributed to the splendour and strangeness of both the spectacle and the poetry of the masque. Like the form itself, these African figures were at first vague and ill-defined, bearing little relevance to any over-all theme, and frequently having no connection with Africa except in name. But later, as the masque took a settled form, they became more defined and more deliberately related both to their supposed place of origin and to the themes of the masques in which they appeared. For instance, figures which in the earliest masques would have been described as "Moors" or "Blackamoors" appear in Jonson's Masque of Blacknesse as the "Daughters of Niger" with the authority of "Pliny, Solinus, Ptolemy and of late Leo the African" behind them.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 1925-1952; vol. VII, p. 169.

By this time the African in the masque had emerged fully from the obscurity of the mediaeval tradition in which, like the masque form itself, he had his beginnings.

Whatever may have been the character or the strength of the stimulus which the English masque undoubtedly received from Renaissance Italy, certain of its features are to be found in activities which had been part of English life since mediaeval times. The dance was the nucleus around which the other features of the masque came to be established, and dancing, especially the dance called "Morisce" or "Morisco", had been an essential part of English mediaeval village festivals from earliest times. One of the customs associated with Morris dancing was the blackening of the faces of the participants. This tradition of blackening was also a feature of other popular activities in mediaeval England. The folk processions, the sword dance and the folk drama, all show an employment of the grotesque of which blackening was only one feature.

One of the most interesting characters in the mediaeval mummers play was the king of Egypt, who had a black face and who was accepted by tradition as the father of St. George.<sup>1</sup> The devils were also usually portrayed as black, and indeed some local traditions required all the mummers to have black faces. The term "Morisce" (with its connection with "Moor" and "Morocco")

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1. See E. K. Chambers, The English Folk-Play, 1933, p. 22 and p. 85.



and the king of Egypt also suggest a possible link between the English mediaeval dramatic tradition and Africa.

The practice of blackening was transferred to the more sophisticated court "disguisings" of the 16th century. In the earliest surviving description of a courtly festivity which involved blackening, the terms "Egyptions", "Moreskoes" and "blacke Moors" appear. In this masque-like performance in 1510, Henry VIII and the Earl of Essex had come in "appareled after Turkey fashion", while "the torchebearers were appareyled in Crymosyn satyne and grene, lyke Moreskoes, their faces blacke ..."<sup>1</sup> Later in the same proceedings, six ladies also appeared "their heads rouled in plesauntes and typpers lyke the Egyptions, embroudered with gold. Their faces, neckes, armes and handes, covered with fyne plesaunce blacke ... so that the same ladies seemed to be nigrost [sic] or blacke Mores".<sup>2</sup> In this festivity, as in earlier entertainments of this kind, the black characters were merely decorative. The strangeness of their appearance had an exotic impact, and that was all that was required at that time. But it was this tradition which, continuing, made Queen Anne request Ben Jonson to make the characters in his masque of 1605 "Black-mores at first".

The Elizabethan outdoor pageant also frequently employed

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1. Edward Hall, Henry VIII, ed. Charles Whibley, 1904, vol. I, pp. 15-16.
  2. Ibid., vol. I, p. 17. Plesaunce/Plesauntes was the name of a fine kind of lawn or gauze. See New English Dictionary under Plesaunce 2, now obsolete.

"Moors", and here again this use seems to have been linked with the use of grotesque characters in the mediaeval pageant. A king of Moors appeared in a pageant undertaken by the London drapers in 1522, and a surviving list of expenses in connection with it gives some indication of his function. The relevant entry records

payment of 5s. to John Wakelyn, for playing the king of Moors, (the company finding him his apparell, his stage, and his wyld fire).<sup>1</sup>

Robert Withington, who notes this entry,<sup>2</sup> draws the interesting conclusion that the "wyld fire" seems to connect the king of Moors here with the "wild man" or "green man" whose function in mediaeval pageantry was to clear a way through the crowd for the procession by using "wyld-fire" or fireworks. The king of Moors seems then to have crept into the later "procession" or "entertainment" as a grotesque character, to compel the crowds back by his strange appearance and his use of fireworks. (Individual items of the king's costume suggest that his appearance was spectacular: "the said king's girdle, his garland or turban of white feathers and black satin, sylver paper for his shoes, &c.")<sup>3</sup> In later outdoor pageants this crude function was refined so that the "Moor" or "king of Moors" appeared as a principal speaking character, often acting as the

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1. William Herbert, The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London, 1837, vol. I, p. 455.
  2. English Pageantry, An Historical Outline, 1918, vol. I, p. 40 and also p. 72, note 3.
  3. William Herbert, op. cit., p. 455.

Presenter. In George Peele's pageant of 1585, for instance, the Presenter is described as "him that rid on a luzern before the Pageant, apparelled like a Moor".<sup>1</sup> In Middleton's Triumph of Truth (1613), and Anthony Munday's Chrysanaleia (1616) similarly important functions were reserved for a Moor.

The popularity of Moors in masques can be judged by the number of references in surviving records either to masques specifically called masques of Moors, or to masques involving such characters, during the reigns of Edward VI, Elizabeth, and James I. The charges for a "Masque of Young Moors" given during Shrovetide 1547, in which King Edward took part, make very interesting reading, for they give illuminating information about the costuming of these characters.<sup>2</sup> The blackening was effected through the use of black gloves, nether stockings, and face masks. These items are mentioned in the long list of charges: "To Rychard Lees of London mercer for viij yards d. of black vellett for gloves above thelbow for mores ...";<sup>3</sup> "To hughe Eston the kynges hosyer for the making of xiiij peyres of nether stockes of lether black for mores";<sup>4</sup> a payment to

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1. "The Device of the Pageant borne before Woolstone Dixi". The Works of George Peele, ed. A. H. Bullen, 1888, vol. I, p. 351.
  2. Documents Relating to the Revels at Court in the Time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary, ed. Albert Feuillerat, Louvain, 1914, pp. 26-33.
  3. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
  4. *Loc. cit.*

"Nycholas modena straynger ... for the trymyng Coloring and lynyng of xvj vezars or maskes for moores".<sup>1</sup> Some attempt was made to disguise the hair by giving the Moors "Cappes made with Cowrse budge".<sup>2</sup> The elaborate costumes included "belles to hange at the skyrtes of the mores garments" and "dartes with brode heddes and ffethers of sylver ..."<sup>3</sup> During the same reign, the accounts show that there was a masque involving Moors of January 6th 1551<sup>4</sup> and a masque of female Moors at Christmas 1551.<sup>5</sup>

The accounts relating to the reign of Philip and Mary do not refer to any Moors in masques. In view of the apparent popularity of Moors in masques during Edward's reign, and the fact that a year after Elizabeth's accession they seem to have resumed their popularity and continued to hold it up to and during the reign of James I, this seems to indicate a significant temporary change of taste. One is led to speculate on the possible influence of Philip of Spain, who, having had closer dealings with Moors, may have felt touchier on the subject than English monarchs, whose ideas of Moors were rather more distant.

Whatever the reasons were for the disappearance of Moors

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1. Documents Relating to the Revels at Court in the Time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary, ed. Albert Feuillerat, p. 31.
  2. Loc. cit.
  3. Loc. cit.
  4. Ibid., p. 48.
  5. Ibid., p. 85.

from masques during the reign of Philip and Mary, they reappeared in all their grandeur soon after Queen Elizabeth's accession. An inventory (dated 27th April 1560) of the wardrobe of the Office of the Revels refers to a masque of six Barbarians, and a masque of six Moors.<sup>1</sup> The masque of Barbarians was performed on January 1st, 1560, according to a note in the inventory (p. 20), while the masque of Moors whose date is less certain is placed by E. K. Chambers on January 29th, 1559.<sup>2</sup> The Moors' costumes as described in the inventory are rich, as usual, and show a slight movement towards more realistic portrayal. The evidence for this last suggestion is scanty, but it is noteworthy that there is no reference to bells for the skirts, as in the earlier account, while the reference to "Corled hed Sculles of blacke Laune"<sup>3</sup> show an even greater attempt to represent the woolly hair of black Moors. There are also references as in the earlier account to black velvet, "Imployed wholie into legges ffeete Armes and handes".<sup>4</sup>

The different terms used in the titles of these two masques - "Moors" in one case and "Barbarians" in the other - seem to indicate that the people portrayed were meant to be different from each other. A comparison of the two sets of costumes would

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1. Documents Relating to the Office of the Revels in the Time of Queen Elizabeth, ed. Albert Feuillerat, Louvain, 1908, p.40 and p. 41.
  2. The Elizabethan Stage, 1923, vol. IV, p. 77. He discusses the evidence in vol. I, p. 158, note 1.
  3. Feuillerat, op. cit., p. 41.
  4. Ibid., p. 24.

seem to bear this out. There is no reference to black velvet for legs, feet, arms, and hands in the description of the Barbarians' costume. This is significant, if Chambers' suggested date is right, for the masquers in the Moors' masque had taken away part of the black velvet used for this purpose in the earlier masque, while "the reste was cut into high shoes for the cloynes maske and so thereof nowe nil Serviceable nor chargeable".<sup>1</sup> A fresh lot would thus have been required for the Barbarians' masque, but no such items are recorded. It may be presumed that these Barbarians were portrayed with<sup>out</sup> blackening as "white Moors". They were dressed in "streighte gownes" (as distinct from the "upper boddyes" of the Moors) and elaborate turbans - "hedpeces of redd and blacke golde sarsnet garnished with whyte silver Lane and Cullen sylver frenge topp tasselled with Cullen golde".<sup>2</sup>

There are no more references to masques involving African characters until 1579. (The records of the intervening years are either lost or are very incomplete.) But even this one masque referred to was not performed, although a Willyam Lyzard was paid "for patorns for the mores maske that should have served on Shrovetuesday".<sup>3</sup> There are no other references to masques with Africans in Queen Elizabeth's reign.

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1. Feuillerat, Documents ... Queen Elizabeth, p. 24.  
2. Ibid., p. 40.  
3. Ibid., p. 308.

Before we encounter our next Africans in masques, early in the reign of James I, a remarkable transformation had taken place. The masque had borrowed from the pageants and processions the use of poetry, and this new form had been employed by the gentlemen of the Inns of Court in their Gesta Grayorum (1595).<sup>1</sup> Thus when the masque emerges under James I it emerges as a new form, a form worthy to engage the minds of serious poets. For a short while the English masque flourished as a serious art.

Queen Anne, who was to take a leading part in Ben Jonson's first court masque, expressed a wish "to have them [the masquers] Black-mores at first".<sup>2</sup> This was not in itself a strange request. Now, however, more was involved than mere dressing-up. There had to be a poetic theme which would justify the introduction of black characters. It was therefore logical that Jonson should choose an African theme. His masquers thus emerged as "twelve Nymphs, Negro's, and the daughters of Niger ..."<sup>3</sup> since Negroes were "the blackest nation of the world".<sup>4</sup> Niger himself was "in forme and colour of an Aethiope; his haire, and rare beard curled ..."<sup>5</sup>

Around these characters Jonson weaves an ingenious story, using, whenever he so required, the fictions of the ancients to augment the fruits of his own imagination. The result is an

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1. Published 1688.

2. Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, 1925-1952, vol. VII, p. 169, lines 21-22. (In quotations u, v, and i are modernised wherever necessary.)

3. Ben Jonson, ed. cit., vol. VII, pp. 170-171.

4. Ibid., p. 169, lines 18-19.

5. Ibid., p. 170, lines 50-51.

engaging fable. The daughters of Niger had suddenly discovered, while reading Ovid, that they were not, after all, the most beautiful creatures in the world, and that their present colour was the result of Phaeton's action:

And, that, before his heedlesse flames were hurld  
About the Globe, the Aethiopes were as faire, <sup>1</sup>  
As other Dames ...

The now disillusioned and distracted girls cursed the sun for disfiguring them ("A custome of the Aethiopes, notable in Herod[otus] and Diod[orus] Sic[ulus]. See Plinie Nat. Hist. Lib. 5, cap. 8", adds a helpful Jonson) until they saw in a vision ("for Aethiopes never dreame") that they would recover their beauty if they travelled to a land with the termination "Tania". After passing through "blacke Mauritania, Swarth Lusitania and Rich Aquitania", they arrive in Britannia, the end of their quest. Here the beams of a "Sunne" (James),

are of force  
To blanch an Aethiope, and revive a Cor's [sic]<sup>2</sup>

All they had to do was to bathe thirteen nights in the ocean, and they would gain whiteness and beauty.

Jonson, once he had hit on the idea of black characters, wove both the poetry and, in so far as he controlled Inigo Jones, costume and scenery around them. The costumes and setting were carefully based on pale colours - silver and azure - with "jewells interlaced with ropes of pearle ... best setting off

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1. Ben Jonson, ed. cit., vol. VII, p. 174, lines 162-164.  
2. Ibid., p. 177, lines 254-255.



from the black".<sup>1</sup> The poetry is shot through with contrasts - light and darkness, black and white, death and life, the sun and the moon, and, by total implication, Africa and Europe. Niger's daughters for instance are thus described:

Who, though but blacke in face,  
Yet, are they bright,                     2  
And full of life and light.

In what must have been a tour de force in Elizabethan ears, Niger maintains that the black complexion is the most beautiful:

That, in their black, the perfectst beauty growes;  
Since the fix't colour of their curled haire,  
(Which is the highest grace of dames most faire)  
No cares, no age can change; or there display  
The fearefull tincture of abhorred Gray;  
Since Death her selfe (her selfe being pale and blue) 3  
Can never alter their most faithfull hiew.

Nothing as intricately harmonised as The Masque of Blacknesse had been attempted in the masque form before. It is a perfect blend of matter and manner; in it the extravagance which was germane to the masque is controlled by a disciplined imagination. This opinion was obviously not shared by Sir Dudley Carleton, whose comments on this presentation are preserved for us. Sir Dudley's criticisms of the scenery, that "there was all Fish and no Water", and of the apparel - "too light and Curtizan-light [sic] for such great ones" - show a literal rather than a literary mind. He, however, notes an interesting detail, namely that the masquers used paint (and not the usual velvet

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1. Ben Jonson, ed. cit., vol. VII, p. 171.  
2. Ibid., p. 172, lines 103-105.  
3. Ibid., p. 173, lines 144-150.

masks) to disguise their complexions:

Instead of Vizzards, their Faces and Arms up to the Elbows, were painted black, which was Disguise sufficient, for they were hard to be known; but it became them nothing so well as their red and white, and you cannot imagine a more ugly Sight, then a Troop of lean-cheek'd Moors.<sup>1</sup>

The thirteen days promised in the Masque of Blacknesse, ran into three years before the daughters of Niger, by then washed white, were to return to the stage in the Masque of Beauty which was presented in 1608. Meanwhile, a masque Solomon and the Queen of Sheba was performed in July 1606 as part of the entertainment of King Christian IV of Denmark. All we have of this masque is the description of an orgy of a performance in which the masquers were so overcome with wine that they could scarcely speak, walk or stand.<sup>2</sup> At one point Faith, Hope and Charity were united at the bottom of the lower hall, "sick and spewing". (His Danish Majesty was no less affected than his entertainers, and so a diplomatic disaster was averted.) Sir John Harrington does <sup>not</sup> say any more about the Queen of Sheba than that she upset the gifts she was to present ("wine, cream, jelly, beverage, cakes, spices, and other good matters") into the Danish king's lap. So we do not know whether she was portrayed as black. Since, however, her home was Meroe in Abyssinia

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1. Memorials of Affairs of State in the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I, collected (chiefly) from the papers of Sir Ralph Winwood, 1725, vol. II, pp. 43-44.
  2. Harrington's Nugae Antiquae, ed. Thomas Park, 1804, vol. I, 348-351.

according to current Elizabethan beliefs, she may very well have been. Doubtless her attendants were.

Jonson's Masque of Queens also treats of an Aethiopian queen, the Queen of Meroe, but little is made of her.<sup>1</sup> In The Gypsies Metamorphosed (1621) Jonson made use of the popular Elizabethan idea that gipsies originally came from Egypt. He refers to

Queen Cleopatra  
The Gypsyes grand-matra. 2

Thus we have "five Princes of Aegipt ... begotten upon several Cleopatra's in their severall Countries ..."<sup>3</sup> The gipsies have their faces darkened, not, as the epilogue explains, by means of magic, but by

an oyntment  
Made and laid on by Mr Woolfs appointment. 4

Thomas Campion's Squires' Masque (1613) has a character representing Africa who appears "like a queen of the Moors, with

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1. Inigo Jones' design for her spectacular costume survives in the Chatsworth collection, and is reproduced in Shakespeare's England, 1916, vol. II, facing p. 326.
  2. Ben Jonson, ed. cit., vol. VII, p. 570, lines 173-174. This idea persisted. In Mildmay Fane's Raguaillo D'Oceano, 1640, Africa is represented by "An Egyptian or Gypsye" and "An Abissine or Black Moor" - ed. Clifford Leech, Louvain, 1938, p. 66.
  3. Ben Jonson, ed. cit., vol. VII, p. 567, lines 58-62.
  4. P. 615, lines 1481-1482. This passage disproves the last clause in a statement by E. K. Chambers which reads: "As early as the Mask of Blackness in 1605, blackened faces and arms were substituted, [for velvet masks and gloves] which, says a contemporary writer, were 'disguise sufficient' and 'an ugly sight', and the experiment was not repeated" - The Elizabethan Stage, vol. I, p. 196. Blackened faces were used in The Gypsies Metamorphosed (1621), as the text shows.

a crown".<sup>1</sup> African figures continued to be used in masques right through to the Caroline period. Of these Aurelian Townshend's Tempe Restored (1631)<sup>2</sup> is worth mentioning because one of Inigo Jones' drawings for a Barbarian as he would have appeared in that masque survives in the Chatsworth collection. The drawing, one of the few surviving pictorial representations of African dramatic characters,<sup>3</sup> is reproduced by Allardyce Nicoll in Stuart Masques and the Renaissance Stage, p. 195. In Inigo Jones' drawing the face, hands and neck are black. If the drawing is anything to go by, paint and not velvet was used to disguise these features. The legs, however, are covered with what seems to be black velvet.

The history of the use of African characters in outdoor processions corresponds to that of their use in masques. They emerged from mediaeval usage, and later developed as the medium itself developed. George Peele's pageant of 1585 shows the king of Moors in transition. He still rides before the pageant, retaining the mediaeval function of making a passage through the crowd, but he is also an important part of the pageant, and is

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1. Works, ed. A. H. Bullen, 1889, p. 217.
  2. Aurelian Townshend's Poems and Masks, ed. E. K. Chambers, 1912.
  3. Inigo Jones' drawing of "A Negro Nymph" for Jonson's Masque of Blacknesse now in the Chatsworth collection is reproduced in Designs by Inigo Jones for Masques and Plays at Court, ed. Percy Simpson and C. F. Bell, 1924, plate I. A drawing of "Queen Candace, Queen of the Aethiops" in the Masque of Queens also survives in the Chatsworth collection. She is not painted black in the drawing, which is reproduced in Shakespeare's England, 1916, opposite p. 326.

given dramatic significance. He is a "stranger", "from the parching zone", whose subsequent lines in praise of London are thus given the ring of independent testimony:

Lo, lovely London, rich and fortunate,  
Famed through the world for peace and happiness,  
Is here advanced, and set in highest seat,  
Beautified throughly as her state requires ! 1

He ends by counselling the Lord Mayor to guard London,

The jewel wherewithal your sovereign queen  
Hath put your honour lovingly in trust. 2

Middleton's king of Moors in The Triumphs of Truth (1613), is even more closely woven into the pageant. He is not only one of the characters, but the symbol of his colour is worked into the poetry. The king is not surprised at the amazement on the faces "of these white people ... at seeing ... a king so black",

in a land  
Where true religion and her temple stand;  
I being a Moor, then, in Opinion's lightness,  
As far from sanctity as my face from whiteness. 3

In spite of his colour, however, he is on the side of truth:

However darkness dwells upon my face,  
Truth in my soul sets up the light of grace. 4

He explains that he has been converted by the religious conversation

Of English merchants, factors, travellers,

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1. The Works of George Peele, ed. A. H. Bullen, 1888, vol. I, p. 351, lines 9-12.
  2. Ibid., p. 353, lines 46-47.
  3. The Works of Thomas Middleton, ed. A. H. Bullen, 1886, vol. VII, p. 248. The "temple" is St. Paul's, within sight of which the pageant was performed.
  4. Ibid., p. 248.

and, as his banner announces, he is now steered by truth. Error, who also appears in the pageant and is pictured as smiling, betwixt scorn and anger, to see such a devout humility take hold of that complexion,

exclaims:

What have my sweet-fac'd devils forsook me too?  
(p. 249)

The symbolism in all these lines is obvious, being based on the traditional associations of white and black.

Anthony Munday's Chrysanaleia (1616) shows another, though a shallower, symbolic use of the king of Moors in a pageant. The king of Moors "gallantly mounted on a golden Leopard" is "hurling gold and silver every way about him".<sup>1</sup> This, it turns out, is to symbolise the amity between the Fishermen's company and the Gold and Silversmiths. (The king of Moors, his six tributary kings, and his largess of gold and silver, called "his Indian treasure", suggest the influence of popular conceptions of Prester John on his portrayal.) Munday's earlier play John A Kent and John A Cumber<sup>2</sup> illustrates very interestingly this role of "Moors" in pageants. The clownish servants in

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1. Chrysanaleia, The Golden Fishing or Honour of Fishmongers, 1616, fol. B verso.
  2. The date of the play is uncertain. Celeste Turner in Anthony Mundy, 1928, p. 106 suggests 1590. E. K. Chambers, identifying the play with The Wise Men of West Chester, suggests 1594 while not leaving out the possibility that it may have been earlier. This is also the position taken by Muriel St. Claire Byrne in her introduction to the play (Malone Society Reprints, 1923, p. X).

the play prepare a welcoming pageant for the noblemen, and in this pageant Turnop deutes Spurling to play the Moor: "Spurling, you play the Moore, vaunce up your Tun".<sup>1</sup> During the actual presentation, Turnop as the Presenter introduces the Moor thus:

Our presents precious, first the golden Tunne,  
borne by the monstrous Murrian black a Moore, 2  
Mortonus Earlus in thy prayse is done.

Sometimes Moors appeared in effigy in pageants, again merely to introduce an element of the grotesque. Figures of naked Moors were used in a Norwich pageant in 1556, and a hundred years later, "two leopards bestrid by two Moors attird in the habit of their country" feature among the set pieces of the Lord Mayor's show of 1656.

Enough has been said to show that figures from Africa played a significant part in the pageantry of England throughout and beyond the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, and that their use underwent change and refinement along with the evolution of the processions, entertainments and masques in which they were employed.

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1. Ed. St. Claire Byrne, 1923, p. 13, lines 365-366.  
2. Ibid., p. 13.

CHAPTER III

DRAMATIC TREATMENTS OF AFRICAN CHARACTERS

One of the most pronounced elements in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama was the exotic element which manifested itself in the employment by dramatists of strange settings, and characters from far distant lands. This gave scope for the introduction of whatever real knowledge of such distant lands the dramatist may have possessed, but in the absence of very much information this exoticism released him from the limited realms of readily verifiable fact into the unlimited realms of imagination. This trend was also a part of the tradition of the masque, which, even more than the drama, relied heavily on sheer brilliance of spectacle.

With the publication of books of travel and new maps, new lands - or at least their romantic names - presented themselves, not only to lend colour to the poetry of the drama, but to give an excuse for the introduction of novelty of character, costume, and setting. The dramatists ranged over wide spaces. Italy, Spain, and France offered venues nearer home, but Asia, Africa, and sometimes purely imaginary lands provided more colourful settings. Common Conditions (1576), for example, traverses practically the whole of the then known world, and ends with the marriage of Nomides, an Arabian knight, to Sabia, daughter of a French doctor.

Africa very often provided colourful settings and characters



for the romantic dramas of the day. Among the characters in Robert Greene's Orlando Furioso (1591) are "the Emperor of Africa" and "the Soldan of Egypt", besides others like the kings of Cuba, Mexico and the Isles. In Alphonsus, King of Arragon (c. 1587) there had also appeared "Arcastus, King of the Moors, and Claramount, King of Barbary".<sup>1</sup> No dramatist was more conscious of the immense scope which the new and growing knowledge of the world opened to the dramatist than was Christopher Marlowe. The boundless range of his own imagination made him especially receptive to information about the vast spaces of earth which were being revealed. With his ear for rich sounds and his eye for the spectacular stage effect, he seized the opportunity of enlarging still further the already wide bounds of setting, and of enriching his poetry with new sonorous names.

Tamburlaine, apart from other things, is a spatial exercise. Marlowe seems to have been fascinated by the sheer vastness of the earth which effectively symbolized for him the vastness of Tamburlaine's ambition. The Scythian shepherd is not content to be lord of the old or "triple world"; he sets his sights even further:

I will confute those blind Geographers  
That make a triple region in the world,  
Excluding Regions which I meane to trace,  
And with this pen reduce them to a Map,  
Calling the Provinces, Citties and townes

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1. E. K. Chambers' dates are accepted here. See The Elizabethan Stage, vol. III, pp. 327 and 329.

After my name and thine Zenocrate.<sup>1</sup>

Marlowe combed the newly published map of Abraham Ortelius - "Theatrum Orbis Terrarum" (1570) - for geographical information with which to fill his wider canvas. Miss Ethel Seaton has shown that Marlowe followed this map very closely, and that where his geography was wrong - for example when he locates Zanzibar in the western part of Africa - he was merely copying Ortelius' errors.<sup>2</sup>

In Tamburlaine's train appear three African Kings - Fez, Morocco and Argier. Zenocrate's father is the Soldan of Egypt. Tamburlaine himself exhibits special pride in his African conquests, and proudly calls himself "great Lord of Affrica".<sup>3</sup> Techelles' description of his great march over Africa illustrates Marlowe's use of vast distances and sonorous names:

And I have march't along the river Nile  
To Machda, where the mighty Christian Priest  
Cal'd John the great, sits in a milk-white robe,  
Whose triple Myter I did take by force,  
And made him sweare obedience to my crowne.  
From thence unto Cazates did I martch,  
Wher Amazonians met me in the field:  
With whom (being women) I vouchsaft a league,  
And with my power did march to Zansibar  
The Westerne part of Affrike, where I view'd<sup>4</sup>  
The Ethiopian sea ...

Marlowe's Africa, as this passage illustrates, was essentially a series of names on a map. As for the peoples of Africa, they were never treated in any detail. They were the strange,

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1. I Tamburlaine, IV, iv, 1715-1720. Works, ed. Tucker Brooke, 1910. (In quotations, the letters i, u and v are modernised where necessary.)
  2. Ethel Seaton, "Marlowe's Map", Essays and Studies, vol. X, 1924, pp. 13-35.
  3. I Tamburlaine, III, iii, 1343.
  4. II Tamburlaine, I, vi, 2755-2765.

picturesque inhabitants of a strange, picturesque land. Their colour was a striking feature which was frequently mentioned. Regardless of what the more informed writers may have said about the different colours of Africans, only their blackness seems to have registered firmly in the minds of audience and playwrights alike. So for Marlowe too, Africans - generally called Moors, irrespective of their place of origin - were black. (Some dramatists, notably Peele in The Battle of Alcazar, and Shakespeare in Titus Andronicus and The Merchant of Venice, emphasized the distinctions between white and black Moors, but frequently this was ignored.) Techelles, promising troops to Tamburlaine, includes

an hoste of Moores trainde to the war  
Whose coleblacke faces make their foes retire. 1

In the second part of Tamburlaine, even Egyptians are specifically referred to as 'black' (I, i, 2388). Marlowe would almost certainly have known of the existence of 'white Moors', but on the stage black figures were more striking, and in poetry the symbolic significance of black was greater. The sheer appeal of colour is seen in Callapine's line when he entices his keeper Almeda with promises of untold riches in return for his freedom: "With naked Negros shall thy coach be drawn".<sup>2</sup> The Moors were given general characteristics in line with their

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1. II Tamburlaine, I, vi, 2710-2711. The force of 'coleblacke' is seen in its application to Tamburlaine's third set of colours, whose appearance meant total destruction for a besieged town. See Part I, V, i, 1790.
  2. II Tamburlaine, I, iii, 2531.

colour.<sup>1</sup> They were fierce and un pitying:

And Moores, in whom was never pitie found,<sup>2</sup>  
Will hew us peacemeale ...

They existed in limitless numbers - "Argier and Affrick's frontier towns" produced "Twise twenty thousand valiant men at armes".<sup>3</sup>

These hosts of black people were presented with the other popularly held notions of Africa: its rainlessness (I, V, ii, 2239), Egypt with its famous Nilus and its crocodiles

that unaffrighted rest,  
While thundring Cannons rattle on their Skins,<sup>4</sup>

Prester John, and the Amazons. On the more factual level, "Argeire" was the home of the pirates -

the cruell pirates of Argeire  
That damned traine, the scum of Affrica.<sup>5</sup>

For Marlowe, Africa did not contain personalities so much as phenomena. For many Elizabethan dramatists, in fact, Africa was no more.

Marlowe's Tamburlaine illustrates the use of African characters as little more than part of the general spectacle of

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1. The symbolic connotation of black as contrasted with white is illustrated in the contempt which Tamburlaine showed for the white hair of his children in Part II, I, iv, 2594-2597:  
Their haire as white as milke and soft as Downe,  
Which should be like the quilles of Porcupines,  
As black as Jeat, and hard as Iron or steel  
Bewraies they are too dainty for the wars.
  2. Part II, III, iv, 3431-3432.
  3. Part II, I, v, 2689.
  4. Part I, IV, 1, 1381-1382.
  5. Part I, III, iii, 1153-1155.

the play, as strange figures who lent colour and romance to it, and of the land as a source of poetic images. Many, even later, dramatists made no more use of Africa and its peoples. The presentation of Africans as individualized characters worthy of detailed treatment began when George Peele seized upon an historical occurrence which projected a Moor into great prominence in European eyes, and brought Europe and Africa spectacularly together. This occurrence, which provided ready-made materials for a striking portrait of a Moor, was the battle of Alcazar, and the Moor was Mulai Mohammed, the Muly Hamet of Peele's play, The Battle of Alcazar.

THE BATTLE OF ALCAZAR

The battle of Alcazar (El-ksar el Kebir), fought in Barbary in 1578, in which Sebastian of Portugal and his army were crushed by the Moors under Abd-el-Malek, provided the materials for a romantic tragedy well suited to Elizabethan tastes. Almost all the ingredients for such a tragedy were present: villainy - duly punished - in Muly Hamet, misguided chivalry in Sebastian and Captain Stukeley, virtue - justly rewarded - in Abd-el-Malek, and a large loss of life. All these elements simply invited dramatic treatment. The magnitude of the disaster alone made the subject sensational. Practically every able-bodied Portuguese nobleman had followed the fool-hardy Sebastian to Africa, and had died in the battle. J. F. Connestaggio, on the consequences of the battle for Portugal, writes:

There was none in Lisbone, but had some interest in this warre, who so had not his sonne there, had his father; the one her husbande, the other her brother; the traders and handie-crafts men, who had not their kinsemen there (and yet many of them had) did venture their wealth in it, some of them for the desire of gaine, and others for that they could not call in that which they had lent to Gentlemen, and souldiers: by reason whereof all were in heaviness,...

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1. G. Connestaggio, The Historie of the Uniting of the Kingdom of Portugall to the Crowne of Castil, 1600, p. 55. (In quotations, i, u and v are modernised where necessary.) This book was first published in Genoa in 1585 and was very widely read in Europe. It was translated into several languages: French (1596), English (1600), Latin (1602), and Spanish (1610). The English translation was by Ed. Blount.

Apart from the flower of Portugal, troops from Germany, the Low Countries, Spain, and Italy fought and died in the battle.

For the ordinary Englishman, however, interest in the battle was centred on the figure of Sir Thomas Stukeley, who, rather contrary to his just deserts, became a popular hero. Stukeley, who in his lifetime had been twice imprisoned for treasonable activities against his country - once for spying in England for Henry II of France, and again for plotting with the Spanish ambassador to invade Ireland - had also been a privateer, and one of the heroes of Lepanto. All the hero-worship which was lavished on him at his death was doubly ironical because he was actually on his way to invade Ireland with the blessing of the Pope, when he was persuaded to join the expedition to Alcazar which he regarded as a breakfast on the Moors before a dinner on the English. (Abd-el-Malek, equally confident of victory in the battle, however, sent word to Elizabeth, promising to send her this troublesome man as a present.<sup>1)</sup>)

All these facts about Stukeley were either not popularly known or were interred with his bones, for he passed straight

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1. Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, 1568-1579, p. 611.

into legend.<sup>1</sup>

1. Among the popular works on Stukeley which include treatments of his last battle are:
  - (i) 'The Life and Death of Famous Stukelie, an English Gallant in the time of Queen Elizabeth who ended his dayes in a battle of three kings in Barbary'. Richard Simpson reproduces this ballad (without the title) in The School of Shakespere, 1878, vol. I, pp. 144-151. The title is given with the text in a volume of ballads in the Wood Collection in the Bodleian Library (Shelfmark, Wood 401).
  - (ii) The Famous History of Stout Stucley: or his valliant life and death. A prose pamphlet also in the Wood Collection (Wood 254, 13).
  - (iii) At the end of the pamphlet mentioned in (ii) above, is a ballad on Stukeley beginning:

In England in the west  
Where Phoebus takes his rest  
There lusty Stukeley he was born.
  - (iv) An anonymous play The Famous History of the Life and Death of Captain Thomas Stukeley (1596) treats the whole life of the hero, and includes a short biography spoken by the hero himself just before his death. (A number of commendatory references to Stukeley in works of the period are quoted by Alexander Dyce in his edition of Peele's Works, 1828, vol. II, pp. 3-4.) Other accounts of this famous battle which are not primarily connected with Stukeley include:
    - (a) A Dolorous Discourse of a most terrible battle, fought in Barbarie, entered in The Stationers' Register to J. Charlwood, March 1579. The author is unknown. This account is reproduced in H. de Castries' Les Sources Inédites D'Angleterre, de L'Histoire de Maroc, 1918, vol. I, pp. 331-338.
    - (b) Edward White, A Brief Rehersall of the bloodie Battel in Barbary, entered in The Stationers' Register, Feb. 1579.
    - (c) Historia de Bello Africano ... in Latinum translata per Ioannem Thomam Freigium, Nürnberg, 1580. Peele may have used this for his account of the battle. Warner G. Rice in 'A Principal Source of the Battle of Alcazar' Modern Language Notes, vol. LVIII, 1943, pp. 428-431, thinks that Peele "almost certainly read this work in the English translation printed by John Poleman" (in The Second Part of the Booke of Battailles, published 1587). The verbal correspondences between lines 1077-1095 of the play and a section of folio U2b of Poleman's translation are almost conclusive proof of this.
    - (d) Ro. C., A True Discourse of Muly Hamet's Rising, 1609.



While ordinary Englishmen were extolling Stukeley in ballads, pamphlets, and plays, the Queen and her counsellors were preoccupied with the imminent danger of Philip of Spain's accession to the now vacant throne of Portugal, and with attempts to prevent it. These attempts also helped to keep the memory of Sebastian, Stukeley, and the battle alive in England for some time.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from all this human interest in the battle and its consequences for Europe, the setting - Africa - and the characters of the Moorish participants provided the ingredient of romance, as well as an opportunity to the dramatist to reproduce something of the exotic extravagance of Tamburlaine. Such, then, were the opportunities offered to Peele by this rich historical event.

#### The date of the play.

The date of the play is important in this study because it appears to be the first full-length treatment of a Moorish character in English dramatic literature.

The facts relevant to the dating of the play are briefly these. On the title page of the quarto edition printed in

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1. Peele's "Farewell to Norris and Drake" (1589), which contains a reference to Tom Stukeley among the popular stage heroes of the day, was written on the occasion of the two men's departure on an expedition to set Don Antonio on the Portuguese throne.

1594, appear the words "as it was sundrie times plaid by the Lord High Admiral his servants". W. W. Greg<sup>1</sup> points out that there is no reference in Henslowe's Diary to a performance in 1594, and concludes that it must have been performed earlier than that year. Another clue to the date is the reference in Peele's "Farewell to Norris and Drake", a poem entered in The Stationers' Register on April 18, 1589, to Tom Stukeley as a popular stage hero:

Bid theatres and proud tragedians,  
 Bid Mahomet's Poo and mighty Tamburlaine,  
 King Charlemagne, Tom Stukeley and the rest,  
 Adieu.

If this reference is to The Battle Alcazar, as Dyce<sup>2</sup>, Greg<sup>3</sup> and Chambers<sup>4</sup> take it to be, then the date is even earlier. Greg supports "not later than Christmas 1588", while E. K. Chambers suggests 1589. Unless the identification of the reference in "Farewell to Norris and Drake" is wrong<sup>5</sup>, later dates like F. E. Schelling's 1591<sup>6</sup> must be ruled out.

If Greg's early date is preferred - it seems the most satisfactory - then the play gives the earliest full treatment of Moors as dramatic characters.

1. The Battle of Alcazar, ed. W. W. Greg (Malone Society Reprints), 1907, Introduction, p.v.
2. Alexander Dyce, The Works of George Peele, 1828, vol. II, p. 4.
3. The Battle of Alcazar, 1907, p.v.
4. E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, 1923, vol. III, pp. 459-460.
5. Richard Simpson, The School of Shakespere, 1878, vol. I, pp. 153-154, thinks so.
6. F. E. Schelling, Elizabethan Drama, 1908, vol. I, p. 228.

Muly Hamet

The hero of The Battle of Alcazar, Muly Hamet, is called in the play "The More". This title is in itself significant in a play in which most of the characters are Moors. The explanation is that the historical counterpart of Muly Hamet - Mulai Mohammed - was born of a Negro mother.<sup>1</sup> The stage character thus attracts to himself the title "More", which to the Elizabethan mind usually conveyed the image of a black person. In addition to this general title, Muly is also referred to as "the Negro Muly Hamet" (10) and "Negro Moore" (921).<sup>2</sup>

Muly Hamet was a novelty on the stage in that he was probably the earliest Moor-villain, but his character owes something to his white predecessors. In his boastful grandiloquence, for instance, he is reminiscent of Marlowe's Tamburlaine. Apart from the general similarity between their inflated stylés, there is one striking verbal echo in line 250 of The Battle of Alcazar when Muly exclaims: "Tamberlaine triumph not, for thou must die", which is suggestively similar to Tamburlaine's own

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1. This fact about Mulai's parentage was well known. The prose narrative 'A Dolorous Discourse' records this about the original of Muly: "Now the cruel King Mulla Abdulla, amongst manye other, taking to his wife a bondwoman, that was a blacke Negro, had by her a sonne called Mulla Sheriffa [this is our Muly] who for that he was of his mothers complection was commonly called the Black King ... " H. de Castries, Les Sources Inédites, Angleterre, vol. I, p. 332. Poleman's translation of Freigius' account of the battle also records of Muly that he was "so blacke, that he was accompted of many for a Negro or black Moore."
  2. Quotations are from W. W. Greg's 1907 edition in which the lines are continuously numbered throughout. (The letters i, u and v are modernised where necessary.)

final words in Part II of Marlowe's play: "For Tamburlaine, the Scourge of God must die". (4641) Combined with this bombastic element, there is also in Muly a suggestion of craft - in his treacherous dealings with his brother, his uncle, and Sebastian - which reveals traces of the dramatic type of the Machiavel. This curious combination of the grandiloquent extrovert and the subtle plotter is a characteristic which other stage Moors, Aaron and Eleazer for example, were to demonstrate later.

Muly is presented from the outset in a totally unfavourable light, and in this he is contrasted with his light-skinned uncle, Abdilmelec<sup>1</sup>, against whom he is fighting.

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1. Abdilmelec in the play corresponds to the historical Abd-el-Malek, who in contrast to other Moors, and the Turks among whom he was brought up, was quite favourably disposed towards Christians. He encouraged trade with Christian countries and especially with England. The cannon balls with which the armies of Sebastian and Mulai Mohammed were shattered came from England - under a secret treaty between Elizabeth and Abd-el-Malek - in exchange for saltpetre. His reception of the Queen's ambassador, described in Hakluyt's Principal Navigations, 1904, vol. VI pp. 285-294, was so warm that it aroused the jealousy of the Portuguese ambassador, who lodged a protest against it in London (Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1577-1578, p. 68). Elizabeth was in fact regarded by Catholics as being responsible for the defeat of Sebastian at Alcazar. In the words of the Papal Nuncio in Spain: "there is no evil that is not devised by that woman, who, it is perfectly plain, succoured Muloco [Abd-el-Malek] with arms, and especially with artillery" (Calendar of State Papers, Rome, 1572-1578, p. 495).

The Presenter's speech at the beginning handily summarizes the play's attitude towards the chief characters:

Honor the spurre that pricks the princely minde,  
To followe rule and climbe the stately chaire,  
With great desire inflames the Portingall,  
An honorable and couragious king,  
To undertake a dangerous dreadfull warre,  
And aide with Christian armes the barbarous Moore,  
The Negro Muly Hamet that with-holds  
The Kingdome from his unkle Abdilmelec,  
Whom proud Abdallas wrongd,  
And in his throne instals his cruell sonne,  
That now usurps upon this prince,  
This brave Barbarian Lord Muly Molocco.  
The passage to the crowne by murder made,  
Abdallas dies, and [leaves]<sup>1</sup> this tyrant king,  
Of whome we treate sprong from the Arabian moore  
Blacke in his looke, and bloudie in his deeds,  
And in his shirt staind with a cloud of gore,  
Presents himselfe with naked sword in hand,  
Accompanied as now you may behold,  
With devils coted in the shapes of men. 2

(Alcazar, 1-23)

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1. "leaves" is the result of Dyce's emendation of "deisnes" which appears in the 1594 edition of the play.
  2. The attitudes to the different characters shown in this speech and elsewhere in the play correspond to the attitudes in the pamphlet "A Dolorous Discourse", 1579. For instance, the pamphlet excuses Sebastian thus:  
The kinge of Portingale being a lusty young gentleman,  
about 23 years of age, peradventure pricked forwarde  
by a vaine hope and ambitious desire of gaine and glory,  
not respecting the perril that depended ther uppon,  
promised the sayd Sheriffe to performe his desyre  
therein;  
(de Castries, Les Sources Inedites Angleterre, vol. I, p. 33.)  
In this pamphlet Muly is described as "so cruel a tyrant".  
These and other correspondences do not necessarily mean that  
Peele read this particular pamphlet, although it is quite  
possible that he did. The attitude of the pamphlet  
corresponds to popular European opinion. W. W. Greg, in  
fact, states that there is little evidence of Peele having  
used this pamphlet (Greg, Two Elizabethan Stage Abridgements,  
1923, p. 9, footnote).

The cruelty of Muly suggested here is soon demonstrated in the dumb show in which he is shown treacherously supervising the murder of his two younger brothers and his uncle Abdelmenen. Thus the stage is set for a typical revenge play - crime to be followed by retribution - to which the Presenter actually looks forward in lines 49-54. The necessities of a chronicle play, however, rather blur the revenge theme.

After the opening dumb show, Muly's character is portrayed in a series of scenes in which his high-sounding terms rise far above his deeds. His first reaction to a setback of any kind is a spate of bombastic curses or equally bombastic yet empty boasts. In scene ii, he is despatching his treasure for safe keeping, when his son brings news of the forces ranged against him, and of the fact that his opponents have received help from the Turks under the leadership of Bassa. Without waiting for details, Muly bursts out:

Why boy, is Amuraths Bassa such a bug,  
That he is markt to do this doubtie deed ?  
Then Bassa, locke the winds in wards of brasse,  
Thunder from heaven [,] damne wretched men to death  
Barre [Bear] all the offices of Saturnes sonnes,  
Be Pluto then in hell and barre the fiends,  
Take Neptunes force to thee and calme the seas,  
And execute Joves justice on the world,  
Convey Tamberlaine into our Affrike here,  
To chastice and to menace lawfull kings,  
Tamberlaine triumph not, for thou must die  
As Philip did, Caesar, and Caesars peeres. 1  
(240-251)

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1. Square brackets indicate emendations to the 1594 text accepted by A. H. Bullen in his edition of the play - The Works of George Peele, vol. I.

This outburst is characteristic of the Moor's habit of dodging reality with pointless speeches in which the classical gods - frequently of the lower world - and their haunts are his favourite sources of imagery. Here his mind soon veers away from the uncomfortable reality of Bassa and his troops to the gods, Tamburlaine, Philip, and Caesar. Certainly, the rhetoric is Tamburlaine's; but Muly's character is no blind imitation of his predecessor's. Peele has cleverly adapted his character to the facts of history. His bombast and large curses are in his case a cloak; a refusal to come face to face with the fact that his cause is doomed from the start; merely an external show to blind himself to the reality of his inward fear and cowardice. Viewed in this way, Muly's character is not as simple as it appears on the surface. He is always next door to despair, and only keeps himself from surrendering completely to it by his own words.

He is not a man of action like Tamburlaine. Peele gives him only two positive acts: one is from history - his luring of Sebastian with promises, to fight on his behalf; the other, a superb effort of the playwright's own imagination, is the episode in which Muly obtains lion's flesh for the fainting Calipolis.

His dealings with Sebastian are used to illustrate both his treachery and his cowardice. He flatters the young king in his presence, eggs him on to fight, and then callously abandons him during the battle, retiring to a safe place to await the

outcome. Thus having welcomed him, and sworn in his usual style by "the hellish prince grim Pluto" to

... performe religiously to thee,  
That I have holyly earst undertane (1007-1008),

and having burst in once again on the now wavering King to "exclime [sic] upon this dastard flight" (1193) and to urge him to stand and fight, he takes no further part in the fighting, except by making fruitless invocations which by their very fury betray his inner lack of confidence:

Now have I set these Portugals aworke,  
To hew a waie for me unto the crowne,  
Or with your [their] weapons here to dig your [their]  
                                graves [.]  
You dastards of the night and Erybus,  
Fiends, Fairies, hags that fight in beds of steele,  
Range through this armie with your yron whips,  
Drive forward to this deed this christian crew,  
And let me triumph in the tragedie,  
Though it be seald and honourd with my [the] bloud,  
Both of the Portugall and barbarous Moore.  
                                (1227-1236)

Muly is a coward, but he is also a conscious manipulator of others - a trait which Aaron and Eleazer (and of course white villains, particularly Iago) were to cultivate with the relish of amateurs in crime. The lines just quoted also prepare - in their suggestions of cowardice - for Muly's next precipitate entrance in which he calls Richard-like for a horse, but, unlike Richard, only "To swimme the river ... and to flie" (1390). In this extremity his curses flow with their wonted vehemence; he seeks for



Some uncouth walke where I may curse my fill,  
My starres, my dam, my planets and my nurse,  
The fire, the aire, the water, and the earth,  
(1392-1394)

and indeed without waiting for the "uncouth walke", he proceeds to curse all these persons and objects (1398-1409). In his final lines, as he disappears to an ignominious death by drowning while running away, he vows revenge on Abdilmelec, again in words which suggest his deeper consciousness that even this last revenge will not materialize, for its venue swiftly changes, from here and now, to

If not on earth, yet when we meete in hell,  
Before grim Minos, Rodomant, and Eocus.  
(1422-1423)

All this is a clever adaptation of the facts of history in order to create an effective stage character. Yet it is in the invented episode in which Muly hunts for lion's flesh for his wife, Calipolis, and that Peele, in the interplay of these two well contrasted characters, most effectively demonstrates his skill in character portraiture.

This scene (III, iii) opens with Muly in a characteristic mood. He is in despair, is blind to all but his own predicament, and, as is usual with him in such circumstances, is hiding behind curses which are couched in language whose wild images, in their suggestions of death, betray his inner consciousness of the hopelessness of his cause:

Some foule contagion of the infected heaven,  
Blast all the trees, and in their cursed tops,  
The dismall night raven and tragike owle

Breed, and become fore-tellers of my fall,  
The fatal ruine of my name and me,  
Adders and serpents hisse at my disgrace,  
And wound the earth with anguish of their stings.  
(518-524)

To this Calipolis replies with a quiet sense of reality, enjoining Muly to address himself to their present "distrest estate":

I faint my Lord, and naught may cursing plaintes  
Refresh the fading substance of my life.  
(532-533)

Calipolis' speech does in fact succeed in bringing Muly sufficiently close to reality to make him go out and hunt for food. While Muly is absent from the stage, Peele uses the interval to develop further the tender character of Calipolis. Their son - a miniature of his father - tries to console his mother with the hope that their position will soon improve, since Muly has now succeeded in luring Sebastian with empty promises to fight for him - the son is as cynical as the father (569-575). Calipolis, without scolding, quietly refuses the comfort of such words:

But more dishonor hangs on such misdeeds,  
Than all the profit their returne can beare.  
(576-577)

Her quiet integrity here glitters like the proverbial gold of Barbary against the dark background of Muly's perfidy. When Muly returns and proudly proffers food which turns out to be lion's flesh, and with promises of even more extravagantly procured fare -

I will provide thee of a princely ospraie,  
That as she flyeth over fish in pooles,  
The fish shall turne their glistering bellies up,  
And thou shalt take thy liberall choice of all -  
(602-605)

Calipolis' reticent reception of this royal but unappetising fare is eloquent of her good sense:

Thankes good my Lord, and though my stomacke be  
Too queasie to disgest such bloudie meate,  
Yet strength I it with vertue of my minde,  
I doubt no whit but I shall live my Lord.  
(610-613)

With these words Calipolis disappears from the play; but the firmness of her outline, the economy of her portrayal, as well as the veiled but eloquent commentary on Muly which is implied in her quiet sense of reality, all these make this character into a sensitive vignette, in a play which in other places shows cruder techniques. Nowhere else in the imaginative literature of the period does the Moorish woman in her own country emerge with such clarity and effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> Beside her, the other ladies in this play - the Queen and Rubin Arches - are mere shadows, appearing in the more customary passive role of the subservient Moorish woman, and reflecting little personality. Even Calipolis' forerunner, the Egyptian Zenocrate, is a less sensitive portrayal, although the extravagant verbal love-making of Muly to Calipolis is strongly reminiscent of the Tamburlaine/Zenocrate relationship. (Later portrayals of Moorish women who appear as Moors-in-exile in plays set outside Barbary -

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1. There is in George Wilkins' later pamphlet Three Miseries of Barbary (1606) a lively portrayal of the rivalry between two wives of the Emperor Mahomet, Lilia Ageda and Isa, which also brings out something of the humanity of the Moorish woman at home. The chapter is headed: "A Pretty combat between two of the Emperor's wives, played before the Emperor himself".

Zanche in Webster's The White Devil (1611) and Zanthia in Fletcher's The Knight of Malta (1616-1618), for example - are quite differently conceived.)

In contrast to Muly, his uncle Abdilmelec, whose historical counterpart stood higher in the estimation of Englishmen, is represented as a just defender of right, the instrument of Nemesis, quietly confident of victory. While Muly rants and curses in the name of the classical gods of the lower world, Abdilmelec, on reaching the borders of his native city, turns his thoughts and those of his followers to God:

Cease ratling drums, and Abdilmelec here  
 Throw up thy trembling hands to heavens throne [.]  
 Pay to thy God due thankes, and thankes to him  
 That strengthens thee with mightie gracious armes,  
 Against the proud usurper of thy right,  
 The roiall seate and crowne of Barbarie.

(73-78)

His attitude to Sebastian is not only free of spite, but is sympathetic to the point of condescension. He considers Sebastian's course misguided, and seeks to dissuade him by peaceful means from joining the cause of Muly:

But for I have my selfe a souldier bin,  
 I have in pittie to the Portugall  
 Sent secret messengers to counsell him.

(905-907)

Abdilmelec's attitude is thus in line with that of the Presenter towards Sebastian. His character is not, however, roundly drawn. Peele treats him primarily as the instrument of revenge and as a symbolic contrast to Muly.

We have then in this play two principal Moors. Abdilmelec emerges as the prototype of the dignified "white" Moor, endowed with a romantic oriental dignity, wise and, according to his own lights, pious. If he is the forerunner of any other character it is of Shakespeare's Prince of Morocco. Muly is an altogether different conception. He is the type of the cruel Moor who is usually portrayed, as he is here, as black.<sup>1</sup> Historical accident thus combined with popular rumour to produce Muly, who headed a line of black Moors on the stage, a line which included notably Aaron in Titus Andronicus (1589-1590)<sup>2</sup>, Eleazer in Lust's Dominion (1599), and, in a striking reversal of the traditional portrayal, the hero of Othello (1604).

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1. The 'plot' for this play (Henslowe Papers, ed. Greg, 1907, p. 138-141) supports the view that, while Muly and his henchmen were played as black, the Moors under Abdilmelec were played as white or tawny Moors. This plot is examined in more detail in Chapter IV, pp. 238 - 240.
  2. See pp. 102-103 below for a discussion of this controversial date.

TITUS ANDRONICUS

Both the authorship and the date of Titus Andronicus are matters on which there is still some uncertainty. The strongest reason for attributing the play to Shakespeare is that two contemporary sources attributed it to him. Francis Meres in his Palladis Tamia (1598) includes this play in his list of Shakespeare's plays, and the editors of the first folio edition included it in the Shakespeare canon. Since then, the play's wholesale surrender to the appetite for blood of Elizabethan playgoers has made many critics eager to follow up the statement by Edward Ravenscroft in an "address" to his own adaptation of the play, to the effect that he had been told "by some anciently conversant with the Stage, that it was not Originally his [Shakespeare's], but brought by a private Author to be Acted, and he only gave some Master-touches to one or two of the Principal Parts or Characters, ..."<sup>1</sup> Critics have come to very different conclusions on the available evidence.

J. M. Robertson concluded that the play was the product of many hands, not one of which was Shakespeare's.<sup>2</sup> More recently, J. Dover Wilson has argued for the hands of Peele and Kyd as well as that of Shakespeare, giving Act I in particular to Peele.<sup>3</sup>

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1. E. K. Chambers, William Shakespeare, 1930, vol. II, p. 255.
  2. J. M. Robertson, An Introduction to the Study of the Shakespeare Canon, 1924. The whole argument is summarised in vol. I, chapter 12.
  3. Titus Andronicus, ed. J. Dover Wilson, 1948, pp. xix-1.

H. T. Price argued for Shakespeare's sole responsibility for the play as it now stands, and asserted: "No convincing evidence has been brought forward which could connect Titus with any other dramatist".<sup>1</sup> While Dover Wilson separates Act I from the rest of the play, Price sees "a unity ... that is a criterion of Shakespeare's skill".

J. C. Maxwell effectively demonstrates the difficulty of coming to a conclusion on the available evidence. For him, Act I is the main obstacle to his acceptance of Shakespeare as the sole author.<sup>2</sup> But he also lists among "Perhaps the most interesting consequences of the assumption that we have in the chap-book what is substantially Shakespeare's source . . ." the fact "that it gives to Shakespeare the typical concern both in the first and in the fifth act with civil order and the forces which threaten to overthrow it ..."<sup>3</sup> For an earlier critic, Ralph M. Sargent, it was in Act I that Shakespeare had made some of his most characteristic changes to the original plot. "He obscures the clear-cut nature of this foreign - native conflict for power . . . . Opening the drama with a factional dispute within the state of Rome ..."<sup>4</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard also

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1. H. T. Price, "The Authorship of Titus Andronicus", Journal of English and Germanic Philology, vol. XLII, 1943, p. 80.
  2. Titus Andronicus, ed. J. C. Maxwell, 1953, p. xxxiii.
  3. Maxwell, op. cit., p. xxvii.
  4. Ralph M. Sargent, "The Source of Titus Andronicus", Studies in Philology, vol. XLVI, 1949, p. 182.

finds the political part of the play of a piece with the emphasis of the last act, both being on the subject of "the high political theme, that of the wounds of civil war and their cure ..."<sup>1</sup>

The results of modern examinations of the evidence of the play itself being so inconclusive and mutually contradictory, the "triumphant demonstration" which E. K. Chambers referred to has not come about. He suggested that it was "theoretically possible to conceive a triumphant demonstration, on grounds of style alone ... that Shakespeare ... cannot possibly have written that revised text of the original play which appears, from such indications as are available, to be what we have before us". He concluded, however, that in the absence of such a demonstration, "the presumption must be that Meres and Heminges and Condell did not err".<sup>2</sup> R. F. Hill, who examines the stylistic evidence, concludes tentatively: "A close study of the various kinds of internal evidence does not preclude acceptance of this orthodoxy if we hold that at least the bulk of the play as we now have it was written before 1590".<sup>3</sup>

The question of authorship has a direct bearing on the problem of the date. If Shakespeare's authorship is accepted even in the limited sense of his having had only ultimate responsibility

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1. E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, 1944, pp. 139-140.
  2. E. K. Chambers, Shakespeare: A Survey, 1925, pp. 35-36.
  3. "The Composition of Titus Andronicus", Shakespeare Survey vol. X, 1957, p. 69.



for the play as we now have it, then the date 1594 suggested by Henslowe's entry appears to be too late when set beside the internal evidence of style, and the handling of the theme and the characters. (Henslowe's marginal "ne" suggests that the play was new at that date.)<sup>1</sup> J. C. Maxwell in his edition of the play (cited earlier) inclines to a date as early as 1589-1590. Without going again into all his reasons, this date seems most acceptable<sup>2</sup> and is in line with a suggestion which I make later that it was the success of the character of Muly Hamet in The Battle of Alcazar which may have influenced Shakespeare to make the important deviations from his source<sup>3</sup> in his handling of the roles of the Moor and Tamora.

One of the striking changes which Shakespeare made to his source material was to transform the nameless Moor in the original story from a mere tool of the Queen into the many-sided villain of his play. The suggestions for the character are contained in the source in lines like the following: "She [the Queen] had a Moor as revengeful as herself, whom she trusted

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1. Henslowe's Diary, ed. W. W. Greg, 1904-1908, vol. I, p. 16.
  2. Maxwell is supported by the tentative results of R. F. Hill's investigation quoted above.
  3. References to Shakespeare's source must be qualified; for after all what we have is an 18th century chap-book version of what may have been his source. The title of the chap-book is, The History of Titus Andronicus The Renowned Roman General. Ralph M. Sargent, in a thorough examination of this rare volume, gives extensive quotations from it. See "The Source of Titus Andronicus", Studies in Philology, vol. XLVI, 1949, pp. 167-183. It is from Sargent's reproduction of the chap-book that quotations are made.

in many great affairs and usually privy to her Secrets, so far that from private Dalliances she grew pregnant, and brought forth a Blackmoor Child ... "1 That the Moor enjoyed executing his mistress' commands is also suggested in the original story. His pleasure in the cutting off of Andronicus' hand is mentioned: "who immediately struck it off, and inwardly laugh'd at the Villainy".2 Shakespeare certainly made use of these suggestions -

O ! how this villainy  
Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it.  
(III, i, 202-203)

But Aaron is a far cry from the pawn of the chap-book; his villainy is self-generated, with little more than general support from the Queen. He is in a real sense the "breeder of these dire events" (V, iii, 178).

My suggestion is that Shakespeare, noting the success of the black villain, Muly Hamet, seized the opportunity of presenting another black villain whose appearance would conveniently symbolize his character.

(There are only pointers to the popularity of The Battle of Alcazar, but they are fairly definite. According to the title page of the 1594 quarto, it was "at sundrie times performed". W. W. Greg has shown in his examination of the surviving 'plot'

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1. Sargent, op. cit., p. 176.  
2. Ibid., p. 178.

that the 1594 text is a shortened version of the original play, "prepared for the use of that section of the company which maintained itself by acting in the provinces; possibly even, though less likely, that it formed part of the stock of those members who sought their fortunes abroad".<sup>1</sup> A special version argues some popularity for the original. Lastly, as David H. Horne points out, Muly's line "Hold thee Calipolis feed and faint no more" (Alcazar, 583) is quoted, albeit in ridicule, by Shakespeare, Jonson, Dekker, Marston, and Heywood. He comments: "If the piece had not been well known, the line would have had little point".)<sup>2</sup>

The transformation of Aaron into the chief villain of the play is even slightly embarrassing to Shakespeare, for it leaves him with little use for Tamora, the chief villain in his source. As is pointed out by J. Dover Wilson, Tamora does not fulfil the promise of high intrigue foreshadowed in the first act, and she goes through the play with the tag of a schemer - a legacy from the source - but is really little more than an accessory to Aaron's schemes.<sup>3</sup> It was not because of the absence of a strong enough character in his source that Shakespeare invented Aaron; rather, in spite of the presence of Tamora, he created a new black villain to fill the role of chief schemer of evil, probably in order to exploit the success of Muly Hamet.

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1. Two Elizabethan Stage Abridgements, 1923, p. 16.
  2. The Life and Minor Works of George Peele, 1952, p. 78.
  3. Titus Andronicus, ed. J. Dover Wilson, 1948, pp. x-xi.

This suggestion is in keeping with the general derivative character of the play - a factor which has led critics to suspect the presence of many hands in its construction. H. T. Price, for instance, notes this feature of the play in these words: "It must not be forgotten that Titus imitates every [italics his] sort of stage-trick that had proved attractive. The popular drama and perhaps even Latin plays were pillaged to supply Titus with incidents and theatrical effects.<sup>1</sup> Of Aaron he writes on the same page: "Aaron may owe something to Seneca, but he is still more a child of the English stage tradition. He is black, like the devils, the villain of the old mysteries". While it is true that the sight of a black face on the English stage certainly evoked memories of the devil of the mysteries - the dramatists deliberately emphasized the affinity - the immediate inspiration for this Shakespearean creation, Aaron, may well have been Peele's Muly. Here one may comment on another suggestion of Price's, in the same article. Dismissing any suggestion that Peele had anything to do with the play, and in support of the claim for its Shakespearean authorship, he suggests that, while Aaron is every way different from the Roman characters in the play, "he is very like the Moorish Prince of Arragon in The Merchant of Venice - another parallel that connects Shakespeare with Titus" (p. 76). (Arragon here is a mistake for

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1. H. T. Price, "The Authorship of Titus Andronicus" Journal of English and Germanic Philology, vol. XLII, 1943, p. 58.

Morocco.)<sup>1</sup> The comparison is rather strained. There is little similarity between the dignified romantic Morocco and Aaron, not even in their colour, for Morocco is a tawny Moor - a white Moor - while Aaron is quite unmistakably black. I have suggested earlier that Morocco looks back - if at all - to a figure like Abdilmelec, while Aaron in his flamboyance, his villainy, and his contempt for religion looks back to Muly.

I have called the character of Aaron many-sided. It is now time to examine this Shakespearean creation in more detail. The lyrical air which Aaron brings into the play with his first speech is in very marked contrast to the stiff formality of the verse in the opening act. He enters with:

Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,  
Safe out of Fortune's shot; and sits aloft,  
Secure of thunder's crack or lightning flash,  
Advanc'd above pale envy's threat'ning reach.  
As when the golden sun salutes the morn,  
And, having gilt the ocean with his beams,  
Gallops the zodiac in his glistering coach,  
And overlooks the highest-peering hills;  
So Tamora.

(II, i, 1-9)

The movement of the verse and the forcefulness of the imagery - suggestive of height and brilliant light - not only symbolize the triumphantly elevated position of Tamora, but also bring out the flamboyance of Aaron himself. His own soaring ambition follows naturally on his description of Tamora's elevation:

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1. Price writes in another article: "There is no doubt that this man [Morocco] is black" - "The Language of Titus Andronicus", Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, XXI, 1955, p. 505.

Then, Aaron, arm thy heart, and fit thy thoughts  
To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress.  
(II, i, 12-13)

His first step is to deck himself for the part:

Away with slavish weeds and servile thoughts !  
I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold:  
(II, i, 18-20)

That this note of brilliance should be introduced into the play by the "breeder of ... dire events" is one of the ironies of Titus Andronicus. For like his Shakespearean successor, Iago, Aaron is something of a jester-villain, wearing his villainies with a lightness which suggests the complete absence of a conscience.

This ebullience never leaves Aaron throughout the play. He bubbles with high spirits as he revels in the misery of his victims. This delight in his own villainy is his most prominent characteristic. His most callous display of it comes in III, i, when after cutting off Titus' hand he assures him that now his sons will be safe, and then privately revels in the knowledge that they will be executed in spite of the cruel sacrifice which had been demanded of Titus:

I go, Andronicus; and for thy hand,  
Look by and by to have thy sons with thee.  
[Aside] Their heads, I mean. O ! how this villainy  
Doth fat me with very thoughts of it.  
Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace,  
Aaron will have his soul black like his face.  
(III, i, 200-205)

These last two lines may be regarded as the crude equation which lies behind the portrayal of Aaron; as an explicit acceptance of

the stereotype of the devilish Moor whose evil nature is fully explained by his colour. The interesting point here is, though, that this explicit acceptance of the stereotype comes from Aaron himself. Although he looks like the stereotype, yet there is also a tacit suggestion in the rhymed couplet which ends the quotation above, that his choice of evil is deliberate. There is implied in his behaviour a conscious turning away from grace, which is presumed to be open to him. This is, I think, important. It shows Shakespeare's preoccupation with men rather than with types even in this early play. The cynicism of Aaron shown here, the deliberate scorning of grace which is almost unnoticed because it occurs in a black character, is what hardens into the religion of evil - the divinity of hell - later portrayed in Iago. There is thus, even in the presentation of a stereotype, an element of personal responsibility and deliberate choice. The individualisation of Aaron is also evident in his passionate defence of his child. (This is dealt with more fully, later in this section.)

Shakespeare makes Aaron an artist in villainy. His smoothness during his devilish ministrations is quite shamelessly cynical. When, for instance, he 'discovers' the bag of gold which he has previously hidden as part of his plan to implicate Martius and Quintus in the murder of Bassianus, his "My gracious lord, here is a bag of gold" (II, iii, 279), is almost scornfully facile. He is the confident artist delighting in his own sense

of timing, and in his ability to manipulate his material. He takes a ghoulish pride in his work, is very conscious of his own wit, and despises those who are witless enough to be taken in by him. He thus despises Demetrius and Chiron, who are too witless to see the inner meaning of Titus' gift of weapons and verses; he comments to himself: "Now, what a thing it is to be an ass !" (IV, ii, 25) This is in contrast to his opinion of their mother Tamora, whose wit he respects:

But were our witty empress well afoot,  
She would applaud Andronicus' conceit.  
(IV, ii, 29-30)

Aaron is constantly preoccupied with "wit"; he refers to Tamora's "wit" again in II, i, 10, and to her "sacred wit" in II, i, 120. (Tamora, who is a kindred spirit to Aaron, calls herself "high-witted" in IV, iv, 35.) He is at pains to defend his wit as he buries the gold in II, iii:

He that had wit would think that I had none,  
To bury so much gold under a tree,  
And never after to inherit it.  
Let him that thinks of me so abjectly  
Know that this gold must coin a stratagem,  
Which, cunningly effected, will beget  
A very excellent piece of villainy.  
(II, iii, 1-7)

He chides the brothers who are squabbling over Lavinia:

'Tis policy and stratagem must do  
That you affect.  
(II, i, 104-105)

In this preoccupation with his own wit, and in his ingenuity in stage-managing the villainies in the play, rather



than executing them himself, Aaron is a fore-runner of Iago. Iago also put a high premium on wit, referring to his own or someone else's no less than six times in Othello - I, i, 136; I, iii, 364; II, i, 129 & 132; III, iii, 467; IV, ii, 215. Iago also revelled in his villainy, and equally despised his gulls' inferior intellect. "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse", he says of Roderigo (Othello, I, iii, 389). He equally despises the "free and open nature" of Othello and reflects that he

... will as tenderly be led by the nose  
As asses are.  
(I, iii, 407-408)

(Muly Hamet's satisfaction at his manipulation of Sebastian has been remarked upon, but may be recalled here as a faint foreshadowing.)

Like the later Iago, Aaron is a brilliant opportunist who seizes chances presented to him, rather than a deliberate plotter. It is through no ingenuity on his part that Tamora becomes an empress, but he soon fits his thoughts to mount aloft with her. It is also purely by chance that he comes upon Demetrius and Chiron quarelling over Lavinia; this, however, gives him an opening to use them as instruments of his "revenge". The hunt which provides such a convenient cover for the murder of Bassianus and the rape of Lavinia is, ironically, Titus' own idea, but Aaron is quick to see the potentialities of a setting which is "Fitted by kind for rape and villainy" (II, i, 116). He cleverly incriminates Quintus and Martius in the murder of

Basrianus, and thus economically arranges their deaths. He is the most conspicuous figure in the cutting off of Titus' hand, although he has the full support of the palace. All these episodes show his quickness of thought and execution. But it is on the occasion when his child is delivered to him for execution, and he suddenly finds all the influence of the palace bent on the child's destruction, that we have the best demonstration of his genius for quick thinking and execution.

In his determination to save the child's life, he harnesses all his ability to plan and contrive. He throws out threats and schemes, and deals decisive blows with an almost bewildering speed, as he stands facing his enemies with his baby in his arms. Ascertaining that the nurse is one of only two outsiders who know of the birth of the child, he runs her through, while casually repeating a proverb and callously mimicking her death-cry:

Two may keep counsel when the third's away.

'Weke, weke !'

So cries a pig prepared to the spit.

(IV, ii, 145-148)

Straightaway he explains to the bewildered Demetrius that this is a deed of "policy" (150). Indeed he soon persuades Demetrius to send the midwife - the other outsider in on the secret - for similar treatment. On the spur of the moment, he produces a plan to exchange his baby for the white child of his countryman

Muly.<sup>1</sup> This plan finally satisfies Demetrius and Chiron, and after a few breathless moments the child's life is saved.

It is no diminution of Aaron's quickness of wit to suggest that Shakespeare intends this story of Muly and his white child to be taken as a complete fabrication. Indeed the speed with which Aaron devises the story is the supreme demonstration of his skill. The happy coincidence of the birth of a white child to a Moor and a white woman with Aaron's desperate need for just such a child, would otherwise be the least credible of the chances which fortune presents to the villain in this play. That the child is white at all would have appeared nothing short of miraculous to an Elizabethan audience if they believed the popular idea that "in truth a blacke Moore never faileth to beget blacke children, of what colour soever the other be".<sup>2</sup> If Aaron had been speaking the truth here, there is no reason why he should not have carried out the manoeuvre of exchanging the two children with his customary dispatch. Instead, as soon as he has successfully quietened the fears of Demetrius and Chiron with his tale, and has sent them to bury the nurse, he reveals a

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1. The name Muly arises out of Stevens' emendation of *Muliteus* of the Quarto and Folio editions to 'Muly lives'. If this emendation represents what Shakespeare wrote, it strengthens my earlier suggestion that the character Muly Hamet was in Shakespeare's mind when he wrote this play.
  2. R. Scot, The Discovery of Witchcraft (1584), edited Brinsley Nicholson, 1886, p. 255. J. C. Maxwell in his note on V, i, 27, holds that Shakespeare did not subscribe to this view. My interpretation of the passage implies that he at least assumed that his audience held this belief, and would therefore see through Aaron's hastily concocted story.

completely different plan:

Now to the Goths, as swift as swallow flies;  
There to dispose this treasure in mine arms,  
And secretly to greet the empress' friends.  
Come on, you thick-lipp'd slave, I'll bear you hence;  
For it is you that puts us to our shifts:  
I'll make you feed on berries and on roots,  
And feed on curds and whey, and suck the goat,  
And cabin in a cave, and bring you up  
To be a warrior, and command a camp.  
(IV, ii, 174-182)

This is the very plan he is executing, when he is captured by the Second Goth (V, i, 34-36). The invention of Muly on the spur of the moment is thus another manifestation of Aaron's wit, not unlike the lie produced in a similar emergency by Iago concerning Othello: "he goes into Mauretania" (Othello, IV, ii, 229).

It seems paradoxical, after all this, to say that the mainspring of the character of this confident villain may be a deeply felt insecurity. But on searching for possible reasons for Aaron's monstrous selfishness, one is forced to recognise his complete isolation from his surroundings. The character with whom he is in closest contact is Tamora, and she can never be wholly his; their relationship is bound to be always clandestine. In their one love-scene (II, iii), Aaron's mind is in fact on other things - on "vengeance" (for which on the surface he has less cause than Tamora). This vengeance seems to have no other bases than the general ones that his fortunes were governed by people of a different race from himself, and that he was alone among them. All this is not clear until we see the tenacity with which he clings to his child, and the lengths he will go to preserve its life. That is another "master-touch" of Shakespeare. Aaron at last

has someone like himself - a part of himself - as an ally against a hostile world. No one is allowed to come between the two of them - not even the queen:

My mistress is my mistress; this myself;  
The vigour, and the picture of my youth:  
This before all the world do I prefer;  
This maugre all the world will I keep safe,  
Or some of you shall smoke for it in Rome. 1  
(IV, ii, 108-112)

In this scene, the air which hitherto has been free from obvious racial antagonism becomes thick with it, as Aaron, with his child in his arms, holds out against the "fair-faced" forces which seek their destruction. His defence of the child is also his defence of his colour. The nurse presents the conflicting forces when she describes the baby as

A joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue.  
Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad 2  
Amongst the fairest breeders of our clime.  
(IV, ii, 67-69)

Stung by this opprobrious description which springs from the baby's difference in colour, he exclaims: "is black so base a hue?"

(71) With the opposition of colour also goes the opposition of

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1. I am conscious that this reading of Aaron's character may be over-subtle. A simpler alternative explanation of the gap between Aaron's cause for vengeance and his studious pursuit of it may be sought in Bernard Spivack's suggestion that some of the characters in plays of this period were caught between the old morality conventions and the new tendencies towards naturalism. Aaron would thus represent "the hybrid image". See Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, 1958, especially chapter II.
  2. The reading of Qq 1-2 "fairfast" i.e. fair-faced, fits this interpretation even better than "fairest" of the Folio.

points of view:

Chiron: It shall not live.  
Aaron: It shall not die.  
(81-82)

Aaron flings their whiteness back in their faces:

Ye white-lim'd walls ! ye ale house painted signs !  
Coal-black is better than another hue,  
In that it scorns to bear another hue.  
(99-101)

Nowhere else in the play is this difference between Aaron and everyone else - except the child - so sharply outlined. He is for once shown in a dreadfully exposed position with only the child on his side. There is thus a double bond between them, and hence good enough reason for the otherwise unexpected surge of paternal feeling in him. The child is for him "My flesh and blood" (85). He interprets the child's smile: "As who should say, 'old lad, I am thine own.' " (122) It is also the child who extracts the one totally unselfish act from him. Realising that his own life is forfeit, he demands a promise from Lucius that the child will be safe before parting with the secret that Lucius wants to hear.

Thus Aaron emerges as a human being after all. His character as a monster would have been all of a piece had he decided to regard the child (as the queen did) as an embarrassment to be quietly put away. But Shakespeare veers away from the easier creation of a bogey-man, and makes Aaron, in spite of his villainy, into a human being, and a better parent than either Titus or Tamora.

Finally, although Aaron is a Moor, he is not a Moslem. In perfect keeping with his cynical attitude he has abandoned all religion, which he regards as a prop for weak minds. He accepts Lucius' statement of his (Aaron's) religious position - "thou believ'st no god" (V, i, 71) - but is prepared to accept Lucius' oath nevertheless:

for that I know  
An idiot holds his bauble for a god,  
And keeps the oath which by that god he swears.  
(V, i, 78-80)

This portrait of an irreligious Moor is interesting in that it removes the stage Moor one step further away from his home and his historical reality, and makes him into a stage personality. In this way Aaron is different from Muly Hamet, who, even though he tries to break the social sanctions of his country, still has to live with them. Aaron is completely without those social ties which regulate human conduct, and can therefore be a free agent of evil. Moors of this type, both male and female, appear in other plays of the period. The next in this line is Eleazer, the Moor in Lust's Dominion.

LUST'S DOMINION

While the connection between Aaron and Muly Hamet is conjectural, the direct descent from Aaron of Eleazer, the villain-hero of Lust's Dominion, is undisputed. Felix Schelling calls Eleazer "a shameless caricature of the Aaron of Titus Andronicus".<sup>1</sup> J. Le Gay Brereton notes that "the general resemblance of the two plays in which the Moors appear is obvious".<sup>2</sup>

When Francis Kirkman published this play in 1657, he ascribed it to Marlowe. This attribution, first called into question by J. P. Collier,<sup>3</sup> has now been generally rejected. Collier was also the first to identify the play with The Spanish Moor's Tragedy, for which Henslowe records a payment on 13th February 1598/99, to "thomas deckers W<sup>m</sup> harton John daye" for a book called the "spanish mores tragedie".<sup>4</sup> This identification has been generally accepted. F. G. Fleay not only accepts this identification but assigns various scenes to each of the three collaborators.<sup>5</sup> W. W. Greg<sup>6</sup> also assigns various scenes to each of the three collaborators, but he disagrees with Fleay over the attribution of certain scenes. Since then,

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1. Elizabethan Drama 1558-1642, 1908, vol. I, p. 428.
  2. Lust's Dominion, ed. Le Gay Brereton, (Materials for the study of Old English Drama, new series, vol. V), 1931, p. xxi.
  3. The History of English Dramatic Poetry, 1831, vol. III, pp. 96-97.
  4. Henslowe's Diary, ed. W. W. Greg, 1904, vol. I, p. 118.
  5. A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559-1642, 1891, vol. I, p. 272.
  6. Henslowe's Diary, vol. II, p. 211.



Brereton<sup>1</sup> and E. H. C. Oliphant have also attributed scenes to the various collaborators with differing results.

Brereton, the most confident, attributes nineteen scenes of the play solely to Dekker. Greg attributes eighteen of these same scenes to Dekker, though with less certainty in some cases. This is the greatest amount of correspondence there is between the various attempts at attribution. Brereton detects Dekker's influence in six more scenes, in five of which he assumes that he collaborated with Day, and in one with Haughton. He only credits Haughton and Day with the sole authorship of one scene each. Thus for Brereton, Dekker was quite definitely the presiding genius of the play. Greg sees a little less of Dekker's hand, but even he sees his influence in all but six scenes of the play. Oliphant, who names authors for only seven scenes, ascribes six of these to Dekker. He asserts, however, with varying degrees of confidence, that the last six scenes, which all the others give to Dekker, were not by him. Fleay is the only one who gives more scenes to Haughton and Day together than to Dekker. He credits Dekker with eight scenes, Day with an equal number, and Haughton with six. Except in Fleay's analysis, then, the hand of Dekker is agreed to be dominant.

If the identification with The Spanish Moor's Tragedy is

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1. Brereton, op. cit., pp. xviii-xxxi. Oliphant's results are also summarised here.

correct, then the date of Henslowe's entry seems to indicate that the play was being written during 1599. Another piece of evidence for the date is the fact that a pamphlet, A brief and true Declaration of the Sicknesse, last wordes, and Death of the King of Spaine, Philip, the Second of that name, printed in 1599, was used in the writing of I, iii, 318-404 of the play.

Even after the repudiation of the Marlovian authorship of the play, critics have seen a certain Marlovian touch in its construction. The domination of the action by one man who is driven by a burning ambition, reminds critics of Marlowe's one-man dramas. Brereton in fact excuses Kirkman's error in attributing the play to Marlowe because apart from the similarity of structure, he sees similarities between the diction of the play and that of Edward II.<sup>1</sup> But, as he himself concludes, this does not show any more than that the play was "compiled by a lively imitator". The influence of Marlowe need not necessarily have been as direct as is suggested, since structurally as well as in the similarities of characterisation Lust's Dominion shows a greater closeness to Titus Andronicus than to any single play of Marlowe's. The parallels between these two plays are quite striking. In Lust's Dominion, we have another black Moor, the paramour of a queen, as the dominating character in the tragedy. The whole play moves on his initiatives, and he manipulates the principal characters

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1. Brereton, op. cit., pp. xi-xii.

with the same facility as Aaron had done in the earlier play. In the execution of his "revenge", human life is of no value; he is dominated by his own self-interest. The mixture of love, lust, blood, and treachery is the same as in the earlier play.

It has been mentioned that some use was made of the pamphlet A brief and true Declaration in the writing of a part of this play. There is, however, no suggestion of such a character as Eleazer in the pamphlet. In it, King Philip, on his death-bed, mentions a certain Don Christofer in these words:

"Remember, I commende unto you Don Christofer for the most faithfull Servant which I ever had".<sup>1</sup> In the corresponding section of the play there are suggestions that this particular Don Christofer has become incorporated into the character of Eleazer. The dialogue runs:

K. Philip: Where's Eleazer, Don Alvero's son ?

Ferdinand: Yonder with crost arms stands he malecontent...

K. Philip: I do commend him to thee for a man

Both wise and warlike. 2

(387-390)

Our author's indebtedness to the pamphlet for Eleazer's character is thus even slighter than Shakespeare's to his source for Aaron. Eleazer seems to have arisen almost entirely out of Shakespeare's Aaron. (There is a Don Christofero in Lust's Dominion who becomes a pawn of Aaron like nearly every one else in the play. He does not correspond in any way, except in name, to the courtier

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1. The Harleian Miscellany, ed. William Oldys and Thomas Park, 1809 edn., vol. II, p. 397.

2. References are to Brereton's 1931 edition of the play.

mentioned in the pamphlet.)

Eleazer totally dominates every feature of the play. On his stratagems and their execution depends every movement of a plot which moves with a breathless speed that again reflects the ever active brain of the villain. All the principal characters reveal their true natures mainly through their reactions to him and his schemes, and even the dialogue seems to take a good deal of its character from his frequent bloody invocations of Murder, Revenge and Tragedy.

Comparisons with Aaron are inevitable in an examination of the portrayal of Eleazer, not only for the obvious similarities, but for some significant differences. For, while copying the main features of the earlier character, the author of Lust's Dominion tried to improve on certain of them.

One of the really unsatisfactory features of Titus Andronicus is the relationship to the plot of Queen Tamora and Aaron. Tamora has all the motives for revenge, but takes little part in the execution of it, even though she is shown to be quite unscrupulous, and perfectly capable of managing the revenge herself. The result is some uncertainty in the handling of the Queen. She becomes almost redundant for most of the plot, and only comes into her own when Aaron has disappeared from the foreground. Aaron it is who, with a cry of revenge which is backed by far less motive, executes not so much vengeance as a general campaign of malevolence against everyone. The author of Lust's Dominion makes a special effort to remedy this

apparent defect. He provides an independent motive for Eleazer, and thus gives him some justification for taking control of the revenge plot. The Queen Mother, like every other character in this play, thus becomes completely subordinate to him. This gives the play a greater mechanical smoothness, but not necessarily a deeper insight into the nature of evil than the earlier play, since the motives of villains are always suspect, and never adequately account for the extent of their vengeance.

Unlike Aaron, who never openly complains of his position in Roman or Gothic society, Eleazer makes a great deal of the slights to which he is subject in Spanish society. He replies to Alvero's enquiry for the Queen Mother:

The Queen with me, with me, a Moore, a Devill,  
A slave of Barbary, a dog; for so  
Your silken Courtiers christen me.  
(227-229)

Similarly he complains to the Queen Mother that, as he rides through the streets, "every slave" throws similar abusive remarks at him (116-130). As he himself admits, the taunts of the populace arise from the people's annoyance at his illicit relations with the Queen Mother. The point remains, however, that, for whatever reasons, his isolation in a hostile society is introduced as a possible motive for his corresponding general hostility. This is given added point when it is considered that residence in Spain was originally forced upon him. He bewails:

my father,  
Who with his Empire, lost his life,  
And left me Captive to a Spanish Tyrant.  
(234-236)

All Eleazer's motives for his behaviour must, however, be treated with suspicion. So great is his cynicism - even when he is complaining about his position in Spain which was not so bad after all - that it is often difficult to decide how much he is supposed to feel the slights he complains about, and how much his complaints are part of a massive attempt to justify his villainy, not least to himself.

For what they are worth, however, Eleazer's exile, his father's death, the slights he suffers because of his race, and - the most concrete of all - the seizure of his property by Mendoza, are all given as reasons or excuses for his revenge. Taken together, all these circumstances add up to a pretty powerful revenge motive for anyone. But such is Eleazer's indifference to other people's lives, and so universal is his hatred, embracing friend and foe alike, that one feels that, for him, motives are mere embellishments, supplied by the author in a superficial attempt to produce a more 'rational' character than Aaron. This rationalization does not make the character of Eleazer necessarily better realized than Aaron's, for, as has been remarked before, there can be little rational justification for the widespread malevolence of characters like Aaron and Eleazer. What is certain is that in his rehandling of the character the author has put Eleazer right in the forefront of the revenge theme, and leaves one in no doubt as to who is in control. The uncertainty of the positions of Tamora and Aaron in the plot of Titus Andronicus is successfully eliminated in

Lust's Dominion.

The element of ambition in the character of Eleazer is more purposefully handled here than in the earlier play. Although Aaron vows to "climb aloft" with Tamora, yet his plots are in no way calculated to advance his position in the state. From the standpoint of his own advancement, they are entirely purposeless. Not so Eleazer, who is quite clearly personally ambitious, and intends to climb to the top of Spanish society. In this, the author, like his creation, is quite single-minded. Eleazer's ascent of the steps to the throne, from which he is to be toppled when he feels most secure, is a triumph of plot construction. Indeed the development of this theme of Eleazer's ambition is what gives direction to the whole plot and provides it with a conscious unity, as the following summary will reveal.

After the death of the old King Philip, Eleazer's fortunes are at their lowest ebb. All the hostility from which the Queen Mother's status had sheltered him during the life of the King, now suddenly breaks upon him. Philip, the King's younger son, accuses him and the Queen Mother publicly of their illicit relationship (466-471, 496-502), and Cardinal Mendoza, the Protector of the new king, Fernando, taking advantage of the general hostility against him, deprives him "Of all those Royalties thou hold'st in Spain" (514), and banishes him from the court (527-528) - a sentence to which all the Princes of Spain give their consent. This move crystallizes Eleazer's revenge motives, and from now on the elimination of his enemies and his rise to

power make one turbulent stream of all the various elements of the fast-moving plot. Desperate for support in his isolation, Eleazer seizes on Fernando's love for his wife, Maria, and cynically plans to use the potential influence that his gives her over him, in order to get back into position. Whether or not his wife reciprocates Fernando's love is of little concern to him. This is how he expresses his determination to use her:

The Spaniard loves my wife, she swears to me,  
 Shee's chaste as the white Moon, well if she be.  
 Well too if shee be not, I care not, I,  
 I'll climb up by that love to dignitye.  
 (606-609)

Fernando, in order to win Maria's love, not only restores Eleazer's lands, but gives him Mendoza's staff of office. Eleazer's next move is to attempt to eliminate his two most powerful enemies, Philip and Mendoza. So he persuades the Queen to "confess" to Friars Crab and Cole, and get them to publish that Philip is a bastard. Before the friars comply, however, they secretly inform Mendoza and Philip, who escape to Portugal to raise an army to fight against Eleazer. Eleazer uses the opportunity provided by their absence to accuse them of plotting the deaths of Fernando, the Queen, and himself. Fernando, another opportunist, sees in the flight a means of getting Eleazer out of the way while he pursues his designs on Maria, and sends him in pursuit of the two fugitives. Eleazer, recognizing Fernando's intentions, gives Maria a poison with which to kill him. For this, she substitutes a sleeping potion, which she gives Fernando when he insists on making love to her. The



Queen Mother, who had also sensed in the King's attentions to Maria a way of getting rid of her rival, rushes into Maria's chamber, finds her son seemingly dead, accuses Maria of the murder, and kills her. Fernando then awakes, and mourns Maria. At this point, in rushes Eleazer, also in the hope of surprising the King, and finding Maria dead, in simulated fury kills him. Fernando is now dead, Philip is away and proclaimed a bastard, and the way to the crown now lies open to Eleazer. The Queen Mother with a feigned reluctance proposes him for the throne, which he, also seemingly reluctantly, accepts, deftly overcoming the incipient opposition of Christofero and Roderigo, by promising them the crowns of Granada and Arragon respectively.

The tightly-knit plot has thus brought Eleazer by a breathless succession of events to a position of supremacy in Spain, while his enemies, Philip and Mendoza, muster forces in Portugal for his overthrow. The stage is thus set for a battle to decide the fate of the throne and Eleazer, but the ingenuity of the author prevents a flat sequence of events leading to a predictable ending. Eleazer, when the war seems to be going against him, proves to be as resourceful as ever. He instructs the Queen to use her hold on Mendoza and lure him away from the alliance with Philip. She succeeds, and makes peace between Mendoza and Eleazer. The latter once more feigns indifference to the crown, and offers it to Mendoza, whom he advises to marry the Queen Mother, thus reducing him to just another of his puppets in the play. Persuaded that he will

now become king, Mendoza arrests Philip his erstwhile ally, subscribes to the proclamation of his bastardy, and is even misguided enough to confess to being his real father. The surprised cardinal thus suddenly finds himself, on his own evidence, guilty of treason, and a fellow prisoner of Philip whom he had earlier arrested. The Queen Mother, up to now Eleazer's tool, now finds that she too has walked into a trap, since she has openly admitted adultery. Eleazer at this point throws with a gambler's recklessness; he dramatically resigns the throne to Isabella, King Philip's daughter, and sends the Queen Mother to prison. His crowning stroke is to be his marrying the legitimate occupant of the throne, Isabella, thus securing his own position permanently. He states the position in a soliloquy:

I have at one throw,  
Rifled away the Diademe of Spain;  
'Tis gone, and there's no more to set but this  
At all, then at this last cast I'll sweep up  
My former petty losses, or lose all.  
(3150-3154)

Even at this late stage, the plot is full of interest. The obstacle of Isabella's love for her affianced Hortenzo, and even the person of Hortenzo himself, seem to be trifling in the face of others that Eleazer had overcome. But with dramatic ingenuity the tables are turned against him, and in the height of his confidence he walks into his own trap, betrayed by his trusted henchman, Zarack. Too late he realizes his plight:

Then I am betray'd and cozen'd  
in my own designs: I did contrive their

ruine, but their subtil policie hath blasted  
my ambitious thoughts.  
(3763-3766)

The play outlasts the death of Eleazer by a mere fifteen lines. His single-minded pursuit of his own self-interest thus gives the plot an overall neatness and a powerful urgency of movement which Titus Andronicus, with its shifts of themes and motives, lacks.

As a result of a well-planned series of interrelationships among the other characters, Eleazer is able to manipulate them all. He makes use of the Queen's lust for him, of Fernando's lust for Maria, of Mendoza's lust for the Queen - the play is indeed dominated by lust - and, by exploiting all these, he makes his way to the top. Every character is either an obstacle to be swept out of the way, or a tool to be used, and then discarded. Utterly cynical, Eleazer's heart is never touched by any of his own relationships. True, he shows some reluctance to accede to the Queen Mother's request that his wife should be killed (1049-1055). Soon, however, even this seeming spark of feeling for his wife is extinguished by his overwhelming self-interest. She too is to be discarded after she has been exploited. His aside as he hands her the poison for Fernando makes this clear:

Then give it him: do, do,  
Do poison him, he gon, thou'rt next.  
(1370-1371)

In pursuance of "policie" Maria too has to die. So even this one saving grace - love for his wife - is denied Eleazer.

It has been hinted before that the streamlining of Eleazer's

character, and consequently of the plot, might be good stagecraft, but does not necessarily show a deep insight into human character or into the problem of human wickedness. The dramatist who departs from the totally explicable and admits some mystery in the workings of the human mind is taking risks, while the one who gives motives and explanations for everything may attain a glib success. From that point of view, and admitting that neither Aaron nor Eleazer is a very profound study, the earlier portrait of Aaron is the deeper; his unexpected devotion to his son, for instance, may be inconsistent in a devil, but Shakespeare's study was of a man, however wicked. The psychology which gives Eleazer more motives for his crime, as though any motives could justify them, the psychology which removes every spark of human feeling from him, may, of the two, be the more specious.

A word about the minor characters will suffice. Eleazer's domination of the plot blurs their outlines, but certain suggestions are conveyed. The image of Philip as the brave, blunt-spoken, impetuous soldier is fairly firm. He is the only character who never compromises with Eleazer. Maria also leaves her mark as a symbol of womanly purity as she goes to her death, ironically, after saving the life of her assailant. Her father/Alvero reflects, in a weak way, something of the dilemma of Titus. He stands up for Philip against Eleazer, and, quite bewildered, finds himself Philip's reluctant jailer. When the Queen Mother accuses his daughter of first enticing Fernando and then murdering him, the evidence of his eyes conflicts sadly with

the promptings of his heart, and while chiding his daughter, he weakly pleads, like Titus for his sons, for a judicial trial for her. The Queen Mother - every bit as unscrupulous as Tamora - is completely dominated by Eleazer. Cardinal Mendoza shows no more piety than his Friars Crab and Cole. He turns away from his duty through a combination of ambition and lust, and thus walks into Eleazer's trap.

The author's main concern is with Eleazer, whom he conceives as a more plausible version of Aaron. He succeeds in producing not a credible character, but one whose single-minded pursuit of villainy supplies the main thread of a well-constructed tragedy, well suited to the tastes of an Elizabethan audience in the last years of the 16th century. His total lack of human feeling makes him into an embodiment of evil, or, as the Queen Mother in her disillusionment calls him, "the Devil of hell" (3735).

#### Later Treatments of the Theme of Lust's Dominion

The theme of Lust's Dominion and its exotic villain attracted later playwrights. It is most interesting to discover that one of their major preoccupations seems to have been to make Eleazer's motive for revenge even more convincing. Aphra Behn, who in her version of the play, Abdelazar (produced 1677), does not even bother to alter the text of Lust's Dominion unless she wishes to make a significant change, extends Eleazer's three-line remembrance to his father (Lust's Dominion, 234-6), into fifteen lines in which her hero not only details his father's wrongs ending

in his death at the hands of Philip, but in fact lays claim to his father's crown, now worn by the King of Spain. Aphra Behn thus supplies him with an unassailable motive for revenge:

My father, Great Abdela, with his Life  
Lost too his Crown; both most unjustly ravish'd  
By Tyrant Philip, your old King I mean.  
How many Wounds his valiant Greast receiv'd  
E'er he would yield to part with Life and Empire:  
Methinks I see him cover'd o'er with Blood,  
Fainting amidst those numbers he had conquer'd.  
I was but young, yet old enough to grieve,  
Tho' not revenge, or to defy my Fetters:  
For then began my Slavery; and e'er since  
Have seen that Diadem by this Tyrant worn,  
Which crown'd the sacred Temples of my Father,  
And shou'd adorn mine now - should ! nay, and must.<sup>1</sup>

Aphra Behn, probably the first champion of the 'noble savage', was of course making a bold bid to produce, not a devil, but a noble African prince whose great heart rebelled against exile in however pleasant circumstances. Her conception of the character of Abdelazar has a lot in common with the hero of her novel Oroonoko.

Abdelazar's character is far less cynical than his predecessor's and carries far more conviction when he exclaims:

Now all that's brave and villain seize my Soul,  
Reform each Faculty that is not ill,  
And make it fit for Vengeance, noble Vengeance.  
(p. 14)

That he had faculties that were not ill, and that his revenge was conceived as "noble", bring him nearer Othello in conception than the original Eleazer. Aphra Behn's Abdelazar is also made to

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1. . . Works, ed. Montague Summers, 1915, vol. II, p. 14 (I, ii).

love his wife - a Spaniard - against the dictates of his pride:

Oh I could gnaw my chains  
That humble me so low as to adore her.  
(p. 30)

Nevertheless he sacrifices her to his all-embracing revenge.

Edward Young's The Revenge (acted 1719) is based on Aphra Behn's play rather than on the original Lust's Dominion. His Moor is also a noble Moor who despises the arts and tricks he has to employ in his revenge. In line with this treatment, Edward Young feels the need to provide his hero Zanga with one particular humiliation which gnawed his noble mind, and set in motion his revenge against Alonzo:

He struck me, (While I tell it, do I live?)  
He smote me on the Cheek - I did not stab him;  
For that were poor Revenge. 1  
(I, i)

The emphasis on the nobility of the Moor in these later treatments reflects a sentimental - and un-Elizabethan - attitude towards the Moor. While the Elizabethan mind was prepared to accept the Moor as naturally wicked, the champions of the 'noble savage', in an attempt to bring out the Moor's nobility, erred in the opposite direction. They should have used new material - Aphra Behn did in Oroonoko - instead of using material which, being completely differently conceived, was not amenable to a treatment intended to prove the opposite of the original.

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1. The Poetical Works of the Rev. Edward Young, 1741, vol. II, p. 242. (No line numbers in this edition.)

SOME MINOR TREATMENTS OF AFRICAN CHARACTERS, 1591-1596

Titus Andronicus and Lust's Dominion, though closely related, are separated by a gap of nine to ten years, during which a number of minor Moorish characters appear in plays. Many of these characters, like those of Marlowe mentioned earlier, are introduced merely to lend atmosphere to plots which, though set in Africa, could really have been set anywhere else. Among these are the figures of pageantry in Greene's Alphonsus (1591) and Orlando Furioso (1592) which have been mentioned. In the latter play, there is a striking detail in Act V, when Orlando enters on two occasions (Scenes i and ii) disguised as a Moor. The method of disguise - "a scarf before his face" - gives a clue to one of the devices used by white characters when they impersonated black characters.

The lost play Tamar Cam, a plot of which survives among Henslowe's papers,<sup>1</sup> must have ended on a really exotic note with a grand pageant of strange peoples. Along with "Tartars", "Geats", "Canniballs" and "Hermaphrodites", appear "the Amozins", "Nagars" and "ollive cullord moores". The "Nagars" were probably Negroes;<sup>2</sup> if they were, this would account for the precise description of the "ollive cullored moores".

Chapman's comedy The Blind Beggar of Alexandria (1596) is set in Egypt, but the characters are conceived as Europeans,

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1. The Henslowe Papers, ed. W. W. Greg, 1907, pp. 145-148.  
2. Cf. the form "negars" used in Queen Elizabeth's edict of 1601 (p. 30, footnote 1 above).



all except Porus who is described as "Black Porus, the Ethiopian King".<sup>1</sup> Porus' role is the unremarkable one of entering the play in the last scene, and being chosen by Elimine as her husband in spite of his colour. The reaction of the other characters to this strange choice is exactly the same as would be expected from Europeans: "Out on thee, foolish woman, thou has chose a devil." (164) It is as though Chapman, suddenly remembering that he had set this play in Egypt, introduced Porus merely to lend an African flavour to it. Nothing more significant is made of the character.

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1. The Comedies of George Chapman, ed. Parrott, 1914, Sc. ix, line 71.

THE FAMOUS HISTORY OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF  
CAPTAIN THOMAS STUKELEY

The principal events of the battle of Alcazar, and the deaths of Sebastian, Abdelmelek, Muly Hamet and Stukeley, are briefly treated again in the anonymous play The Famous History of the Life and Death of Captain Thomas Stukeley, which Henslowe records as having been performed for the first time on 11th December 1596.<sup>1</sup> The authorship of this play is not certain. The surviving text (first published in 1605)<sup>2</sup> is, according to J. Q. Adams, "crudely reworked and hurriedly patched up for a revival".<sup>3</sup> Richard Simpson, in his introduction to the play,<sup>4</sup> first outlined the now generally accepted theory that the 1605 text was put together from different sources, and detected in it four hands and two earlier plays.<sup>5</sup> This theory was later elaborated by J. Q. Adams,<sup>6</sup> who put forward a very convincing suggestion that the main body of the play was taken from a play written by Thomas Heywood. The section of the play which concerns this study, however, is the very end, which deals with the events of the battle of Alcazar and in the composition of which, also, Adams (less confidently) conjectures Heywood may

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1. Henslowe's Diary, ed. Greg, vol. I, p. 50.
  2. Reproduced in Tudor Facsimile Texts, edited by J. S. Farmer, 1911.
  3. Joseph Quincey Adams, "Captaine Thomas Stukeley", Journal of English and Germanic Philology, vol. XV, 1916, p. 107.
  4. The School of Shakespere, vol. I, 1878. Quotations are from this edition.
  5. Ibid., pp. 139-142.
  6. Op. cit., pp. 107-129.

have had a hand. Both Simpson and Adams agree that this later section was taken from another play which Adams called Sebastian and Antonio. It may be remarked here that The Fair Maid of the West, which is certainly Heywood's, has scenes in Morocco - another tenuous but possible link between the two plays, pointing as it does to a similarity of interest in the exotic settings of North Africa.

Captain Thomas Stukeley, as its name implies, is mainly concerned with the varied adventures of the central character. Its episodic nature makes it necessary for incidents to be only briefly touched upon, and for incidental characters to be drawn only in outline. Thus when the play moves with the hero to Africa and the battle of Alcazar, the whole episode has to be treated in a single act. In consequence, the author merely reflects popular attitudes toward the main characters, sometimes by means of direct narration. We learn more, for instance, about the play's attitude towards Muly Hamet and Sebastian from the speeches of the Chorus, than we do from their own words and actions. Reflecting these popular attitudes, the Chorus says of these two men:

but woe the wretched hour,  
And woe that damned Mahamet by whose guile  
This tender and unskilled but valiant king  
Was thus allured unto a timeless death.  
(2296-2299)

This suggests a Machiavellian villain, cunning and wily; but as Muly emerges from the episodes in the play, he is a ranting boastful soldier, and, but for an inclination to vulgarity in his boastfulness,

very little different from his more popularly favoured uncle, Abdelmelek. Indeed his style is not noticeably different from that of his wife Calipolis. The author of this section of the play adheres to the one style - rather in King Cambyses' vein - for all the characters. There is little individualisation, and even less subtlety in the characterisation. The following speech, for instance, seen in isolation would be readily attributed to Muly:

Beg, 'tis a word I never heard before  
Yet understand I what thou means't thereby [.]  
There's not a child of manly Zariks line  
But scorns to beg of Mahomet himself.  
We shall lead Fortune with us bound about  
And sell her bounty as we do our slaves [.]  
We mount her back and manage her for war  
As we do use to serve Barbarian horse  
And check her with the snaffle and the reins.<sup>1</sup>  
(2396-2403)

It is Abdelmelek who rants thus. His subsequent offers of peace and the avowed friendliness of his words to Sebastian, are all in line with the popular conception of his character, but sort ill with the boastful tendencies shown in the quotation.

Calipolis had been very sensitively handled by Peele, and had been made a very effective foil to Muly. Our present Calipolis is merely a female Muly whose extremes of imagery and whose tendency to boastfulness put her in the same straight line with her male Moorish relations. Her welcome of Sebastian is

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1. Square brackets indicate my punctuation.

typical:

I'll wipe thy brows with leaves more sweet and soft  
Than is the down of Cithereas fans [.]  
I'll fan thy face with the delicious plumes  
Of that sweet wonder of Arabia [.]  
With precious waters I'll refresh thy curls  
Whose very savour shall make panthers wild,  
And lively smell of those delicious sweets  
And with such glorious liquors please thy taste  
As Helens goblet never did contain  
Nor never graced the banquet of the Gods.  
(2341-2350)

This highly generalized kind of character portraiture is very different from the bold handling of the London scenes earlier in the play, especially those concerning the student days of Stukeley. The author of those lively scenes seems far removed from the author of the rigid formal speeches which we find in the Alcazar sections of this play. We have seen in Peele's Alcazar that Moors could be differentiated by sensitive character-drawing. One can only bring forward a lack of real interest in these Moors as an explanation of the flat handling we have here. Our present author does not even accept the obvious opportunities which the well known difference in colour between Muly and Abdelmelek gives him.<sup>1</sup>

One thing, however, the author of the Alcazar sections seems determined to do, and that is to introduce some local colour into the African scenes. He does this by making the characters harp on the excessive heat of Africa. (This was one of the well publicised features of the continent.) Abdelmelek comments on the heat of his country as though he were a stranger to it:

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1. See p. 89, footnote 1.

The sands of Afric are so parching hot  
That when our blood doth light upon the earth  
The drops do see the like caldrons as they stand.  
(2570-2572)

Sebastian complains:

The sun so heats our armour with his beams  
That it doth burn and scar our very flesh.  
(2584-2585)

Muly exclaims that such heat was never known "since Phaeton set this universe on fire" (2592). All this is within a few lines, as if someone suddenly sensing an absence of African colouring inserted those references to the heat. That is exactly the same impression that Muly's sudden precision in defining the extent of his kingdom gives, as though it had been deliberately injected to provide local colour:

I Muly Hamet King of mighty Sus  
Whose countrys bounds and limits do extend  
From mighty Atlas over all those lands  
That stretch themselves to the Atlantic sea  
And look upon Canaraes wealthy Isles  
And on the West to Gibaltaras straights.  
(2446-2451)

One feels the sudden intervention of the travel book. But generally the treatment of Africa and its Moors is vague, and appears to be only incidental to the story on which this part of the play is based.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Shakespeare had created a vigorous portrait of a Moor in his Aaron of Titus Andronicus. Aaron was a black Moor who bore his "badge of hell" in his face. Shakespeare's next portrait of a Moor is the Prince of Morocco, one of Portia's wooers. The Prince of Morocco is quite clearly described in a stage direction of the play as a tawny Moor.<sup>1</sup> The exact implications of this are gone into later in chapter IV, but we can anticipate the conclusion and state that this was an attempt to distinguish him from a black Moor, and that he was meant to be merely swarthy in complexion. He was not meant to be a Negro.

Morocco's function is to give variety to the wooing pageant which could easily have been spoilt by its repetitious nature. He is to give visual validity to his own words:

all the world desires her;  
From the four corners of the earth they come,  
To kiss this shrine, this mortal-breathing saint.  
(II, vii, 38-40)

He is to introduce a from-the-ends-of-the-earth atmosphere, without bringing in any decidedly repulsive associations such as a Negro character would at that time have called to the mind of the audience. He is to be a figure of dignity, dressed "all in white", the further to remove unpleasant associations. In spite of all this, however, his complexion is a disadvantage,

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1. The stage direction at the beginning of Act II in the First Folio edition reads: "Enter Morochus a tawnie Moore all in white ... "

so that, since, being a prince, he cannot cringe and apologize for it, Shakespeare makes him defend it fiercely:

Bring me the fairest creature northward born,  
Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles,  
And let us make incision for your love,  
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.  
(II, i, 4-7)

But he is sufficiently well-bred to blend all this with a graceful compliment to Portia:

I would not change this hue,  
Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen.  
(II, i, 11-12)

These are the poles between which Morocco moves. On the one hand, he displays a fierce assertiveness and a touchiness which arise from the disadvantage with which he starts. This disadvantage also accounts for his inclination to boast, and for his images which are rather stronger than a wooing normally requires (plucking young sucking cubs from the she-bear, for instance). On the other hand, he shows a softness born of a genuine desire to win Portia, whose loss would have made him "die with grieving".

It was inevitable that Morocco should choose the golden casket - the gold of Barbary was proverbial - as it was dramatically necessary that he should choose wrongly. But Morocco comes out of the choice much better than Arragon, whose speech, if Morocco's images are sometimes inappropriate, is a stuffy display of offensive conceit. Morocco, while insisting on his own worth, is sufficiently humble to fear that his worth may not measure up to Portia's:



Thou dost deserve enough; and yet enough  
May not extend as far as to the lady.  
(II, vii, 27-29)

Arragon, however, arrogantly assumes desert, and sees himself revealed as "a blinking idiot". The difference between the two men is the difference between a rather self-conscious dignity and a worthless conceit. Arragon departs a double fool:

With one fool's head I came to woo,  
But I go away with two.  
(II, ix, 75-76)

Morocco departs having learnt a lesson which, though trite, the best may still have to learn:

All that glisters is not gold.  
(II, vii, 65)

The contrast is complete, and Morocco's function is fulfilled.

An unnamed Moorish woman is mentioned in The Merchant of Venice sufficiently clearly to give a producer enough excuse to introduce her on the stage as a waiting woman. Lorenzo counters Launcelot's charge that he inflated the price of pork by converting Jews to Christians with:

I shall answer that better to the commonwealth than  
you can the getting up of the negro's belly: the  
Moor is with child by you, Launcelot !  
(III, v, 40-43)

Launcelot replies with a series of puns on Moor/more and an implication that the lady in question was not chaste anyway:

It is much that the Moor should be more than reason;  
but if she be less than an honest woman, she is  
indeed more than I took her for.  
(44-46)

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1. The equation, Negro = Moor, is noteworthy. Its implications are gone into more fully in chapter IV.

Launcelot's later puns on "stomachs" and "cover" in the succeeding lines also help to underline the sexuality of the relationship between himself and the Moor. J. R. Brown's note on this passage is interesting.<sup>1</sup> He writes:

This passage has not been explained; it might be an outcrop of a lost source, or a topical allusion. Perhaps it was introduced simply for the sake of the elaborate pun on Moor/more.

There is a possible explanation which would not be un-Shakespearean. The references to the Launcelot/Moor relationship occur in intimate proximity to the Lorenzo/Jessica relationship which by this point is now moving within the romantic orbit of Belmont, with the Portia/Bassanio and Nerissa/Gratiano affairs in the background. The earthy, basic relationship between Launcelot and the Moor completes the scale of alliances from Portia's down to this. This cold douche of earthy realism is not unlike the Jacques/Audrey contrast to the Orlando/Rosalind, Silvius/Phebe love types in As You Like It. The fact that Launcelot's partner is a Moor only lends emphasis to the contrast.

It is interesting also that the implied sexual freedom of Launcelot's Moor is a characteristic of the two principal Moorish ladies in waiting who appear in later plays - Zanche in The White Devil (1611-1612) and Zanthia in The Knight of Malta (1616-1618). This almost automatic association of Moors with

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1. The Merchant of Venice, ed. J. R. Brown, 1955, p. 99.

sexuality would explain why Shakespeare, in order to make his point with the greatest economy, chose a Moor rather than a European as Launcelot's partner. Also, if the character is introduced on the stage, the exotic suggestion of the spectacle would be enhanced.

WONDER OF WOMEN

THE TRAGEDY OF SOPHONISBA

Sophonisba is a very much neglected play, and undeservedly so, for it is a very powerful study of the clash between the individual and the state, between private morality and public policy and, finally, between pure service and self-interest. This theme is played in different keys and at different levels, but it is naggingly sustained throughout the play. T. S. Eliot, whose brief note in Elizabethan Essays only sign-posts the way to the play's real merits, calls it "the only play which he [Marston] seems to have written to please himself".<sup>1</sup> Our concern with the play in this study is primarily with the two African characters, Vangue, "an Aethiopian slave", and Zanthia, Sophonisba's maid, but such is the close-knit texture of the whole play that even these lowly characters help to bring out the main theme.

The prologue itself gives the main clash into which the incidents of the play are fitted. Syphax and Massinissa are rivals for the hand of Sophonisba,

but the lot  
Of doubtful favour Massinissa graced,    2  
At which Syphax grows black.  
(Prologue 12-14)

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1. Peter Ure has contributed what is perhaps the most sensitive study of the play in The Durham University Journal, new series vol. X, no. 3, June 1949, pp. 81-90.
  2. The Works of Marston, ed. A. H. Bullen, 1887, vol. II.

Syphax, incensed, joins forces with Scipio, who is invading Carthage, to attack the city. The combined forces of Scipio and Syphax are so strong that the Senators of Carthage decide to appease Syphax by breaking their word to Massinissa, and handing Sophonisba to his rival. This breach of faith, and the sacrifice of the individual's free choice which it involves, are justified on the grounds of public policy. The position is summed up by Carthalon:

May, most inevitable necessary  
 For Carthage' safety, and the now sole good  
 Of present state, that we must break all faith  
 With Massinissa.

(II, i, 5-8)

This is the decree of the Senate, but Gelloso, who maintains that there is no difference between private and public morality, refuses to subscribe to it. He maintains

That he who'll not betray a private man  
 For his country, will ne'er betray his country  
 For private men.

(II, i, 78-80)

The superior forces of the state are brought to bear, and the individual is crushed by the pressures of the state. Gelloso is eventually tortured and "rent to death" (III, ii, 24), and Sophonisba is despatched to Syphax' castle in Cirta. Here she resists his advances and threats both with moral arguments and with stratagems. But she is only an individual at the mercy of the forces of a prince who is determined to use his power, however brutally, to attain his ends:

Look, I'll tack thy head  
 To the low earth, whilst strength of two black knaves

Thy limbs all wide shall strain.  
(III, i, 9-11)

The king like the state, can do no wrong. Indeed, later in the play, Syphax asserts that ordinary moral and religious considerations are unkingly. The whole moral world is thus turned upside down for the convenience of princes:

King's glory is their wrong.  
He that may only do just act's a slave.  
My god's my arm; my life my heaven; my grave  
To me all end.

(V, ii, 40-43)

The last assertion is the inevitable consequence of the King's basic assumption, that there is no objective moral referent. It is a total denial of anything superior to man's will, no less subversive of the moral order than Satan's "Evil be thou my good" or Iago's "Divinity of hell". Even when Sophonisba is delivered from the clutches of Syphax by the now united forces of Scipio and Massinissa, she still remains the pawn of the state. The now captive Syphax, determined that, if he cannot have Sophonisba, nobody else shall, reasons with Scipio that if Sophonisba was able to make him break faith with Scipio, she could influence Massinissa in a similar way, and make him break his alliance with Rome. Scipio's doubts are aroused and, to make sure, he demands Sophonisba as his prisoner. Massinissa is bound by his oath to obey. To save him from breaking his vow, Sophonisba takes poison, and dies. In the last scene her body is ceremonially presented to Scipio - a wonder of women perhaps, but certainly a sacrifice of the individual to

state and policy.

The whole plot is beautifully orchestrated - literally almost, for music is quite sensitively employed throughout - and the minor characters, including Vangue and Zanthia, contribute their subsidiary parts to the grand scheme.

Vangue, specifically described as an Aethiopian, is employed as Syphax's henchman. His blackness would have made him symbolically fitted in the eyes of Marston's audience for this role. Marston's sensitive use of darkness and blackness in the black rites of Erictho, the enchantress, suggests that his choice of race for his two servants was deliberate. (He makes Syphax threaten Sophonisba with violence from "two black knaves", presumably to make her fate appear even more terrible to her.) When in the opening scene of the play, Syphax is venting his black vexation, and sees no way out of his despair, it is Vangue who suggests an alliance with Scipio. At the first sign that Vangue is coming up with a suggestion, Syphax exclaims quite significantly: "Some light depth of hell, Vangue, what hope?"(23) No doubt Syphax is in hell - in the torments of despair - but that the illumination was coming from an unpromising source, Vangue, is also suggested by his words. Vangue is the visible black symbol, the agent of Syphax' heart. Their minds are in perfect accord:

Dear Ethiopian negro, go wing a vessel,  
And fly to Scipio.

(60)

When, in the third act, Syphax drags in Sophonisba and

tries to violate her, Vangue is in complaisant attendance, and it is he who is left to safeguard his master's interests when the latter allows Sophonisba to perform the sacrifice she intends.

At this point Marston makes his final use of Vangue in a striking coup-de-théâtre. Sophonisba ends her sacrifice, and, in pretended celebration, offers Vangue a drugged cup of wine. He drinks, grows drowsy, reveals a secret passage to Sophonisba, and then falls into a heavy sleep. Sophonisba lays him on the bed, draws the curtains, and then escapes down the secret vault. Syphax enters, expectantly pulls back the curtains, only to find the very antithesis of what he expected - his Ethiopian negro slave, the symbol of his own evil instead of the beautiful Sophonisba. The effectiveness of this device lies in the combination of the functional and the symbolical in Vangue. He is the negation of beauty in Syphax' eyes, but he is also a representation of evil, Syphax' own evil. Syphax in his anger kills Vangue. But he does not get away from his evil. He still pursues Sophonisba, and Marston gives him another discomfiture which underlines the significance of the Vangue episode.

When next Syphax thinks he is going to enjoy Sophonisba, his ally this time is Erictho - another and a more sinister representation of evil. She is a sorceress whose black deeds are described by Syphax himself. She is quite clearly a symbol of evil, and is surrounded by darkness. She describes



what happens when she is angry:

Are we incensed ? the king of flames grows pale,  
Lest he be chok'd with black and earthy fumes,  
Which our charms raise.

(IV, i, 136-138)

Syphax makes his compact with this enemy of light who encourages his sin: "Be joy'd, make proud thy lust." (138) When, however, Syphax thinks he has enjoyed Sophonisba, he draws the curtains and discovers that he has been with no other than Erictho. He is face to face once again with his sin. This is a re-appearance in a bolder key of the earlier motif involving Vangue. The Erictho scenes, far from being examples of mere "hideous blood-curdling realism",<sup>1</sup> are an effective contribution to the central theme of the play. They help to illustrate Syphax' path to the final renunciation of good quoted earlier. Such a line of interpretation would reveal a more subtle touch than is generally credited to Marston.

Zanthia, Sophonisba's waiting woman, is also a Moor. Her name would have been adequate enough indication of this, for, wherever it or its variant Zanche occurs in the plays of this period, it indicates a Moorish waiting woman. This is, however, the first appearance of the name whose bearer's role is echoed by the later Zanthias.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the evidence

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1. A. H. Bullen, The Works of Marston, 1887, vol. I, pp. xlv-xlv.

2. Zanche, Vittoria's maid in The White Devil, 1611-1612.  
Zanthia, alias Abdella in The Knight of Malta, 1616-1618.  
Zanthia, in The Bondman, 1623.  
Zanthia, in Believe as You List, 1631.

See p. 256, footnote 1 for the source of this name.

of her name, there is a significant line in the scene in which Syphax makes advances to her, saying: "Thou art not foul."

(III, i, 61) The significance of this whole speech (III, i, 60-64) is central to the role of Zanthia, but it is somewhat obscure and involves an emendation, so perhaps it should be dealt with before the dramatic role of the character is examined.

The situation is that Sophonisba has fended off Syphax by promising him full satisfaction, if only he will allow her one hour of privacy in which to fulfil her vow to Massinissa. While she is engrossed in reading a letter, Syphax turns to Zanthia and says:

Zanthia, Zanthia !  
Thou art not foul, go to; some lords are oft  
So much in love with their known ladies' bodies,  
That they often love their - Vails: hold, hold,  
  thou'st find  
To faithful care kings' bounty hath no shore.  
(61-64)

The word "vailles" (so in the original edition), which Bullen found difficult to explain, is impossible as it stands. The emendation suggested by K. Deighton - maides<sup>1</sup> - is suitable. All Syphax is doing is turning temporarily from the mistress to the maid, at least to bribe Zanthia with pretended love, in order to win her over to his side. (This is similar to the relationship between Zanthia and Mountferrat in The Knight of Malta - he was really in love with Zanthia's mistress, Oriana.)

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1. The Old Dramatists: Conjectural Readings, 1896, p. 13.

The subsequent exchange between Zanthia and Syphax is confirmatory:

Zanthia: You may do much.  
Syphax: But let my gold do more.

The adversative "But" shows that Zanthia's response was to something else offered earlier, not gold; probably a kiss, as Deighton in his note on the passage (cited earlier) suggests.

Enough has been said by now to indicate that Zanthia's role in this play is what later comes to be accepted as the pattern for Moorish waiting women. The ease with which she responds to the almost wordless advances of Syphax suggests the tendency towards sexuality which seems to underlie the treatment of Moorish women in several plays of the period. (The glancing reference to the Moorish woman in The Merchant of Venice has been noted.)

Zanthia is a type of the light waiting-woman who is easily corrupted because of her lustful inclinations. But in Marston's scheme of conflicting attitudes towards morality, she holds her place. Just as the Senators of Carthage turn out to be time-servers of morality, deserting moral courses when situations are adverse, so Zanthia in her relationship with her mistress is shown to be a mere time-server. Sophonisba makes the principal comment on this type of service in the play, when immediately after an exit of Zanthia's she says:

But above all, O fear a servant's tongue  
Like such as only for their gain do serve.  
Within the vast capacity of space,  
I know no vileness so most truly base.

Their lord's their gain; and he that most will give,  
With him (they will not die, but) they will live.  
(III, i, 109-114)

Like her superiors in the play, Zanthia proves false when the possible fulfilment of her lust makes Syphax the more attractive employer. Thus she betrays her mistress to Syphax. (Later Syphax, who really does not care for her, sacrifices her to attain his own designs of Sophonisba.) Zanthia's treachery is no less, then, than a minor representation of the main theme of a play which displays a remarkable unity throughout. Perhaps Marston can take credit for the creation of this stereotype of the Moorish waiting-woman which other - and more highly esteemed - dramatists were to copy, but in his play he integrated popular opinion with deep poetic truth.

THE FAIR MAID OF THE WEST OR A GIRL WORTE GOLD

Both parts of Thomas Heywood's The Fair Maid of the West throb with the spirit of his times. They show the author to be intensely and intelligently interested in all that went on around him. He ranged from the doings of the heroes of the age like Essex and Raleigh, to the exploits of the London amazons, Mary Ambree and Long Meg, and other turbulent spirits like Little Davy and Cutting Dick; from the current hit tunes among fiddlers, to the problems of Barbary merchants over forbidden cargoes confiscated by kings of Morocco, and their twin perils of storms and pirates. Although his knowledge of the habits and manners of tavern characters in England was first-hand, and thus superior to his knowledge of everyday life in Mamurah in Barbary, yet he was sufficiently in touch with the gossip and commonly held notions about that land, to reproduce in his plays the reactions to Barbary and its peoples of an intelligent (but not expert) 16th or early 17th century Englishman.

The exact dates of composition of the two parts of the play are not known. Both parts were published together, and were entered in The Stationers' Register, on June 16, 1631. The difference in the general attitudes of the two parts of the play suggests that the second part was composed during a different period from the first, and that the interval between the two may have been considerable. A. M. Clark, who gives 1609-1610

as the date of Part I,<sup>1</sup> suggests that some twenty years must have elapsed between the composition of the first and the second parts.<sup>2</sup> G. E. Bentley, who agrees with Clark's theory of a time lapse between the two parts, inclines to an earlier date for the first part, namely 1603.<sup>3</sup> Warner G. Rice favours an even earlier date - "before the turn of the century."<sup>4</sup> The Elizabethan character of the first part of the play with its vivid references to Essex and Raleigh, its thoroughly hostile attitude towards Spain, the suggestions of topicality in the trade with the Barbary coast, together with the constant praise of Queen Elizabeth, all suggest that Rice's early date for the first part is the most appropriate.

While the suggestions of the first part point to an early date, it has often been mentioned that the whole character of the second part shows Jacobean influence. A. M. Clark summarises this point of view very well:

In the second part, though he preserves the racy manner, Heywood is deriving his standards from the slippery ethics of Fletcher and Massinger, his plots from situations which are constantly recurring in their world, and his characters from their favourite types. Whereas Mullisheg in Part I is drawn after the pattern set in Tamburlaine and Alphonsus, King of Arragon, in Part II he is the typical tyrant of the later romantic stage. 5

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1. Thomas Heywood, Playwright and Miscellanist, 1931, p. 110.
  2. A. M. Clark, op. cit., p. 216.
  3. The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, 1941-1956, vol. IV, p. 568.
  4. "The Moroccan Episode in Thomas Heywood's The Fair Maid of the West", Philological Quarterly, vol. IX, 1930, p. 137.
  5. Thomas Heywood, p. 213.

(The only slight reservation one is inclined to make in accepting this judgement is that Abdelmelek in The Famous History of Captain Thomas Stukeley or his earlier appearance in The Battle of Alcazar provides a more fitting antecedent for Mullisheg than either Tamburlaine or his parody who are cited by Clark. The suggested common authorship between Captain Thomas Stukeley and this play noted earlier, may be here usefully recalled.)

The difference in outlook between the first and second parts of the play is reflected in the treatment of the Moors, and especially the king Mullisheg. Part I, having breezed through Plymouth and Foy in England, and Fayal in the Azores, ends up in Mamorah in Barbary. There Bess Bridges, the fair maid of the title, encounters Mullisheg, King of Fez. The encounter is brief, occupying only the last act of the play.

Bess is forced by lack of water to put into Mamorah in her ship, which is painted black, and appropriately called "The Negro", a name which encourages Mullisheg to hope that his advances to Bess would be favourably received:

Ominous  
Perhaps, to our good fate. She in a Negro  
Hath sail'd thus ferre to bosome with a Moore.<sup>1</sup>  
(p. 321)

Mullisheg is first introduced in Act IV (p. 312), and in the space of about fifty lines he emerges as the popular Elizabethan

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1. Dramatic Works, 1874 (the Pearson edition), vol. II.  
(In quotations, i, u and v are modernised where necessary.)

conception of a Moorish ruler. He is a ruthless warrior, having just secured peace after "these bloody and intestine broiles" (p. 312), and now ascends his tribunal "Upon the slaughtered bodies of our foes" (p. 312). He then proceeds to enact some harsh laws to exact the utmost from Christian merchants, and thus enrich his empty treasury:

then give order  
That all such Christian Merchants as have traffique  
And freedome in our Country, that conceale  
The least part of our Custome due to us,  
Shall forfeit ship and goods.  
(p. 312)

His pleasure is equivalent to lust, and his harem is international, although even he does not dare to hope for English wives.

(This is typical of Heywood's patriotism.)

Finde us concubines,  
The fayrest Christian Damsells you can hire,  
Or buy for gold: the loveliest of the Moores<sup>1</sup>  
We can command, and Negroes every where:  
Italians, French, and Dutch, choise Turkish Girles  
Must fill our Alkedavy ...  
(p. 313)

Finally he is a misbeliever; he is made to cite one of his false doctrines:

our God shall be our pleasure,  
For so our Mecan Prophet warrants us.  
(p. 313)

With this background, we are prepared for Mullisheg's reaction to his first sight of Bess. He is stunned by the beauty of the Englishwoman and immediately desires her. But

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1. There is here an implied distinction between Moors and Negroes. Moors will thus be equivalent to white Moors.



Bess makes him swear among other things "to offer no farther violence to her person than what he seeks by kingly usage and entreaty" (p. 322). Mullisheg is noble enough to honour his oath even though he passionately desires Bess, and has her completely in his power. When he hears the story of the "constant love" of Bess and Spencer, he completely suppresses his own feelings and gives his blessing to their marriage:

You have wakend in me an heroick spirit:  
Lust shall not conquer vertue.  
(p. 330)

Mullisheg himself ends this part of the play, commending the virtues of Bess:

And wheresoe'er thy fame shall be inroll'd,  
The world report thou art a Girle worth gold.  
(p. 332)

The picture we have is of a Moor who, though naturally lustful, is noble enough to copy a noble example, and triumph over his base desires. The character does not seem to interest the playwright overmuch. Any struggles Muullisheg may have had within him are rather easily resolved in a simple phrase - "Lust shall not conquer vertue".

When Heywood takes up the story again, evil is not so easily conquered, and the dark side of the Moor is now dominant. The resulting study in the second part is fuller, and exploits the general suggestions of character glossed over in Part I. Part II opens with a figure for which the first part had never prepared us, namely Tota, Mullisheg's wife. If Heywood had

thought of her and the second part of the play while he was writing the first, he would almost certainly have introduced her in the earlier part. For she is no shrinking background figure like the typical Moorish woman at home. She is not at all Moorish in conception, for surely a Moorish woman, used to life in the international harem of Fez, would not work up such a passionate resentment at Mullisheg's unexpected revival of personal interest in Jess, and plan such daring measures of revenge amounting to no less than the cuckolding of her husband. Heywood, who is usually so particular about authentic detail, seems to have deserted Morocco in his creation of Tota. It is probably that he was influenced by the wantons Zanthia in Sophonisba, Zanche in The White Devil, and Zanthia in The Knight of Malta, who all appear in plays which may have intervened between Parts I and II of his play.

However unprepared we are for Tota, the new Mullisheg is even more surprising. He has changed from the noble mood in which he had led the way to "pompous banquets" at the close of the first part. When he appears here, he is silencing all music and exclaiming:

All musick's harsh, command these discords cease,  
For we have war within us.

(p. 346)

Lust, which at the turn of the century had gone down before virtue without a struggle, now reappears to present a Jacobean war in the King's mind. Lust in fact wins the first round of the struggle as Mullisheg finally convinces himself that, even

though he has sworn to give Bess safe conduct, he is justified in breaking his oath:

What of that ?  
Can a king sweare against his own desires,  
Whose welfare is the sinews of his Realm ?  
I should commit high treason gainst my self,  
Not to do that might give my soul content,  
And satisfie my appetite with fulnesse.  
(pp. 347-348)

He has become a tyrant, and has argued himself out of the bounds of ordinary morality.<sup>1</sup> He seeks the aid of Goodluck:

To make Besse mine some secret means devise,  
To thy own height and heart Ile make thee rise.  
(p. 350)

So much had Mullisheg changed that for the first time he inspires the traditional comparison with the devil:

Who but a Moor,  
Of all that beares mans shape, likest a devill,  
Could have devis'd this horreur ?  
(p. 350)

For good measure (and for purposes of later resolving the plot) Heywood makes the Queen invoke the aid of Roughman in a design of her own to lie with Spencer, in revenge for Mullisheg's neglect of her. Both are thwarted in their designs, and are made to lie unknowingly with each other. But the escape plans of the English visitors miscarry and, although at one time or another they all have a chance to get away, Heywood brings them all back by employing the old device of making the hero return against his own best interests to honour

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1. Cf. Syphax' "King's glory is their wrong".  
Sophonisba V, ii, 40.

his vow. (A similar motif occurs in Captain Thomas Stukeley, when, in the section which J. Q. Adams supposes to have derived from a play by Heywood, Stukeley returns to Cales to redeem his promise given to the Governor's wife.)

This subsidiary theme brings out another very prominent new note in the second part of this play. In Part I, the obvious fact that Mullisheg was Moslem was mentioned but, like the lust theme, was not developed. In the second part, however, the difference in religion between him and his English victims is high-lighted. Moors and Englishmen are made to contend in virtue in order to establish whether Christianity or Islam inspires nobler conduct. The basic assumption - which is proved in the end - is that Christianity is the superior religion. In the light of this assumption, the conduct of Mullisheg is explicable, but not the unusual display of honour, integrity, and trust displayed by Bashaw Joffer.

Bess and her train have all escaped under the protection of Mullisheg's signet and the password, all with the exception of Spencer, who, being under special watch, cannot escape so easily. He tries to fight his way out, does impressive deeds of valour against odds, but is overpowered by superior numbers, and is delivered to Bashaw Joffer, who is so impressed by his valour that only his oath of duty to his king could make him keep him prisoner. When he hears how Spencer has been separated from Bess, and how he is now unable to redeem his promise to see

her at a certain hour, Joffer allows him, on his word alone that he will return, to go on board and see her. Inevitably, Mullisheg realizes that the English have fled, that he has been tricked, and that only Spencer is left on whom to take revenge. He summons Spencer, and hears from Joffer that he is on parole. Certain that Spencer will never return, he condemns Joffer to death in his place, but before the headsman can strike, Spencer comes to redeem his promise. When in addition Bess and the others, who could all have sailed away, return and offer their lives for Spencer's, even Mullisheg is overwhelmed. Still remembering the Christian/Moslem tussle for the crown of virtue, he exclaims:

Shall lust in me have chief predominance ?  
And vertuous deeds, for which in Fesse  
I have been long renown'd, be quite exilde ?  
Shall Christians have the honour  
To be sole heirs of goodness, and we Moors  
Barbarous and bloody.

(p. 385)

He forgives all when he hears that it was no common courtesan who had been foisted on him the night before, but his queen, and he acknowledges the virtue of the English:

These English are in all things honourable,  
Nor can we tax their waies in any thing,  
Unlesse we blame their vertues.

(p. 385)

Bess, Spencer, and their train at last leave Fez, laden with Mullisheg's bounty, for more vicissitudes. We are hardly surprised when that paragon among Moors, Joffer, finally turns up in Florence at the end of Act V, acknowledges the superiority of

Christian virtue, and embraces Christianity:

Such honour is not found in Barbarie.  
The vertue in these Christians hath converted me,  
Which to the world I can no longer smother,  
Accept me then a Christian and a brother.  
(p. 177)

Heywood in Part II returns to his earlier work, and probes more deeply into the character of Mullisheg. He sees him as a figure subject to two impulses - his lust and his honour. The seeds of this conflict were implicit in the character as it was first sketched out in Part I. The intervening period showed how such opposing impulses could be exploited. To give but one example, Fletcher's Mountferrat in The Knight of Malta (1619), had been subject to a similar conflict - between lust and honour. He too had resisted:

Oh furious desire, how like a whirl-wind  
Thou hurriest me beyond mine honors point !  
Out of my heart, base lust, or heart, I vow  
Those flames that heat me thus, I'll burn thee in.<sup>1</sup>  
(I, i, p. 82)

He too had succumbed, and reconciled himself to being false to the vow of his order. Fingering his cross - the sign of his order - he had said:

White innocent sign, thou do'st abhor to dwell,  
So near the dim thoughts of this troubled breast,  
Yet must I wear thee to protect my crimes,  
If not for conscience, for hypocrisie.  
(I, i, p. 83)

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1. The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher, ed. Arnold Glover and A. R. Waller, 1905-1912, vol. VII.

Mullisheg, originally an Elizabethan portrait, is now presented as a Moorish example of the victim of a typical Jacobean love/honour conflict.

The two parts of this rambling play<sup>1</sup> have been treated together for convenience, but doing so has violated strict chronology. Between them comes the most celebrated dramatic portrait of an African, Shakespeare's Othello.

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1. The plot of this play is used in a Restoration romance, a form more suitable to its rambling nature:  
James Dauncy, The English Lovers, 1662.

OTHELLO

By the time Shakespeare's Othello appeared on the London stage in 1604, African characters of varying colours had become a familiar part of the London stage tradition. They were generally called Moors. Two broad types are distinguishable, although they share some common characteristics. The first type, whose blackness was generally emphasized in the text, was the villainous Moor. Muly Hamet in The Battle of Alcazar, Aaron in Titus Andronicus, Eleazer in Lust's Dominion, are notable examples of this type. The other type was the Moor whose blackness was not emphasized in the text, or who was specifically referred to as a "white Moor" or a "tawny Moor". Usually he was portrayed as a dignified oriental ruler, still capable of the cruelty credited to all Moors, but also capable of noble conduct. The two types appeared opposite each other in The Battle of Alcazar, in which the villain Muly Hamet was shown fighting against his dignified uncle Abdelmelec, a white Moor. Morocco in The Merchant of Venice too was clearly conceived as a white Moor.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from these stage types, popular notions of Africans were circulating widely in the form of books both scholarly and popular, and in the gossip of sailors, traders, and slavers who were now sailing to Africa in ever increasing numbers.

(Continuous contact between Africa and England had by now been

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1. See pp. 253-254 below.



established for over half a century.) These stories ranged from tales about the harems of the north African rulers and descriptions of the courts of West African Negro kings down to accounts of trade transactions and slave raids. In addition to all this second-hand information, Londoners seem to have had opportunities of seeing Moors both black and white in their streets. The newly discovered portrait in England of a 16th century Moorish nobleman has revived interest in the embassy sent by the King of Morocco to Queen Elizabeth in 1600.<sup>1</sup> The presence of Negroes in England at about the same time is also clearly attested by Queen Elizabeth's edict in 1601 for the transportation of "negars and blackmoores" out of the country, where their increased number was giving cause for alarm.<sup>2</sup>

It was against this background of stage tradition and popular experience that Shakespeare's Moor appeared. The poet used this background very sensitively, exploiting its potentialities for suggestion, but at the same time moving away from the stereotypes, so that in the end Othello emerges, not as another manifestation of a type, but as a distinct individual who typified by his fall, not the weaknesses of Moors, but the weaknesses of human nature.

Shakespeare's method in doing this is the daring one of putting the man and the type as it were side by side on the stage.

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1. See Bernard Harris, "A Portrait of a Moor", Shakespeare Survey, vol. XI, 1958, pp. 89-97.
  2. See p. 30, footnote 1 above.

One set of characters continually invoke the clichés of accepted belief, while the hero himself with the aid of other characters sets up a different image. The final image has to be arrived at by an assessment of the value of the evidence as presented by both sides.

Shakespeare assigns the task of introducing the hero to Iago, who reproduces and exaggerates many of the unfavourable characteristics commonly credited to Moors, and, indeed, distorts them for his own special purposes. When, representing himself as having been wrongly by-passed for the lieutenancy by Othello, he reports to Roderigo Othello's answer to the "great ones" who had intervened on his behalf, he gives a picture of a proud man, prejudiced without reason and therefore unable to defend his action:

But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,  
Evades them, with a bombast circumstance  
Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war.  
(I, i, 12-14)

(This picture, of an unsound and loud-mouthed soldier, would have fitted Muly Hamet well.) When in the same scene Iago speaks of Othello to Brabantio, he represents him as a less than human being, ugly and lascivious - in fact the devil - in contact with Brabantio's "white ewe". Iago's language presents the popular image of Moors in a grotesquely distorted light. He cannot risk the possibility of Brabantio seeing Othello's visage in his mind, so his images are carefully selected to suggest bestiality, while the general urgency of his language leaves no time for the

intrusion of thought into Brabantio's confused mind:

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram  
Is tupping your white ewe.  
(I, i, 88-89)

Moving to the popular associations of black with hell, he urges haste, lest "the devil will make a grandsire of you" (91). He reinforces these earlier images with an even more grotesque one of Brabantio's daughter being covered with a "Barbary horse". His nephews will "neigh" to him; he will have "coursers for cousins and gennets for germans" (114).

So cleverly is Iago's attack constructed that up to this point "Barbary horse" is the most specific indication he has given of the man about whom he is talking. When he finally reveals this information, it is in another doctored context: "Your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs" (117-118). He rivets Brabantio's attention, not on a man, but on a blurred image of a black lascivious animal contaminating a purer being. It is in fact left to Roderigo to give anything like a factual account of the elopement. But even his references to Othello, though couched in less offensive language than Iago's, also reflect the prevailing prejudice against Moors. According to him, Brabantio's "fair daughter" has been transported "To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" (127). She has made a "gross revolt" in tying herself to a "stranger" (137). Nowhere in this whole scene is Othello once referred to by name. In these contexts even the term "Moor", by which Iago and Roderigo habitually refer to him, suggests

overtones of contempt.

The unfavourableness of this introduction is partly counter-balanced by the very characters who make it. Iago's testimony is shaken not only by the vehemence and venom with which it is delivered, but by his self-confessed hatred of the Moor - "I do hate him as I do hell-pains" (155). He is a prejudiced witness. Also, he cannot stay to be "produced" against the Moor. He is off, in fact, to show "a flag and sign of love" (157) to the very man whom he has been slandering. Roderigo's testimony is similarly suspect since he is the rejected suitor. These facts about the witnesses emerge while they are still testifying, and therefore simultaneously detract from the value of their evidence, and, incidentally, undermine the validity of the prejudices they represent. Finally, before he leaves the stage, Iago gives unwilling testimony to Othello's essential worth (which his earlier words had depreciated) when he says:

Another of his fathom they have none,  
To lead their business.  
(153-154)

So even before our first glimpse of Othello, and ironically through the mouths of unfavourable witnesses, some of the obstacles of the traditional portrayals have been cleared away and the hero can now appear.

Othello's appearance in scene ii takes this process even further. On the visual plane, Othello stands dignified and unruffled by the unsteady, bobbing, gesticulating Iago. To the latter's total misrepresentation of the scene in which he

has just taken part, and his attempt to incite Othello by pretending that he had nearly lost his patience and killed Brabantio -

Nine or ten times

I had thought to have yerk'd him here under the ribs - Othello replies reticently. "'Tis better as it is" (3-5). The dignity of his bearing is supported by the dignity of his words when he gives his own first direct testimony about himself.

Othello's first speech of any length is an important one. He is totally unaffected by Iago's attempts to excite or scare him by harping on Brabantio's anger and his power in the state. He begins:

Let him do his spite:  
My services which I have done the signiory  
Shall out-tongue his complaints.

(17-19)

Othello's "services" represent the one solid prop of his confidence; they are the source of his security in Venetian society, without which his position becomes very vulnerable indeed. He is after all a "stranger". (The fact that he is descended from kings, which he goes on to mention (20-21), is apparently not generally known, and therefore has been of no service to him. Indeed he never invokes it during the rest of the play. This fact is put in to enhance Othello's stature as a tragic hero in the eyes of the audience.) His "services", actual and potential, give him his freedom in Venice. Because of them he can stand up to any man, even a senator. They are his most valued possession, valued, according to his other

speeches, next to his life. In fact, without them life is meaningless. When he testifies before the senate, he asks that, if his words are proved to be false,

The trust, the office I do hold of you,  
Not only take away, but let your sentence  
Even fall upon my life.

(I, iii, 118-120)

His office and his life go hand in hand. His farewell to his occupation is also illuminated by this paramountcy of his "services" in relation to his life as a whole. This concept also helps to unfold the implications of his reference to his marriage later on in this his first speech. He says:

But that I love the gentle Desdemona,  
I would not my unhoused free condition  
Put into circumscription and confine  
For the sea's worth.

(I, ii, 25-28)

If anything, Othello has weakened his position in Venice (as subsequent events show) by marrying Desdemona. For, while before he was unconfined and free, his very marriage immediately renders him vulnerable - to open insults, threats of imprisonment and active hostility. He realizes this, but he is willing to bear it all because of his love for Desdemona.

Othello's first speech, then, makes three points. He is confident because of his value to the senate; he is of royal birth (intrinsically worthy to marry a Senator's daughter); he has willingly, because of his love for Desdemona, sacrificed a freedom of action and movement which was once his most prized possession.

The hero's strength of character, demonstrated by his refusal to be provoked either by the swords of Brabantio's followers or by the Senator's own insults, confirms the image of a different Othello from the empty bombastic person we had been led by Iago to expect.

But although Shakespeare has hit the conventional attitudes such an early blow, they are not finally silenced. Throughout the play we have the old image cropping up beside the new in sustained counterpoint. Brabantio, in scene ii and again in the court scene, reflects popular prejudices; so does Emilia, and, for his own purposes, so does Iago. Brabantio accuses Othello of practising on his daughter with "foul charms" (Africa - especially Egypt - was the home of magic) which were, according to his belief, the only means by which Desdemona, brought up in the prevailing atmosphere of Venice, would be brought to

Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom  
Of such a thing as thou.

(I, ii, 70-71)

Brabantio (and Iago later) assert that the match was against "nature". (This involves, of course, a limited interpretation of nature which equates it with custom or normality.) Brabantio, ignoring the facts, angrily classes Othello with "bond slaves and pagans", a class of "Moor" with which Elizabethans were all too familiar. Iago too mouths the popular beliefs: "These Moors are changeable in their wills." (I, iii, 352-353) He also speaks of "the lusty Moor" - another popular association.

Aemilia throughout the play is suspicious of Othello. She is a conventional Venetian who, unlike her mistress, could never trust a Moor. She barely manages to conceal her dislike and mistrust of Othello and her disapproval of the match while Desdemona is alive. She is sceptical of Desdemona's assertion that Othello is not jealous: "Is he not jealous?" (III, iv, 30) and "Is not this man jealous?" (III, iv, 98) Aemilia is suspicious because "Moors" are known to be jealous. (One of the ironies of the play is that Aemilia is right for the wrong reason.) Out of deference to her mistress, however, she keeps her contempt for Othello bottled up. But when she sees her mistress murdered, it all comes pouring out: "blacker devil" (V, ii, 129), "filthy bargain" (V, ii 155), "gull", "dolt" (V, ii, 161), "dull Moor" (V, ii, 223), and almost in her last breath, one of the most common of the stock epithets, "cruel Moor" (V, ii, 248).

Against these characters who reflect the popular convention, Shakespeare puts not only Othello himself and Desdemona, but comparatively detached characters like the Duke in his judicial capacity, Montano, Lodovico, and even Cassio, who, though wronged, still refuses to fall into the general prejudice.

Shakespeare employs these conflicting attitudes to construct a trial scene that is more subtle and delicately balanced than at first appears. The proceedings of the Senate in the matter of Brabantio against Othello are scrupulously just. It is interesting to compare the kind of justice that Brabantio expects with the kind he receives. He orders Othello to be haled before



the Senate, confident of the support of people who felt as he did:

the duke himself,  
Or any of my brothers of the state,  
Cannot but feel this wrong as 'twere their own.  
(I, ii, 95-97)

This is not a reliance on the law of the statute book, but on the fellow-feeling of the jury. What does he in fact receive? He receives sympathy at his personal predicament - "We are very sorry for it" (I, iii, 73), but his specific charges receive a judicial examination. When he charges Othello with using charms and witchcraft, the Duke replies:

To vouch this, is no proof,  
Without more certain and more overt test  
Than these thin habits and poor likelihoods  
Of modern seeming do prefer against him.  
(I, iii, 106-109)

A judicial trial is really under way, and in it, against the testimony of Othello and Desdemona, Brabantio's case quickly crumbles. It is the plaintiff himself who implies the verdict. (I, iii, 189-198)

But was Brabantio wrong about the private feelings of the Senators? He probably was not, and Shakespeare's use of couplets in this scene is ambivalent enough to suggest this. The Duke's "sentences" have a formal air which show his judicial detachment while at the same time leaving room for the suspicion that his feelings were with Brabantio and that, had Othello's tale won his daughter, he would have felt exactly like the old Senator. Brabantio's parody of the Duke's "sentences" is meant to make clear the impersonal nature of the Duke's words and suggest the rift between the law and personal feelings. Also the Duke's

"Take up this mangled matter at the best" (I, iii, 173) suggests the idea of making the best of a bad job. However, the surface meaning of the "sentences" has its own validity. The private feelings of the judge do not affect the legal authority of his pronouncements. Thus the Duke's final words to Brabantio are in harmony with the general attitude of the play, namely that the presence of virtue or vice in the mind is not always indicated by appearances:

If virtue no delighted beauty lack,  
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.<sup>1</sup>  
(I, iii, 291-292)

### Desdemona and Othello

When this play is examined in relation to earlier plays involving Moors, one of its striking differences from them is seen in the nature of the love between Desdemona and Othello, as contrasted with the ties which existed between Aaron and Tamora in Titus Andronicus or Eleazer and the Queen Mother in Lust's Dominion. This is a relationship founded on far deeper feelings

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1. Since this section was written, W. H. Auden has put the matter more bluntly than I care to: "He [Othello] does not or will not recognise that Brabantio's view of the match.

If such actions may have passage free,  
Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be

is shared by all his fellow senators, and the arrival of news about the Turkish fleet prevents their saying so because their need of Othello's military skill is too urgent for them to risk offending him." W. H. Auden, "The Alienated City", Encounter, vol. XVII, no. 2, August, 1961.

than those earlier affairs. In the earlier treatments the relationship was one in which a queen to satisfy her lust bestowed clandestine favours on an inferior. Once the relationship was established, however, its very clandestine nature, and the inferiority of the male partners put the latter in a position of strength. Thereafter it became a business of blackmail.

One element of the earlier relationship nevertheless survives in Othello's love for Desdemona, in that, being a Moor, he starts off in a position of social disadvantage in relation to her. (Even his "services" do not quite make up for this.) As a result, Othello has necessarily to be, initially at any rate, something of a receiver of favours rather than a bestower of them. He cannot be as free and open in his love as even Roderigo, his obvious inferior in worth, can afford to be. Desdemona has to take the initiative in their relationship, as she does. This is not to say, however, that Othello is "a careless receiver of benefits", as has been suggested.<sup>1</sup> The history of their love is summarised in these lines:

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,  
And I lov'd her that she did pity them.  
(I, iii, 167-168)

Othello responds to Desdemona's deep sympathy which amounts, as is evidenced by her tears, to her personal involvement in his sufferings. There is no suggestion here that Othello's

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1. R. B. Heilman, Magic in the Web, 1956, p. 171.

response is less deep than Desdemona's, or that for the purposes of the play, until the disrupting influence of Iago sets in, the love match is not as full and as complete as these things can be. One fact must, however, be noted. Because of his isolation in Venetian society and the prevailing attitudes, Othello puts himself into the hands of Desdemona, the one who really belongs to the society. Hers is the stronger position socially, and this is a potential source of difficulty in the match. This is a factor which Othello's mind is quick to seize on, and which consequently Iago can exploit.

Desdemona's love for Othello is represented as full and perfect in every way. It is not merely a detached, idealistic sympathy but involves the idea of consummation:

That I did love the Moor to live with him,  
My downright violence and storm of fortunes  
May trumpet to the world.

(I, iii, 250-252)

She refers frankly to "the rites for which I love him" (I, iii, 259) and of which she will be bereft if she is left behind in Venice while her husband attends to business in Cyprus. This full and frank confession before the Senate of her full love for Othello, is in striking contrast to Othello's underplaying of the physical element of his love. Othello's enthusiasm for "the flinty and steel couch of war" on his wedding night is almost ungallant. What Desdemona refers to in reverential terms as "rites", he depreciates as

light-wing'd toys  
Of feather'd Cupid.  
(I, iii, 270-271)

What is the reason for this seemingly unnecessary restraint on Othello's part? For the answer to this question we must look again at Othello's position in Venice, the common associations of Moors with lasciviousness, and the difference between Othello's professions in Venice and his performance in Cyprus.

Othello is being summoned from his wedding rites to more "services" to the signory. We have noted that his life and position in Venice depend heavily on these services. Othello shows an anxiety to assure the Senate that nothing could come between himself and the senate's commands. He does this more heartily than perhaps a Venetian similarly situated would have done. His excessive disavowals of his attachment to "light-wing'd toys" are an attempt to side-step any ready association with lasciviousness. (Roderigo had already reminded us of this association in his speech to Brabantio earlier in (I, i, 127).) But the fact is that Othello is not really as indifferent to the physical aspects of love as he makes out. In Cyprus, where the strains of his position are more relaxed, his behaviour is perfectly natural and warm. When he arrives in the island he is overwhelmed with genuine emotion at the sight of Desdemona: "It stops me here" (II, i, 200). The range of his expressions of endearment at this point includes both the spiritual and physical aspects of love: "my soul's joy" (187), "Honey" (207), "O my sweet" (208). There is no self-consciousness, only a welling-up of genuine emotion. Nor is Othello reluctant to enjoy those "rites" which he had almost scorned in Venice. He kisses Desdemona publicly, and invites her

without self-consciousness to the marriage-bed:

Come, my dear love,  
The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue;  
That profit's yet to come 'twixt me and you.  
(II, iii, 8-10)

He is equally tender and natural to Desdemona later when the brawl interrupts their "balmy slumbers".

These early Cyprus scenes, being as they are outside the restraints of Venetian society, show better than the senate scene Othello's real feelings, and the nature of his love. Right up to the end of the play, the language is to remind us that Othello is not indifferent to the charms of Desdemona's body. This is a fact that the wily Iago appreciates and plays upon. Throughout the temptation he subtly presents pictures of Desdemona and Cassio in physical contact. This always produces a marked deterioration in Othello's control: III, iii, 396-397, III, ii, 414-428, IV, i, 1-48. On the last occasion, Iago's linking of Cassio and Desdemona with the word "lie" finally throws Othello into a trance. Othello himself frequently refers suggestively to Desdemona's body, as he does in III, iii, 346, and again in IV, i, 187, where Iago has to recall him from his untimely rhapsodies on Desdemona's beauty. But he persists in enumerating Desdemona's qualities: "O! the world hath not a sweeter creature; she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks". Indeed he is inclined at one stage to poison her, "lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again" (IV, i, 215-217). At the time of the murder itself, Othello will not

scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,

And smooth as monumental alabaster,  
(V, ii, 4-5)

and her.

balmy breath ... dost almost persuade  
Justice to break her sword!  
(16-17)

All this shows an enthusiasm for Desdemona's body which he had deliberately concealed from the senate.

Shakespeare has handled this aspect of Othello's love delicately in order to remove him from any hasty association with a type, but he does in the end balance the picture. It is not, I believe, Shakespeare's intention to show any one-sidedness in the love match. The weaknesses in the lovers' relationship which Iago was to exploit lay, not in the quality of the love, but in their situation, and in general human weaknesses arising out of Othello's character.

### Othello's Jealousy

During Othello's ecstasies on his arrival in Cyprus, Iago observes in an aside:

O ! you are well tun'd now,  
But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,  
As honest as I am.  
(II, i, 202-204)

By the end of Act III, iii, the untuning is complete. Iago has promised "My friend is dead" (475), and Othello has asked Iago to furnish swift means of death "for the fair devil" (478-479). Indeed the change is effected within a single long scene (III, iii).

As late as halfway through the scene, Othello asserts: "I do not think but Desdemona's honest." (225) One hundred and nineteen lines later, he is involved in a hate ritual: "All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven." (446) Looking at this mathematically, it is very sudden indeed. What really happens? Is Othello a man who is basically jealous and to whose ready ears Iago supplies proof? Has he suddenly become subject to a "Moorish" change of will? (Iago: "These Moors are changeable in their wills" - I, iii, 352-352.) To borrow Heilman's words,<sup>1</sup> "What makes Othello corrode so easily?"

The whole issue could be plausibly settled by asserting that if a character starts a play free from jealousy, and is to end by killing his wife out of jealousy, then the transformation has to be quick. If the poet wants to avoid the charge of suddenness while preserving his end, he has to start with an already jealous man. Shakespeare could have resorted to this device (he did in The Winter's Tale), and popular belief would have helped him more than halfway. Instead, he chose the method of demonstrating the process of corrosion. So we start with an Othello who is not jealous, but who is in some ways vulnerable. Shakespeare then makes him subject to a clever attack which is aimed at his most vulnerable points.

Othello's jealousy is not self-generated. It is the result of a deliberate plan by Iago. The plan is first mooted in

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1. Magic in the Web, p. 276, note 56.



I, iii, 401-410, when its primary object is to get Cassio into trouble. By the time it is mentioned again, this time more specifically, Othello has come into the direct line of fire:

yet that I put the Moor  
At least into a jealousy so strong  
That judgment cannot cure.  
(II, i, 312-314)

The assailant upon Othello's reason (he aims at nothing less) enumerates at the outset a few character traits in his victims which would aid his purpose. First, Cassio is the sort of man who could be easily slandered in this way. He is "framed to make women false" (I, iii, 404). Cassio's own loose relationship with Bianca gives plausibility to Iago's assessment and contributes directly (in IV, i) to the success of his plot. Next, the Moor himself is foolishly over-credulous,

And will as tenderly be led by the nose  
As asses are.  
(I, iii, 407-408)

Iago's contempt for Othello's intellect - shown in other slighting references in II, i, 321, II, iii, 357, and IV, i, 102 - is justified by his manipulation of Othello's mind so as to make him believe his wife guilty on such flimsy evidence.<sup>1</sup> Finally, Iago sees in the "inclining Desdemona" one who can be easily persuaded to embrace any honest suit. He tells Cassio that "she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested" (II, iii, 329-330). Her subsequent espousal, and at times injudicious

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1. In intellect, Othello stands in marked contrast to Aaron and Eleazer, who were both arch-strategists and manipulators of other men.

pursuit, of Cassio's welfare - "my lord shall never rest" (III, iii, 22) - also contribute directly to the tragedy. Fate (we can hardly get away from the word) and the victims themselves were to put other weapons in Iago's hands, but the overall plot to make Othello jealous is his.

Iago is also conscious of the potentialities of the racial differences between Othello and Desdemona, but the circumstances in which he first mentions this weapon, and the way in which he subsequently uses it in the temptation scene, indicate that until Othello himself mentions it (when of course he exploits it to the full) he is not sure that it would be a useful weapon. When he tries to persuade Roderigo in II, i, that Desdemona would soon grow tired of Othello - something he is by no means sure of, else he might have waited for it to happen naturally - he mentions "loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties; all *of* which the Moor is defective in". Consequently, he argues, she will soon begin to "disrelish and abhor the Moor; very nature will instruct her in it, and compel her to some second choice" (II, i, 233-240). Iago had dangled similar possibilities to the same gull earlier: "These Moors are changeable in their wills" (I, iii, 352-353). Differences such as these were perhaps his strongest weapons if he could use them effectively. But Iago never mentions these in his stock-taking soliloquies. They are nevertheless at the back of his mind. In III, iii, he throws in - as no more than ground-bait - a remark loaded with implications: "I know our country disposition well." (201) "Our"

deftly excludes Othello, who is sufficiently impressed by Iago's suggestion about the general infidelity of Venetian ladies for the tempter to persevere in this line of argument, albeit still very cautiously. He adds another veiled reference to the difference in race: "when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks". (207)

This is more specific bait. Iago seems to be well content with his progress and seems to be inclined to leave well alone for the time being, when Othello bites: "And, yet how nature erring from itself, -" (227) he is not allowed to finish before Iago sinks the hook:

Ay, there's the point: as, to be bold with you,  
Not to affect many proposed matches  
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,  
Whereto, we see, in all things nature tends;  
Foh ! one may smell in such, a will most rank,  
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.

Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,  
May fail to match you with her country forms  
And happily repent.  
(228-238)

Iago has almost overdone it, and Othello dismisses him, but not before he makes a request of his tormentor which shows how successful this preliminary attack has been: "Set on thy wife to observe" (240). Othello's "Why did I marry?" immediately he is alone, shows how securely Iago has him. His tormentor's words remain in his mind - he is already "on the rack" - and soon he is saying on his own account "Haply, for I am black" (263). All that is left for Iago to do after this is to produce, on Othello's demand to see, a few illusions which he is to call proof.

Shakespeare's handling of this vital scene during which the

the corrosion is effected is not to be judged by length - even though with 480 lines it is long enough - but by its intensity. This short illustration of Iago's use of one weapon shows how complete Shakespeare can be in a brief space. The Othello who says:

'Tis not to make me jealous  
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,  
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well;  
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous,  
(183-186)

and who seems to have the one incontestable bit of "proof" needed to demolish Iago's suggestions: "For she had eyes, and chose me" (189), is made, as a result of the intensity of Iago's attack and his own weak manoeuvrability, to exclaim seventy-eight lines later:

She's gone and I am abus'd; and my relief  
Must be to loathe her.  
(267-268)

All this without even a handkerchief for proof ! Shakespeare has at one and the same time showed the difference of race to be a trifle as light as air, and a dreadful weapon in Iago's hand. It has been used in fact exactly as the handkerchief is to be used later.

### The Handkerchief.

Othello's demand for proof comes after Desdemona's guilt has been established in his mind. He had listed rather elaborate criteria on which his conduct would be based: "I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove," (III, iii, 190) but in fact he doubts long before he has seen even the illusions that he allows to

pass for proof. Nevertheless, he does call for "proof":

Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,  
Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof.  
(360-361)

With the persistence of mania he calls for proof (365-367, and 387), and for satisfaction (391 and 394). Iago obliquely produces a series of disquieting pictures of Cassio and Desdemona in 396-397, 400, and principally in relation to Cassio's "dream" (414-427), to weaken Othello's control, and then he mentions his one bit of tangible evidence, the handkerchief. The mere mention of the handkerchief secures sentences of execution on both Cassio and Desdemona. In effect Iago's mere word has been accepted as proof.<sup>1</sup>

Unnecessary as proof though the handkerchief itself (as distinct from Iago's tale about it) seems to be, Shakespeare devotes a good deal of time to it, and makes significant changes to Cinthio's handling of it. At least one important feature of his treatment is puzzling to me. It is the magic element in the handkerchief. This is an element which Shakespeare introduces <sup>in</sup> to the story. Cinthio had only mentioned "a handkerchief which he [Iago] knew the Moor had given her, finely embroidered in the Moorish fashion; and which was precious to Desdemona, nor less so to the Moor".<sup>2</sup> There seems to be enough stress here on the

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1. R. B. Heilman (in Magic in the Web, pp. 157-160) notes how Othello travesties justice in his "trial" of Desdemona in V, ii. That stricture applies even more strongly to III, iii, where the defendants do not even appear.
  2. John Edward Taylor's translation, 1855, reproduced by H. H. Furness in his Variorum edition of Othello, 1886, p. 382.

value of the handkerchief without recourse to a mysterious origin. Yet Shakespeare makes Othello give Desdemona a fairly detailed account of the magical provenance of the handkerchief of which, until he tells Desdemona about it, only he is aware. Twenty lines of description at this point of intensity in the drama should certainly be intended to have some significance. But what? Does Shakespeare want us to believe that it was the magic in the handkerchief that made Othello put so much value on it? Are we to believe at all that this story of the handkerchief is true? Or that Othello, in the words of Fernand Baldensperger, "is a decided Christian and at the same time an inborn fetichist"?<sup>1</sup> I believe that the answer to all these questions is "no".

My suggestion is that Othello is using the magic idea to cover up the real reason for his disproportionate passion over such <sup>a</sup> trifle. He is still sane enough to feel ashamed to admit openly that he requires the handkerchief as "proof" of fidelity. Yet such is the state of his mind after Iago's ministrations that he has to know where the handkerchief is. He therefore has to give Desdemona a story, not the truth, to communicate a certain urgency into his demand for its production. He has to magnify its value so that it occupies in Desdemona's eyes the same size that it occupies in his now distorted vision. (Ironically this is the same napkin that Othello had a little while earlier

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1. Magic in the Web, p. 283, note 83. The passage occurs in a personal letter from Baldensperger to Heilman.

described as being "too little".) So for a moment he borrows hastily from his background this rather unconvincing tale. He succeeds in momentarily shocking Desdemona with the story - "Is't possible?" (III, iv, 69) and "Then would to heaven that I had never seen it!" (78) But even she does not believe the story for long. She is unable to reconcile this sudden revelation of superstition in Othello with the rest of his character. She actually tries to laugh it off: "This is a trick to put me from my suit," (87) but Othello's obvious passion leaves her bewildered. Her remark: "Sure, there's some wonder in this handkerchief," (100) seems to be uttered in a state of dazed incredulity. The more she has time to think about it, the less she believes the story. She persists in believing that some other matter - something of state - is bothering him. For, she adds,

in such cases  
Men's natures wrangle with inferior things  
Though great ones are their object.  
(III, iv, 142-144)

Never again, after the one episode in III, iv, does Othello mention the magic element in the handkerchief. When he accuses Desdemona of giving it away to Cassio, it only has value because he had loved it:

That handkerchief which I so lov'd and gave thee  
Thou gav'st to Cassio.  
(V, ii, 48-49)

When, passionately defending his killing of Desdemona to Emilia, he refers once more to it, it is again as a deeply valued love token:

And she did gratify his amorous works  
With that recognizance and pledge of love

Which I first gave her . . .  
It was a handkerchief, an antique token  
My father gave my mother.  
(V, ii, 211-215)

(The last detail given here does not accord with Othello's earlier story about an Egyptian giving it to his mother.)

The handkerchief is in reality no more than a love token, and merely as such it is still very precious to Desdemona - more so than Othello's suggested origin would have made it. This is the value which Iago discerned and which made him beg his wife to steal the handkerchief. Otherwise it is as "trifles light as air". The handkerchief has, I suggest, no more magic in it for Othello than it has for Desdemona. It is the pledge of a love which, according to Othello's defective vision, Desdemona has betrayed. The tale also helps to build up the exotic background of Othello, just as his references to the Anthropophagi and other phenomena do.

#### Honourable Murderer.

In the last scene (V, ii), all the ironies of the play are gathered up into one massive irony in the slaying of the innocent Desdemona by an Othello who is fully convinced of her guilt. While he calls himself "a sacrificer" believing this to be true, he is really a "murderer", as he himself soon comes to realize. He stands in the role of judge over Desdemona, and at the completion of the act of justice, he finds it necessary to sit in judgement upon himself and convict himself for the very act that he has just called an act of justice. This scene thus interestingly divides into



two trials: the trial of Desdemona, followed by the trial of Othello, the judge and executioner in both cases being Othello himself.

The first trial, for all its legal terminology - "cause", "justice", "sword", "perjured", "confess" - is a travesty. The judge has come in with his mind made up. He is at once plaintiff, judge and executioner, while he also has the ironical but pervasive role of lover. This mixture of functions automatically damns the proceedings. But beyond these formal considerations the proceedings themselves are intrinsically unjust. Othello merely accuses. He does not accept evidence from the other side:

For to deny each article with oath  
Cannot remove nor shake the strong conception  
That I do groan withal. Thou art to die.

(54-56)

Desdemona's answer to the charge therefore passes unheeded except as evidence of perjury against her. On such procedure it is inevitable that she should be found guilty and be executed on Othello's testimony alone. The irony here is that Othello's refusal to accept evidence springs from an overriding consciousness of the justness of his position. Without knowing it, he equates himself with divine justice, which, unlike him, has a total apprehension of all the facts. Being a mere man (this seems to be the point of all great tragedy), he has the obligation to go through the pedestrian task of taking and sifting evidence: otherwise he runs the risk of hideous error. This

he fails to do.

After this first trial comes the testing of Othello's trial of Desdemona, and an implied trial of the judge himself.<sup>1</sup> In this re-examination, Aemilia plays crucial role. The whole charge of infidelity in the first part of the trial had been based on the handkerchief (47-48, 62, 66), and she held the secret of its loss.

Othello states his case publicly against Desdemona (and for the first time in full) in lines 208-215 with the handkerchief figuring again as evidence. The case is that Iago knows of Desdemona's infidelity with Cassio, that Cassio has confessed to this, and that Desdemona gave his "recognizance and pledge of love" (212) to Cassio. He goes on to clinch (as he thinks) his point: "I saw it in his hand" (213). It takes Aemilia only five lines to demolish the validity of the "proof" (223-227) and, incidentally, the whole of Othello's case. He stands condemned even in his own eyes, and of course so does Iago. No one pronounces a verdict on Othello's case except himself. (Similarly Brabantio had implied the verdict in his own case.) There is no need for another judge. To his murdered wife he exclaims (referring to a higher tribunal):

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1. Important though Iago has been in leading Othello to the brink of tragedy, once this is achieved, he is largely ignored. The play then concerns itself with the effects of his villainy on characters better than himself.

when we shall meet at compt,  
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,  
And fiends will snatch at it.  
(272-274)

This is his penalty after death, stated in Christian terms.

But the case has to be settled on earth as well. How is his conduct to be explained in human terms? Lodovico, possessed of all the facts, calls Othello "this rash and most unfortunate man" (282). This is a judgement more sentimental than judicial. Lodovico is too absorbed in Othello's predicament as a man to pass sentence on him as a criminal. Sympathy for Othello is again the dominant note in Lodovico's fuller comment, which ends by turning the responsibility for passing judgement to Othello himself:

O thou Othello ! that wert once so good,  
Fall'n in the practice of a damned slave,  
What shall be said to thee ?  
(290-292)

Othello then pronounces the verdict: "An honourable murderer, if you will." (293) The juxtaposition of "honourable" and "murderer" expresses fittingly the irony of the play. This is not an attempt on Othello's part to whitewash his crime, but an attempt by the author to present it as it emerges from the circumstances of the play.

Othello's final speech has a note of deep humility which springs from a full consciousness of his own limitations as a human being. The quality of his grief is different from that displayed earlier, immediately after his discovery of his horrible mistake. Then, his grief had been loud and violent. He had

predicted his own damnation, and, anticipating his torture in hell, had called down torments on himself. He had broken down and wailed aloud (V, ii, 276-281). His violence, flowing outwards, had made him attack Iago. (Earlier he had even offered violence to Gratiano, 256-257.) In his last speech, by contrast, his mood is calm. Before its gentle opening - "Soft you" - he has passed judgement on himself, and he is now setting the record straight before he carries out the sentence. (The voice of the dramatist in the act of summing up is discernible in the last words of Othello, and failure to take its presence into critical account here may lead to disasters in interpretation.) Othello's version of his story is fair. The sight of one who, however inadvertently, had been so unfair to Desdemona, being fair to himself might offend our sense of justice, and lead us to see in this last speech a cheap attempt at self-justification - he has no right to be fair to himself. But if we remember that this is also the dramatist being fair to his tragic hero, the balance is restored.

Othello, then, is being fair. Most of what he says of himself in this last speech represents the sense of the play, and could be paralleled in the judgements of other fair characters. In his own mouth, the description of his own deeds as "unlucky" (rather than brutal, wicked or unjust) sounds like whitewashing. But this is parallel to Lodovico's attitude implied in phrases like "this rash and most unfortunate man"

(V, ii, 281), "fall'n in the practice of a damned slave" (V, ii, 291), as well as in his general reluctance to pass any sterner judgement on Othello. (This contrasts with the very harsh epithets which he freely applies to Iago. In his last speech, for instance, he refers to him as

Spartan dog !  
More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea,  
(360-361)

and "this hellish villain" in 367.) Othello asks to be represented justly - "as I am" (341). This is a similar plea to that of the dying Hamlet to Horatio, to live to tell his story (Hamlet V, ii, 358-363). Othello, however, goes further, and in a series of epigrams states what Hamlet only implies, namely, that he has been thrust by circumstances into deeds normally foreign to his nature:

then, must you speak  
Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well;  
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,  
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,  
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe  
(342-347)

My interpretation of "not wisely but too well" is in line with G. R. Elliott's when he writes: "That epigram is explanation, not extenuation".<sup>1</sup> Othello's earlier condemnation of his crime had been complete. (He is a "murderer", however "honourable".) The neatness of the epigram, however, carries within it the seeds of difficulty. (Did the dramatist's wit run away with the

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1. Flaming Minister, 1953, p. 236.

thought here?) "Too well" - read as implying "an excess of virtue"<sup>1</sup>, a legitimate interpretation - sounds too much like bragging, while the whole tone of the speech (spoken in the "melting mood") seems to be one of humility. If Shakespeare had not been as neat as he was in this line, he might have added a necessary qualification which would have made all clear. But, even as it stands, "too well" implies something more like "on too idealized a principle which implied that my wife should be above even suspicion". (The clumsiness of an attempted paraphrase merely enhances the felicity of the line.)

Othello's presentation of himself as one "not easily jealous" is, I think, justified (in spite of the short stage-time that he takes to become jealous) by the intensity and the clever direction of Iago's attack acting on his victim's credulity. This action is aptly expressed by "wrought" with its suggestion of being worked upon. If Othello's words represent him as being passive in his relation to Iago, this is what the play itself suggests. Othello did not counter-attack Iago's assault on his reason. His intellectual armoury was ill-equipped for this kind of warfare. But his passivity does not extend to his crime, nor does he claim exoneration from this. The positive nature of his crime is implied in the image of throwing away the pearl "like the base Indian". This pejorative comparison

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1. R. B. Heilman, Magic in the Web, p. 168.

is meant to convey Othello's admission of his own undervaluing of the precious nature of Desdemona's love, as well as his stupidity.<sup>1</sup> At the end of this speech, Othello executes the sentence, and dies, giving the irony of the play a physical representation by dying upon a kiss - a gesture futile in this-worldly terms, but (like the end of Graham Greene's The Heart of the Matter) opening up the possibility of a higher trial of this frequently tried case between Othello and Desdemona. (This may not have been in Shakespeare's mind at all but the end of the play does suggest this.)

Thomas Rymer, who so frequently brings up the right questions but supplies the wrong answers, accuses Shakespeare of frivolously violating tradition by departing from the Horatian portrait of a soldier, and making his soldier, Iago, "a close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal, instead of an open-hearted, frank, plain-dealing Souldier ..."<sup>2</sup> But as Zimansky points out, this was deliberate and meaningful in the play: "his [Iago's] success depends partly on the idea of the typical soldier that Rymer holds ...". So the very idea of decorum that Rymer upholds is actually in the play, and its violation allows the tragic action."<sup>3</sup> This deliberate antithesis between what Iago

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1. Ironically the position he takes to himself here is exactly the same as Aemilia's, which in her anger she expresses more harshly - "O gull! O dolt!/As ignorant as dirt! (V, ii, 161-162) - and in line with his own "Fool! fool! fool! " (V, ii, 322) when his mood was more violent.
  2. The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer, ed. C. A. Zimansky, 1956, p. 134.
  3. Op. cit., Introduction, p. xxviii.

is supposed to be and what he is ("I am not what I am") also occurs in Shakespeare's portrayal of Othello. He is taken (by some of the characters) as the manifestation of a type - barbarous Moor, bond-slave, pagan - and he turns out to be noble, Christian, if somewhat naive. We thus have a double antithesis: Iago is both soldier and villain; Othello is both Moor and noble hero.

There are many ways by which one can come to a realization of Shakespeare's great stature beside his contemporaries. His complete humanisation of a type character who for most of his contemporaries has only decorative or a crude moral significance is only one more mark of this stature. He transformed the Moor with all his unfavourable associations into the hero of one of his most moving tragedies. It is ironical that, because of his success, many 19th century critics (and a few in this century) have refused to accept the fact that he could have started so far away from his end, by using a figure who had far from tragic significance for his contemporaries - a black Moor or Negro.<sup>1</sup> This too is testimony, albeit negative testimony, to Shakespeare's immense stature.

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1. See pp. 256-261 below.



THE WHITE DEVIL

In an age when poets sought to reconcile extremes by the use of one deft phrase, the title of Webster's play was a deliberate paradox. Brachiano, Vittoria's lover, disappointed at her supposed infidelity to him, echoes the symbolism of the title when he exclaims: "How long have I beheld the devill in christall!"<sup>1</sup> (IV, ii, 89) This juxtaposition in imagery of black and white occurs once more in the play. When Isabella, the virtuous wife of Brachiano, is trying to convey the depth of her grief, she says:

Hell to my affliction  
Is meere snow-water.  
(II, i, 252-253)

The devil, hell, and their accompanying colour of black are woven into the language of the play as if Webster were repeatedly reminding his audience that behind the fair exteriors of his characters hell constantly lurked. To make the symbol flesh, he intermingled black faces with his white characters on the stage. Vittoria had her Zanche, Giovanni his Jacques, and, in a fusion of black and white, the avenger Francisco disguised himself as the Moor Mullinassar. There is no doubt that Webster was highly conscious of the symbolic value of his black characters. The introduction of these characters was quite gratuitous on Webster's

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1. The White Devil, ed. F. L. Lucas, The Works of John Webster, 1927, vol. I.

part.<sup>1</sup> His intention seems to have been to give physical form to the underlying paradox of the play. Lucas, recognizing this symbolic significance of Zanche, calls her Flamineo's "black familiar". The phrase is apt, except that the devilish associations are not meant to attach to Flamineo alone. Zanche is the conventional black devil to Vittoria's white. Because brother and sister in the play are such kindred spirits, they share the services of the familiar; but her peculiar significance with regard to Vittoria is recognized by B. J. Layman when he writes of "Zanche the Moor - a lesser devil whose hue, real and symbolic, provides us with a means of judging Vittoria's ..."<sup>2</sup> This is no doubt Webster's intention. In spite of a certain grandeur in her, we are not meant to forget Vittoria's complicity in the murders of Camillo and Isabella, or the lust which inspired them. Webster is constantly referring to this devil in her. Monticelso, embarrassed by the coolness with which Vittoria scores off him in the trial, exclaims:

I am resolved  
Were there a second Paradise to loose  
This Devell would betray it.  
(III, ii, 71-73)

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1. Gunnar Boklund dismisses any "impressive pedigree" for Zanche in the sources of the play. He writes: "The possibility is very real that Webster had never heard of the existence of Caterina Bolognese - or any chambermaid of Vittoria's for that matter - and simply furnished his heroine with one whom he made behave according to prevailing dramatic fashion and his own idea of dramatic expedience. Faithful to the same fashion he called this child of his imagination Zanche".  
The Sources of the White Devil, Uppsala, 1957, p. 97.
  2. "The Equilibrium of Opposites in The White Devil", P.M.L.A., vol. LXXIV, 1959, p. 339.

On numerous other occasions Vittoria is called a devil: frequently by her brother (I, ii, 240; V, vi, 19, 124), by Brachiano, and by Monticelso. We seem to be in the morality atmosphere, and the devil is never far away. Monticelso, using the morality idiom, exclaims:

next the devell, Adultry,  
Enters the devell, Murder.  
(III, ii, 112-113)

Altogether, the devil is mentioned in one context or another nearly forty times. In a play which frequently uses the idiom of the morality drama, Zanche walks the boards on two levels, as Vittoria's maid and as a manifestation of evil or the devil. The particular sin which she represents is that of lust, and this she shares with her mistress.

As Vittoria's maid, she follows along the lines of Marston's Zanthia. Her loyalty ends where her lust begins, for lust is her dominating element. At her first entrance she appears as an eager minister to her mistress' lust. She brings in a carpet and cushions for Vittoria and Brachiano (I, ii), stays to watch the ensuing scene, and approvingly comments "See now they close" (204).<sup>1</sup> But she is not a mere commentator on lust. She is lustful in her own right. That is the basis of her

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1. Massinger's Zanthia in The Bondman (1623) also follows the line of her predecessors. Echoing Zanche's role here, she is such a perfect pandar that Azotus remarks of her counsels in this regard,

'Tis pity these instructions are not printed;  
They would sell well to chambermaids.  
(Plays, ed. Gifford, 1856, p. 101.)

relationship with Flamineo, whose quibble on raising the devil (V, i, 88-89) points conclusively to this.

At the sight of Mullinassar (Francisco disguised) she easily transfers her desires to him, and makes unmistakable reference to the kind of relationship she expects between them in the invented dream which she narrates to him in V, iii, 232-248. In furtherance of her lust she betrays her mistress' secret to him, and confesses her complicity in it, blithely proposing:

For which, urg'd with contrition, I intend  
This night to rob Vittoria.  
(V, iii, 260-261)

She is a black devil, frank and open in her sin. Typically she says as she boldly accosts Francisco:

I neere lov'd my complexion till now,  
Cause I may boldly say without a blush,  
I love you.  
(V, i, 206-208)

Like her mistress, and for more obvious reasons, she is constantly being referred to either baldly as a devil or indirectly as a creature of hell. The rather self-righteous brother of Flamineo, Marcello, asks his brother: "Why doth this devill haunt you?" (V, i, 84) Lodovico calls her "the infernall" (V, iii, 220), and Flamineo, classing her with her mistress, calls them both "cunning Devils" (V, vi, 149). This is Zanche the symbol; a constant reminder on the stage of the presence of evil, of sin, and particularly of the sin of lust from which springs much of the evil in the play. Unlike her mistress, however, she is openly what she is; she is the black

foil against which the character of the white devil could be more clearly judged.

### A Note on 'Mullinassar'

Francisco's disguise is of some interest. He is an avenger, the doer of black deeds, and the additional touch of a black colour further emphasizes the constant proximity of hell to the events of this play. That needs no further emphasis. What is rather surprising is the fact that Webster spends several lines giving Mullinassar (as distinct from Francisco) a character, one which reminds us very strongly of Shakespeare's Othello.

Flameneo says of him:

I have not seene a goodlier personage,  
Nor ever talkt with man better experienc't  
In State-affaires or rudiments of warre.  
Hee hath by report, serv'd the Venetian  
In Candy these twice seven yeeres, and bene cheife  
In many a bold designe.

(V, i, 6-11)

Like Othello, he is a Christian (25-26). Other touches, like his air of command, his reported fondness for the lofty phrase (32), and his service against the Turks (42), serve to heighten the similarity. Webster gives "Mullinassar" a fairly lengthy discussion with Marcello and Flameneo which is unnecessary to the plot. Why did Webster veer off the strictly necessary to stir up memories of Shakespeare's noble Moor? It is possible that he may have wished to introduce into the revenge

theme the suggestion of an "honourable" murder. This is not to say that Webster wanted this to be taken as his own view of the revenge, but he has shown sufficient ambivalence in his handling of the "devil" Vittoria, to leave us unsurprised if he throws in a slight counter-weight into the whole question of the moral basis of revenge.

F. L. Lucas observes that Zanche's idea of addressing Francisco in Moorish is "dramatically a slight mistake since it rouses a false expectation that his imposture will thereby be revealed".<sup>1</sup> This is true, and is all part of Webster's excess of zeal in providing some local colour here. No doubt the dramatist wished to convey something of the isolation of a figure like Zanche in Italian society, which made her crave for the society of a countryman, and a few moments of converse in her own tongue.

(A later disguise occurs in Richard Broome's comedy The English Moor (1636-1637). Millicent, an English lady, is painted black and given a trick of speech - the only occasion in my reading when a Moor has been made to speak less than standard English.)

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1. Note to V, i, 95-96.

THE KNIGHT OF MALTA

There is probably no better way of describing the plot of this play than by borrowing the words of Morandine, its humorist, who, confronted with yet another surprising twist to the story, exclaims "more Jiggam-bobs". There are enough "jiggam-bobs" in this extremely rambling and complicated plot to account for the hands of more than the three men who are credited with the play's composition. (Successive critics of the play have followed F. G. Fleay in dividing its scenes among Fletcher, Field and Massinger.)<sup>1</sup> With the impressive pageantry accompanying the installation and formal degradation of knights of the order of Malta are intermingled the hurly-burly of fights with the Turks and the display of colourful booty gained thereby - including picturesque Turkish captives - to form an elaborate background for the personal story of Oriana, the chaste sister of Valetta, the grand master of the order of the Knights of Malta.

The plot centres on the conflict involved between Mountferrat's vow of chastity and his love for Oriana. It treats of his secret advances to her, her rejection of his suit, and his gradual loss of the scruples of honour as he gives way in turn to resentment at his rejection and to his continuing desire for her. Underneath the ramblings of the plot runs a

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1. F. G. Fleay, Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1891, vol. I, 205-206. Also E. H. C. Oliphant, The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, 1927, pp. 392-398, especially p. 394 where he gives his division of the scenes among the three playwrights.





The mistress and the maid thus represent two extremes between which Mountferrat moves. His real agony lies in the fact that according to the vows of his order he has no right to be in this position at all. Either choice would be dishonourable. Once on the slope, his decline is continuous.

Abdella falls in line with her black predecessors on the English stage. On the realistic level, she is the light waiting-woman with an eye on her own interest, and who in fulfilment of her lust betrays her mistress. The standards which rule the conduct of the other characters do not operate with her at all. One exchange with even the degenerate Mountferrat illustrates her complete detachment from ordinary moral standards. She is urging her lover to accept Gomera's challenge to a duel:

he is but one neither,

Naked as you are, of a strength far under.

Mountferrat: But he has a cause above me.

Abdella: That's as you handle it.

(IV, ii, p. 145)

For her, honour is merely whatever is convenient.

The details of Zanthia/Abdella's portrait are all borrowed from the convention. Her lust is open and unashamed, and her pride in the constancy of her charms is defiant (I, ii, p. 84). She is bold in the face of death and danger. She counsels

Mountferrat: "Be bold and brave, if we must dye together."

(IV, ii, p. 145)

She and the other characters refer to her inability to blush (IV, ii, p. 145). All these are tricks out

of the conventional hat.

On the symbolic level, she is the devil, the agent and the symbol of evil. Again this is a conventional treatment. Norandine brings out her symbolic function in one torrent of abuse on Mountferrat and her:

We'll call him [Mountferrat] Cacodemon, with his  
black gib there, his Succuba, his devils seed,  
his spawn of Phlegethon.  
(V, ii, p. 160)

Abdella derives from the convention, but looms larger in this play than any of her predecessors. Her creators obviously realized her symbolic potentialities and exploited them to the full. She fits very well into the clearly conceived thematic structure of a play which is, however, choked with the weeds of uncontrolled invention.

TREATMENTS OF CLEOPATRA

The figure of Cleopatra has fascinated dramatists in England ever since the publication of Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's Lives. The line stretches from Samuel Daniel down to George Bernard Shaw. The Elizabethan and Jacobean era produced, within the space of about thirty years, four major dramatic portraits of her: Samuel Daniel's in The Tragedie of Cleopatra (1594), Shakespeare's in Antony and Cleopatra (1606/7), John Fletcher's in The False One (1620), and Thomas May's in The Tragedie of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt (1626).

The fact that Cleopatra was not a native of Egypt, but a descendant of kings whose original home was Macedonia, was well known. A passage in North's Plutarch relating to Cleopatra's exceptional linguistic ability makes this quite clear:

She spake unto few barbarous people by interpreter, but made them aunswere her selfe, or at the least the most parte of them: as the Aethiopiens, the Arabians, the Troglodytes, the Hebrues, the Syrians, the Medes, and the Parthians, and to many others also, whose languages she had learned. Whereas divers of her progenitors, the kings of AEgypt, could scarce learne the AEgyptian tongue only, and many of them forgot to speake the Macedonian.

Daniel's Cleopatra conforms to this picture of a Grecian princess ruling in a foreign land. She is in no way identified with Egypt or its peoples. The poet, writing after the restrained dramatic manner of the Greeks, has his eye fixed on

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1. Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, translated by Sir Thomas North, ed. George Wyndham, 1895-96, vol. VI, p. 27.

the moral pattern and not primarily on the Queen who is involved in it. Cleopatra's fate for him is the completion of a revolution of the wheel of fortune; she herself is very formally presented, although Daniel feels a partly unwilling admiration for her. The moral situation is conveniently communicated through the agency of a stylised chorus of Egyptians who, for all it matters, could have been Greeks. They refer conventionally to "Mysterious Egypt, wonder breeder" (1201),<sup>1</sup> and to "Nylus Father of floudes" (1702-1703), but neither Egypt nor its queen comes alive with a special Egyptian character, as they do in Shakespeare's play.

In Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra, Egypt is Cleopatra and Cleopatra is Egypt, and both country and queen are brought sharply before us. Quite apart from the references to the Nile and its habits, to the crocodiles and the pyramids, which any dramatist who knew about them would have included in a play about Egypt, Shakespeare makes use of Egypt in a more fundamental way, to evoke an atmosphere in complete contrast to Rome, and a queen as different as possible from a Roman matron.

The whole language of the play derives inspiration from Egypt. Cleopatra is Antony's "serpent of old Nile" (I, v, 25) - an expression full of suggestion - and, when he is displeased with her, she becomes "foul Egyptian" (IV, x, 23), "this false soul of Egypt" (IV, x, 38), and "a right gipsy" (IV, x, 41). On

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1. The Complete Works of Samuel Daniel, ed. A. B. Grosart, 1885.

numerous other occasions she is just "Egypt". Antony addresses her thus in his last speeches: "I am dying, Egypt, dying". The farewell is to both queen and country, as well as all they have stood for. Cleopatra herself in her most poignant moments swears by Egypt: "As I am Egypt's queen" (I, i, 29). Her total identification with her people and country is shown as she calls down vengeance on herself and them if she has been false to Antony:

Ah! dear, if I be so,  
From my cold heart let heaven engender hail,  
And poison it in the source; and the first stone  
Drop in my neck: as it determines, so  
Dissolve my life. The next Caesarian smite,  
Till by degrees the memory of my womb,  
Together with my brave Egyptians all,  
By the discanding of this pelleted storm  
Lie graveless, till the flies and gnats of Nile  
Have buried them for prey!

(III, xi, 158-167)

The Egyptians, the flies and gnats of Nile are not mere injections of local colour; they are essentially part of the very fabric of the play. Similarly the asp is transformed into an essential agent in the story. "The pretty worm of Nilus" (V, ii, 242) does its work as Cleopatra's babe, "That sucks the nurse asleep" (V, ii, 311-312). Egypt is nothing without Cleopatra; even the asp derives its life from the Queen of Egypt.

Shakespeare even gives Cleopatra a touch of the sun in her complexion, the more to identify her with the land and its people. Philo contemptuously dismisses her complexion with the words "tawny front" (I, i, 6), and more than her complexion with "a

gipsy's lust" (I, i, 10). The Queen even describes herself as being "with Phoebus' amorous pinches black" (I, v, 28). The suggestions of a dark complexion here would make Cleopatra's sensual character more readily acceptable to Shakespeare's audience. (In Dekker's later play, The Wonder of a Kingdom, 1631, Cleopatra is referred to in similar terms:

Ide give a Princes ransome now to kisse  
Blacke Cleopatra's cheeke. 1  
(III, i, 49-50))

Shakespeare departs from the authority of his sources to create "a less unparallel'd" who combines all the mystery, the exotic charm, the lust, the magic, even the evil of Egypt, to become, with her country, a massive force able to stand against the staid, solid (though slightly shabby) respectability of Rome. "Salt Cleopatra" is far more convincing as an "Egyptian dish" than as a Macedonian princess.<sup>2</sup>

Fletcher's play, The False One (1620), treats the young Cleopatra whose dealings were with Caesar. This Cleopatra is quite clearly a Grecian, surrounded by a people quite different from herself. Fletcher, who in this play accepts the easy generalisation common at that time, that Egyptians, like all other Africens, were black, makes this difference quite clear (almost in his own person) when he makes Achilles refer to

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1. Dramatic Works, ed. Fredson Bowers, 1953-1961, vol. III, p. 605.
  2. Shakespeare had similarly created a romantic and rather mysterious background for Othello of which the handkerchief, no less than the Anthropophagi, were ingredients.

the fair Cleopatra  
(An attribute not frequent to the climate).<sup>1</sup>  
(I, i, p. 301)

The dramatically unnecessary parenthesis conveniently illustrates Fletcher's method - more typical of the age than Shakespeare's - of intruding the local colour into the play. Cleopatra's difference in complexion is further emphasized by the revulsion with which she reacts to Photinus' proposal of marriage: "O Giant-like Ambition! married to Cymerian darkness!" (V, iv, p. 367). (An additional reason for Cleopatra's disgust is that he is a eunuch.)

Fletcher does his best for the curious playgoer by sprinkling the play with references to the pyramids, sun-burnt Egypt, the overflowing Nile - he knew as much about all that as Shakespeare did - but his play fails to evoke the lively, sensuous, mysterious, seductive atmosphere of Shakespeare's play. His Cleopatra, in complete deference to history, remains Greek, and a foreigner to Egypt.

May's Cleopatra, six years later, is even less Egyptian than Fletcher's. Indeed May adheres quite closely to North's words in the passage on Cleopatra's linguistic ability, quoted earlier (on page 209). Candidus says of the queen:

How many languages  
Speakes she with elegance?      Embassadors  
From th'Aethiopiens, Arabs, Troglodites,  
From th'Hebrews, Syrians, Medes, and Parthians

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1. The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher, ed. A. Glover and A. R. Waller, 1905-1912, vol. III.

Have in amazement heard this learned Queen  
Without the aid of an interpreter  
In all their severall tongues returne their answers;  
When most of her dull predecessor Kings  
Since Ptolemaeus Philadelphus time  
Scarce understood th'Aegyptian tongue, and some, 1  
Had quite forgot the Macedonian.

He too adheres to the authorities and leaves Cleopatra a Greek.  
Only Shakespeare boldly departs from his sources, and creates  
a unique Egyptian queen who is indeed the soul of Egypt.

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1. Two Tragedies by T. May, 1654, folio B 2 verso.



ALL'S LOST BY LUST

Rowley's play, in spite of its bloody nature, proved to be popular not only with his own contemporaries but throughout the period of the Restoration. And thereafter its theme attracted playwrights and poets down to the 19th century.<sup>1</sup> The date of its performance is established by G. E. Bentley as being "before the end of 1620 at the latest".<sup>2</sup> The title-page of the 1633 edition proudly announces that it was "Divers times Acted by the Lady Elizabeths Servants And lately by her Maiesties Servants, with great applause, at the Phoenix in Drury Lane". Samuel Pepys records what must have been a disastrous performance at The Red Bull on 23rd March 1661 in which Cob, the page, sang his song so badly that "his master fell about his eares and beat him so, that it put the house in an uprore".<sup>3</sup>

The main story concerns the Moorish invasion of Spain. The Moors, under their king Mully Mumen, invade the kingdom of Roderick of Spain. The latter, in order to get Julianus out of the way, appoints him to resist the invasion, and proceeds to rape his daughter Jacinta. He then imprisons her in his castle with Lothario as her keeper. He too has lustful

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1. The Rape Reveng'd or The Spanish Revolution by W. C. (1690), The Conquest of Spain by Mrs. Pix (1705). Robert Southey was greatly attracted to the theme, for he treated it twice: in La Coba (1802), and in his tragic epic poem, Roderick, The Last of the Goths (1814). Landor's Count Julian is also on the same theme.
  2. The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, vol. V, p. 1020.
  3. The Diary of Samuel Pepys, ed. Lord Braybrooke (Everyman's Library), 1906, p. 142.

intentions against the lady, who, however, manages to escape from the prison. She makes her way to her father's camp and arrives just as he has beaten the Moors and taken their king captive. At the news of Roderick's conduct, he releases his prisoners and joins with them to fight against his king and country. Roderick in panic breaks open a forbidden chamber in his castle, and sees visions of his approaching defeat. He flees. Mully Mumen now demands Jacinta for his bride, she refuses, and he in revenge cuts out her tongue, and blinds Julianus. He tricks Julianus into killing his daughter, and then stabs the unhappy father. Nor is this all the blood in the last scene, for the sub-plot here unites with main plot, and ends with the death of Antonio, and the suicide of the two wives he had married. The Moor, whom Julianus calls "that black monster", ends the play by proclaiming himself King of Spain:

Let Chroniclers write, here we begin our raigne,  
The first of Moores that ere was king of Spaine. <sup>1</sup>  
(V, v, 203-204)

In its mixture of blood, lust, and honour, this play reminds the reader strongly of Lust's Dominion. Its villain, like that of the earlier play, is a Moor. But Rowley's Moor is quite different from Eleazer. Far from his being an irreligious Moor, Mully Mumen's Moslem religion is prominent. When he proposes marriage to Jacinta, her first reaction springs from this difference in religion:

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1. Ed. C. W. Stork, 1910

O my second hell,  
A Christians armes embrace an infidell!  
(IV, i, 183-184)

Later, when the prospect of marriage becomes more immediate, her reaction is one of physical revulsion: "Th'art frightfull to me" (V, v, 2).

Mully Mumen is not an interesting character, being little more than the type of the misbelieving, barbarous Moor. He is beaten in war, and when by chance he finds himself in a position of advantage, he shows himself to be cruel and heartless. When he threatens vengeance, Jacinta expects the worst:

Yes, some barbarous one,  
Tis naturall to thee, base African,  
Thine inside's blacker then thy sooty skin.<sup>1</sup>  
(V, v, 13-15)

Mully lives up to this character by the needless cruelty of his treatment of Julianus and Jacinta. Although he looms so largely in the play, it is not his character, from our point of view, that is of interest, but one of the very minor characters, namely "Fidella, A Moore, wayting-woman to Margaretta".

Fidella is interesting, because in her Rowley departs from the stock characterisation of the fickle Moorish waiting-woman. She, unlike the Zanthias, is faithful to her mistress to the death. After she and her mistress strangle Lazarello, thinking he is Antonio, Margaretta's unfaithful husband, Margaretta intends to face judgement on her own, and offers Fidella gold, bidding her fly:

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1. For a discussion of the use of this and other terms denoting colour in this play, see pp. 267-269.

There's gold, hie thee to safety, fare thee well  
I must nere see thee more, this place will be -  
(IV, ii, 41-42)

Fidella's reply is, in view of the convention, surprising:

Not too hot for me Madam; my complexion  
Is naturall to it.

Of course, she does not understand Margareta's own refusal to fly. She does not understand why she wants to "betray" herself to justice. She quite obviously subscribes to an inferior moral code, but she displays a blind fidelity even where she does not understand. She is thus unique among the female Moorish servants in plays of the period.

This survey has shown something of how the English dramatists of the Elizabethan and Jacobean era used the new scope offered them by the increased contact between Africa and England which took place in their time. They used the continent to a far greater extent than they used either America which was quite new, or India with which contact similarly increased during this same period. Africa was used as the setting for a number of plays, or as the home of many characters. This introduced into such plays a note of exoticism which was popular during the period. The new characters with their strange costumes and gestures enhanced the spectacle of the plays, while their strange sounding names, and those of their countries, also did something similar for the poetry. To the most thoughtful

of the dramatists, however, it did even more. It gave them new backgrounds and new situations against which to study the perennial preoccupation of drama - human nature. In these new contexts the old problems are examined: human greed, lust, tyranny, the clash between good and evil, the relations between the individual and the state, and all the human suffering that can result from all these.

Between the 1580's and the death of James I we have a fair cluster of African characters. Their range and scope varied widely but it is possible to see something of a progressive development in their portrayal at least up to the appearance of *Othello*. (Forward movement was not, however, unbroken.) The earliest characters were introduced merely for their strangeness, to enhance the spectacle of the plays in which they appeared. Such were the characters in Robert Greene's Alphonsus (c. 1585) and Orlando Furioso (1591). Marlowe's Africans had little more individual treatment than Greene's, but his general enthusiasm for the 'new' continent and its peoples is evident in Tamburlaine (1587). Robert Peele's The Battle of Alcazar (1588-1589) seems to have been the first play to reveal the potentialities of African characters for individual treatment. His Muly was quickly followed by Shakespeare's Aaron in Titus Andronicus (1589-1590), and seems to have influenced Shakespeare in the creation of his villain-hero. Aaron in his turn inspired Eleazer in Lust's Dominion some ten years later. These characters helped to establish the portrait of the villainous

Moor in tragedy. (It is noteworthy that Moors were <sup>used</sup> mainly in tragedies, and very little in comedies.) This type of Moor was usually black. Another type of Moor also appeared alongside these black villains. Abdelmelek in The Battle of Alcazar is a good example of this type. He was portrayed as a white Moor, dignified, noble, and pious (though misguided) in the observance of his religion. The Prince of Morocco also illustrates this type.

Shakespeare's Othello owed something to both these types of Moors - especially the black Moors, for such a one was he. Indeed the popular associations of such characters were continually being invoked against Othello by some of the characters in the play. Shakespeare nevertheless moved away from the stereotype (while keeping it in view) to a Moor who was not so much a native of Barbary, as he was a player in this wide and universal theatre. He illustrated in his fall not so much the weaknesses of Moors, but the frailties of human nature. Other Moors were to follow Shakespeare's noble Moor, but they usually fell back on the stereotype. Othello stands alone among the Moors of the era.

The female Moor also quickly settled down into two types: the passive decorative figure in her natural setting, Barbary, and the lustful treacherous serving-woman in exile. Calipolis in The Battle of Alcazar is a unique illustration of the first type, with Tota in The Fair Maid of the West a striking exception, while a succession of Zanthias illustrate the second type. This

latter type was presented with little variation by Shakespeare in The Merchant of Venice (a mere glimpse), Marston in Sophonisba(1603), Webster in The White Devil (1611-1612), and Fletcher in The Knight of Malta (1616-1618). Rowley struck a faint individual note with Fidella in All's Lost by Lust (1619-1620).

Cleopatra was treated by most playwrights as a Greek princess governing a strange people, the Egyptians. She had little more in common with them than residence. Shakespeare, however, treated her as an Egyptian, and identified her with Egypt. She and the country became in Shakespeare's play a dark sensual counterpoise to Rome.

The obviously different physical features of Africans and the tradition of disguising in the masque combined to make the Moor a popular disguise in both comedies and tragedies of the period. As early as Orlando Furioso<sup>1</sup> (1592) and as late as Brome's comedy The English Moor (1637) and Berkeley's The Lost Lady<sup>2</sup> (1638), characters were disguised as Moors for one reason or another. In Lust's Dominion and The White Devil such disguised characters featured in the final act of revenge.

Like the Jew and the Turk, the African left his mark on the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Indeed this continued into the Restoration period, when a new type of African in the tradition of the noble savage replaced the villainous black Moor who had been the dominant type in the earlier era.

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1. See p. 272 below.  
2. See pp. 273-274 below.

CHAPTER IV

SOME RACIAL TERMS IN ELIZABETHAN USAGE

Conclusions about the colour and racial identity of Moors who appear in Elizabethan plays have turned largely on the meanings which Elizabethan writers attached to certain terms, notably the terms Moor, Blackmoor, Tawny Moor, Barbarian, Egyptian, Indian, and the precise meaning <sup>of</sup> adjectives like black, white and tawny. The problem is that in different contexts the Elizabethans used the same words with different meanings, thus making it difficult to draw general conclusions or to transfer meanings readily from one context to another. The problem can be illustrated by citing the different conclusions to which contemporary critics have come as to the meaning of "tawny" in two Shakespearean contexts.

In a stage-direction to Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice II, i, the Prince of Morocco is introduced as "Morochus a tawnie Moore all in white".<sup>1</sup> J. R. Brown, editor of the New Arden edition of the play, assumes the colour "tawny" here to be different from black, and thus similar to the meaning of "tawny" in Titus Andronicus. Brown's note on the stage direction reads: "tawny Moor in contrast to a black one; cf. Titus, V, i, 27". The passage Brown cites is that in which Aaron the Moor addresses his child (by Tamora) thus: "Peace, tawny slave, half me and

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1. First Folio edition, 1623.



half thy dam". Brown would thus agree with C. H. Herford, who glosses "tawny" in this latter passage as "a hue between black and white".<sup>1</sup> H. T. Price on the other hand has a different view of the meaning of "tawny" in the Titus passage. Arguing quite rightly that "Tawny is frequently applied in Elizabethan English to people who are indubitably black", he concludes that Aaron's child was black. But he also asserts incidentally that this meaning is the one indicated in the stage direction to The Merchant of Venice, II, i; he writes of Morocco: "There is no doubt this man is black".<sup>2</sup> Price thus reaches the opposite conclusion from Brown's over the two passages. For Brown both Morocco and Aaron's child are the same colour - a hue between black and white - and for Price they are both black. J. C. Maxwell agrees with Price's gloss on "tawny" as used in relation to Aaron's child, i.e. black. (He makes no reference to the Prince of Morocco, who does not concern him here.)<sup>3</sup>

Both Price and Brown seem to assume a consistency in Shakespeare's usage of "tawny" in the two passages, and having fixed the meaning in one passage each applies it to the other. There is a danger in assuming such a consistency, even in the works of a single Elizabethan writer, in the use of some terms

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1. The Eversley Shakespeare, ed. C. H. Herford, 1899, vol. VII, p. 366.
  2. H. T. Price, "The Language of Titus Andronicus", Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science Arts and Letters, vol. XXI, 1935, p. 506.
  3. Note to Titus Andronicus, V, I, 27 (New Arden edition), 1953.

relating to colour.

Price and Maxwell have the support of a number of passages in Titus, IV, ii, for their interpretation of tawny as black. The Nurse calls the child "A joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue" (66). Aaron challenges the scorn of the Nurse and the two sons of Tamora with the question: "Is black so base a hue?" (72) And looking down on the baby in his arms he says: "Look how the black slave smiles upon the father" (121). There are terms like "devil", "toad", and "tadpole" to reinforce the direct suggestion of "black". To agree with the interpretation of "tawny" here should not, however, bind one to accept the assertion that Morocco is also black. Here Brown's suggestion of a contrast to black is correct. For although the term "tawny" was undoubtedly used loosely by Elizabethan authors, it had a definite meaning when it was used in the phrase "tawny Moor". It then indicated a Moor who was not black; an inhabitant of North Africa rather than an Ethiopian or a West African Negro. Such, I believe, was Shakespeare's conception of the Prince of Morocco.

The opposing interpretations of "tawny" cited above should indicate the extreme caution which is necessary in trying to determine the exact meaning of Elizabethan terms describing complexion or race, and the risks involved in transferring an undoubtedly correct interpretation in one context to another. The safest method is to examine a number of usages of the various terms both in scholarly and imaginative works, taking full notice of the circumstances in which they are used, before attempting

any generalisations.

### INDICATIONS OF USAGE IN NON-DRAMATIC WRITINGS

Our examination (in chapter I) of the growth and spread of geographical knowledge in England has shown how this new knowledge was retailed to the reading public in books both popular and scientific. The usages in such books would no doubt have helped in one way or another to determine how racial terms would be used in imaginative writing. As has been shown, even the learned writers sometimes mingled legends and unfounded travellers' tales with the results of first-hand scientific observation, so that occasionally they show some vagueness or inconsistency in their use of racial terms. As a general rule, however, they were remarkably clear in this regard.

#### "MOOR", "BLACK MOOR", "WHITE MOOR", "TAWNY MOOR"

As early as 1547 Andrew Borde had written:

Barbary is a great countrey, and plentyfull of frute, wine, and corne. The inhabytours be Called<sup>1</sup> the Mores: ther be whyte mores and black moors ...

In spite of this distinction, however, when a few lines later than

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1. Andrew Borde, The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge, Early English Text Society, Extra Series, vol. X, 1870, p. 212. For the same distinction see also *Ibid.*, p. 189. (In quotations from this edition, the letters i, u and v have been modernised where necessary.)

the above passage Borde went on to describe "Moors", he wrote:

they have gret lyppes, and nottyd heare, black  
and curled; there skyn is soft; and ther is nothing  
white but their teth and the white of the eye.

It would appear therefore that, in spite of this theoretical knowledge that there were two types of Moors, the image in Borde's mind was of a black man - the type who was more precisely called a black Moor. The persistence of the image of Africans as black in Borde's thinking is probably indicative of the state of mind of a great number of educated Englishmen during the 16th century. But Borde had at least shown a theoretical knowledge of the existence of differences of colour among Moors.<sup>1</sup>

Other and later writers sometimes took no trouble to point out this difference even if they were aware of it. A 16th century reader of Waterman's Fardle of Facions (1555) would not have taken away any clear notions of the colour of Africans except that they were generally black. Waterman's only clear distinction of colour was not between one set of Africans and another, but between Prester John and most of his subjects. He wrote of the legendary king: "And he is not as the moste of the Ethiopians are, blacke, but white".<sup>2</sup> Waterman's work would have done little to change the old blurred image of the African as black. For aught that he told the 16th century Englishman

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1. Probably the modern expression "a coloured man" gives an idea of the general notion that the term "Moor" had for 16th century Englishmen.
  2. William Waterman, The Fardle of Facions, ed. E. & G. Goldsmid, 1888, p. 41.

even the Egyptians were black - as they were often referred to in 16th and early 17th century writings.<sup>1</sup>

Even when distinctions were made between the colours of "Moors" the idea of blackness still clouded the effect of the distinction. Richard Eden, for instance, thus describes the king of Benin:

who beinge a blacke moore (althoughe not so blacke as the rest) sate in a great houghe haule ...<sup>2</sup>

This is not the sort of distinction that would have done much to change the popular association of "Moors" with the colour black. In an account of John Lok's second Voyage to Guinea, made in 1554, Eden gave a fuller account of the peoples of Africa. But he depended more on Pliny and the classics than on contemporary observation. He wrote:

It is to be understood, that the people which now inhabite the regions of the coast of Guinea, and the midle parts of Africa, as Libya inner, and Nubia, with divers other great and large regions about the same, were in old time called Aethiopes and Negritae, which we now call<sub>3</sub> Moores, Moorens or Negroes ...

The lapse from accuracy which this passage represents has been commented on earlier.<sup>4</sup> It could only have helped to confirm the popular image of all "Moors" as black.

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1. See for instance Fletcher's description of Cleopatra as "the fair Cleopatra, (An attribute not frequent to the climate)" The False One, I, i, Works of Beaumont & Fletcher, ed. Arnold Glover and A. R. Waller, vol. III, p. 301.
  2. See p. 27 above
  3. The Principal Navigations, 1904, vol. VI, p. 167.
  4. See p. 28 above.

By the end of the 16th century, however, some very clear statements had appeared in print. John Pory in his introduction to John Leo's History and Description of Africa was quite clear in his mind about the different types of Moors. Of the inhabitants of Africa he wrote:

Moreover this part of the worlde is inhabited especially by five principall nations, to wit, by the people called Cafri or Cafates, that is to say outlawes or lawlesse, by the Abassins, the Egyptians, the Arabians, and the Africans or Moores, properly so called; which last are of two kinds, namely white or tawnie Moores, 1 and Negros or black Moores.

The terms tawny Moor or white Moor, Negro, and black Moor as used in this passage are unambiguous. I suggest that wherever these particular terms occur in the literature of the period they are equally unambiguous, and are used just as Pory uses them here. When for instance Shakespeare used the phrase "Tawny Moor", he meant a "white" as distinct from a "black" Moor.

Robert Stafforde in 1607 made no clear distinction of colour between the various inhabitants of Africa. On Africa as a whole he wrote: "The Inhabitants of it, are generally very black of countenance ... <sup>2</sup> This is no more definitive than the much earlier Fardle of Facions (1555). Stafforde mentioned "the kingdom of the Negroes" as being south of Libya, but he did not take the trouble to distinguish between their colour and that

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1. Ed. Robert R. Brown, 1896, vol. I, p. 20. (The letters i, u and v are modernised where necessary.)
  2. Robert Stafforde, A Geographical and Anthological Description, 2nd edition, 1618, p. 38.

of the Moors of the North. This work was planned along the lines of a geography primer, with short pithy numbered sections as though it was intended for popular or elementary reading, so too much is not to be expected of it. It does show, however, how a popular geography text-book as late as 1607 could still be misleading about this subject.

Purchas in his Pilgrimage distinguished Moors from Negroes in a passage which makes some very subtle distinctions between the colours of various types of people. He wrote:

the tawney Moore, black Negro, duskie Libyan,  
Ash-coloured Indian, olive-coloured American,  
should with the whiter Europæan become one 1  
sheepe-folde, under one great shepheard.

(The term "olive-coloured" was sometimes used to describe Moors, but apparently Purchas meant to distinguish here between "tawny" and "olive-coloured".) The phrase "tawny Moor" is used unambiguously - it refers to the light-coloured inhabitant of North Africa, as it does in all the contexts I have examined. The phrase "black Negro" is equally unambiguous.

Francis Bacon also makes the distinction between the two types of Moors. His usage is illustrated in one of the chapter headings in his Natural History, Century IV. The chapter is headed: "Experiment solitary touching the coloration of black and tawny Moores".<sup>2</sup> In the chapter itself Bacon suggests a reason

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1. Purchas His Pilgrimage, 1613, Book VI, xiv, p. 646.
  2. Works, ed. Spedding, Ellis and Heath, 1857, vol. II, p. 473. This subject also interested Sir Thomas Browne later. See Works, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 1928, vol. III, pp. 232-240.

why glass workers in England were not black even though they continually worked near fires, while "The heat of the sun maketh men black in some countries, as in Aethiopia and Ginny &c". His explanation is that, while fire draws out the fluids of the body, the gentler heat of the sun

doth but draw the blood to the outward parts, and rather concocteth it than soaketh it; and therefore we see all Aethiopes are fleshy and plump, and have great lips; all which betoken moisture retained, and not drawn out.

The continuation of this passages is particularly interesting since it locates the different homes of the Moors:

We see also, that the Negroes are bred in countries that have plenty of water, by rivers or otherwise; for Meroe, which was the metropolis of Aethiopia, was upon a great lake; and Congo, where the "egroes are, is full of rivers. And the confines of the river Niger, where the Negroes also are, are well watered: and the region about Capo Verde is likewise moist, insomuch as it is pestilent through moisture; but the countries of the Abyssenes, and Barbary, and Peru, where they are tawny, and olivaster, and pale, are generally more sandy and dry. As for the Aethiopes, as they are plump and fleshy, so (it may be) they are sanguine and ruddy coloured, if their black skin would suffer it to be seen.

The passage is valuable for the unambiguous terms used to distinguish between the two types of Moors - "black" and "tawny" - and the further elucidation of the terms by the references to their location. But also the incidence of other terms in such a clear passage makes it useful for fixing usages. Bacon distinguishes between "Aethiopes and Abyssenes". The Aethiopes were, like Negroes, black, while the Abyssenes were like the inhabitants of Barbary and Peru, "tawny, and olivaster, and



pale".<sup>1</sup> The distinction between "Aethiopes and Abyssenes" illustrated by this passage would perhaps explain why the word "Ethiop" was frequently used as a synonym for Negro or blackmoor, but not "Abyssene".<sup>2</sup> (See Love's Labour's Lost, IV, iii, 268 and Two Gentlemen of Verona, II, vi, 26.)

I think "tawny Moor" had an unvarying meaning, even though the adjective "tawny" by itself was loosely used, as indeed was the term "Moor" in isolation. In the light of this, the meaning of the stage direction in The Merchant of Venice II, i, is clear.

#### NEGRO

The term "Negro" does not cause the same difficulties as "Moor". With its obvious Latin derivation it must have clearly suggested an image of a black person. The remarkable thing about this word is that, while it occurred quite frequently in works of a technical nature, the dramatists used it less frequently than might have been expected of a word whose form pointed so directly to its meaning. Shakespeare for instance used it only once - (The Merchant of Venice, III, v, 43) - although the author of Lust's Dominion and Peele in The Battle of Alcazar used it more frequently. This reluctance of dramatists

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1. This is the first use of "olivaster" recorded by the Oxford English Dictionary.
  2. When the distinction between Abyssenes and Ethiopians was made, the Abyssenes were the people of Northern Ethiopia or Ethiopia Superior.

to use the word may have been due simply to the fact that it was new in the language, and therefore lacking in the wealth of association which centuries of use had given the term "Moor". (The first use of "Negro" recorded by The Oxford English Dictionary is in a passage written in 1553 by Richard Eden.)

John Pory used the term, and located fairly precisely where the people so called lived. In his introduction to Leo's History and Description he made the Senegal the dividing line between Negroes and other peoples: "so that the river Senaga is the utmost northern bound of Negroes or nations extremely blacke".<sup>1</sup> He also used the word quite frequently in the actual translation in relation to the inhabitants of West Africa. There appears to have been a clear conception of the people to whom this term applied - they were black.

#### ETHIOPIAN

The term "Ethiopian" was very frequently used in non-fictional works as a synonym of Negro, and although it had a particular connection with the subjects of Prester John it was frequently applied to the dark-skinned peoples of tropical Africa as a whole. For Eden, in fact, an Aethiopian was the same as a Negro. He wrote:

Toward the South of the region is the kingdom of Guinea, with Senega, Jalofo, Gambra, and many other regions of the Black Moores,

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1. Ed. Robert Brown, 1896, vol. I, p. 83.

called Aethiopians or Negros, all which are watered with the river Negro called in old time Niger. 1

This association in English of Aethiopia with black people goes a long way back. Wycliffe had made the association proverbial by using the term in his translation of Jeremiah xiii, 23 - "If chaunge mai an Ethiopie his skyn".

Mandeville's description of the country also associated the people with the colour black:

The South part [of Ethiopia] is called Mauretania, and the folk of this part are blacker than of the east part. 2

This association was echoed in Elizabethan imaginative writings, where the term came to be used as synonymous with a black person.

### EGYPTIAN

Egyptians were often referred to in Elizabethan writings as though they were black. I have not found the exact source for this idea in scientific writings, but there is often enough vagueness to have given rise to this notion. In The Fardle of Facions (1555) William Waterman asserted that Egyptians were descendants of the Ethiopians because so many of their customs were derived from the latter:

All whiche their [the Egyptians'] doynge, dooe manifestly make, that thei came of the Aethiopes,

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1. Principal Navigations, ed. cit., vol. VI, p. 143.
  2. Mandeville's Travels, ed. Malcolm Letts, 1953, vol. I, p. 112.

who (as Diodore the Sicilian saith) were the first inventours of all these. 1

Since earlier in the same book the Ethiopians had been described as being mostly black, it is easy to see how the wrong impression could have been given. Robert Stafforde was equally vague about colour and did not mention the colour of Egyptians.<sup>2</sup> An additional reason is that one feature of Africa frequently mentioned in books was its heat, which was believed to burn the inhabitants black. Egypt was particularly famous for its rainlessness - a feature which would only intensify the effect of the heat. In the absence of a specific mention of colour, it would be easy for the Elizabethans to maintain the vague notion of all Africa as the home of the black people. Whatever the source of the notion, however, in the imaginative works of the period Egyptians were often black.<sup>3</sup>

### GIPSY

In this connection the term "gipsy" is interesting. Originally the form was an aphetic form of Egyptian, and frequently meant no more. Because of the habits popularly credited to Gypsies, however, the term came to have a pejorative meaning and was often used as a mere term of abuse.<sup>4</sup> The

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1. Ed. E. & G. Goldsmid, 1888, vol. I, p. 44.
  2. A Geographical and Anthological Description, 1607.
  3. See p. 227, footnote 1.
  4. So in Antony and Cleopatra, I, i, 10. Ben Jonson in The Masque of Gipsies refers to "Cleopatra, the Gipsies' grand-matra".

contexts usually reveal the meaning intended without any difficulty.

### BARBARIAN

"Barbarian" had various pejorative associations in Europe before it came to be applied to a native of Barbary. The convenience of having a term which not only nominated but also described a race - not a favourite among the Elizabethans - was a boon not neglected by the dramatists. It was used over and over again - often to qualify the word "Moor". It was sometimes vaguely used to cover more than the inhabitants of "Barbary", as in the quotation in the next paragraph.

### INDIAN

Lastly the term "Indian" was sometimes vaguely used for natives of Africa. Probably because this usage arises more from confusion than from knowledge, it is not recognized by the Oxford English Dictionary. The term is used in allusion to Eleazer in Lust's Dominion and it also occurs in The Fardle of Facions in a rather casual phrase:

These Ethiopians or Indianes excepted, al the  
reste of the people of Libia Westward, are  
worshippers of Mahomet, and live aftre the same  
sorte in maner, that ye Barbariens do in Egipte  
at this present, and are called Maures, or Moores,  
as I thincke of their outleapes and wilde rowming.  
(vol. I, p. 43)

## INDICATIONS OF USAGE IN DRAMATIC WRITINGS

The terms we have examined frequently occur in the dramatic writings of the period, with some variations of meaning. While in the works already referred to writers were usually being as exact as their knowledge permitted, more imaginative users were not so much concerned with precision as with evoking a variety of responses which were outside the scope of more exact writers. Even the dramatists, however, had to start from known and accepted usages which they adapted according to their need. But I hope it will be shown that, although occasionally it is difficult to discover what the dramatists had in mind when they used some terms, in the great majority of cases there is enough contextual material to suggest their meaning.

In order to avoid misleading generalizations, the method employed in the ensuing examination is to look at some of these terms as used in each of a number of plays involving Moors, and to try to fix their meaning in the light of the suggestions of each play.

### i - THE BATTLE OF ALCAZAR

The Battle of Alcazar is a useful play in which to examine the use of the term "Moor", for its principal characters are all Moors, divided into two factions, the one led by a black Moor, and the other by a tawny Moor. From the very beginning of the play, before even the main characters enter, the Presenter

prepares the audience for two types of Moors. He refers to both leaders in his opening speech, and the terms he uses are worth noting. Muly, the villain, is "the barbarous Moore" (9), "the Negro, Muly Hamet" (10), "sprung from the Arabian Moore" (18), is "blacke in his looke" (19), and is accompanied "with devils coted in the shapes of men" (23). Muly's uncle and opponent, Abdelmelec, to whom the Presenter is far more sympathetic, is described as "this brave Barbarian Lord" (15).<sup>1</sup> (There is no indication of colour in his case.) This distinction between the two men is maintained throughout the play. The title "the Moore", suitably qualified, is reserved for Muly Hamet the villain; his uncle is never referred to by it. A variety of qualifying words are used with "Moore" in reference to Muly. The phrases "unbelieving Moore" (46) and "accursed Moore" (54) show the anti-Moslem feeling common among Christian writers at the time.<sup>2</sup> "Barbarous Moore" (9), "Negro Moore" (902, 921) by hostile characters, and "Lustie Moore" (941), "Manly Moore" (949, 972), "Brave Moore" (998) by friendly characters, show the range of epithets applied to the Moor. Of these the term "Negro" is specially interesting, for it is not very frequently used in the drama of this period. Here, however, where the author has the task of differentiating between Muly and his uncle, the

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1. Edition used for references: The Battle of Alcazar, ed. W. W. Greg, 1917. (The letters i, u and v have been modernised when necessary.)
  2. The Moor inherited the traditional hostility of Christians towards the Turks and their religion. In 16th century writing, Mohammed was regarded as a false deity. In The Turke, for example, Mulleasses is made to pray to him for aid in his wickedness.

distinctness of "Negro" is useful to him. Muly is the only character to whom the term is specifically applied - "this Negro" (43), and "this Negroes father" (61). (The term is only applied to Muly by hostile characters, and seems to carry pejorative overtones.) It is also used once to apply to a whole class of low people:

Besides a number almost numberlesse  
Of drudges, negroes, slaves and Muliters.  
(1085-1086)

Although the particular title "the Moore" is reserved for Muly, the term is used in its more general sense - never in reference to a particular character - on four occasions. Abdelmelec refers to his followers as "our Moores" (111) and "The Moores that now with us do wend" (142). Bassa, the Turk, pledges support to Abdelmelec as faithfully "as anie Moore whom thou commandest most" (178). Finally, Muly Xequé (also on Abdelmelec's side) exhorts the soldiers thus:

Sheath not your swords you Mores of Barbary  
That fight in right of your annointed king.  
(194-196)

In these four instances when the word is not used to refer to individuals, it seems to mean tawny Moors. This does not mean that Peele was confused. He seems to be perfectly conscious of the two types of Moors, and by suitable qualifications differentiates between Muly and white Moors. On the stage, the distinction would also have been made by means of make-up.

The 'plot' for this play survives among the Henslowe Papers, and it gives some very useful clues as to how the author's



intentions were carried out by the men of the Admiral's company in 1588. It supplies confirmatory evidence of how "Moor" without qualification was used to indicate a person of black complexion; for in it the term seems to be applied exclusively to characters portrayed as black Moors. In the first section of the plot, the directions for the opening dumb show read:

Enter Muly Mahamett mr. Ed: Allen, his sonne Antho:  
Jeffes: moores attendant: mr Sam, mr Hunt & w.  
Cartwright: ij Pages to attend the moore. mr. Allen's  
boy, mr. Townes boy: to them 2. young bretheren: Dab 1  
and Harry : : to them Abdelmenen w kendall: exeunt.

Muly Mahamet is referred to by name in line 5, and as "the moore" in line 7. The "moores attendant" in line 6 are the men whom the Presenter in the play calls "devils coted in the shæpes of men" (Alcazar, line 23). It seems clear that they are called "Moors" in the plot because they are to be the same colour as Muly, and thus by appearance as well as by function "devils coted in the shæpes of men". The rest of the plot is consistent with these early usages. Whenever he appears later, Muly is accompanied by at least two "moores attendant". For his second entry, the plot reads:

Enter in a Charriott Muly [M]ahamet & Calipolis: on  
each side [ ] page moores attendant Pisano mr Hunt  
& w. Cartwright and young Mahamet Antony Jeffes: exit 2  
Mr Sam manet the rest: to them Mr Sam againe exeunt.

The names of the actors who had been "moores attendant" earlier, Hunt, Cartwright and Sam, appear again here, although the entry of

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1. Henslowe Papers, ed. W. W. Greg, 1907, p. 138, lines 5-10.  
(The new Foakes and Rickert edition is not available to me.)
  2. Ibid., p. 139, 17-22.

Mr Sam is not indicated. In line 40 of the plot, Muly has another entrance, and this time he is attended by "2 moores w. Cartwright and Mr Hunt". (Mr Sam does not enter here.) Two of the "moores attendant" doubled as "2 moores: embassadors Mr Sam Mr Hunt ... " (lines 50-51). It is significant that these ambassadors are designated "Moores". Having been specially made up as "Moores", for the opening of the play, they seem to have been the logical persons to add these small parts to their earlier roles. In the plot, then, only Muly "the moore" and his "moores attendant" are called Moors. This is to distinguish them from the other Moors - Abdelmelec, Muly Mahamet Xequé, Abdula Rais and others - who are always referred to by name and never as "Moors". They were no doubt portrayed with very light make-up as white or tawny Moors, while the villain and his henchmen were more heavily made up as black Moors. The use of the term "Moor" by itself for these latter characters shows the considerable suggestions of blackness that the unqualified term must have had in ordinary usage.

#### ii - TITUS ANDRONICUS

It has been suggested earlier that when the term "Moor" or indeed any other unqualified term denoting an African, like "Ethiope", "African", "Native of Barbary", and even "Egyptian", was used, the common image evoked was based on the colour black. An interesting illustration of this common association of "Moor" with the colour black is shown in the ballad "Titus Andronicus"

Complaint", which appears in Percy's Reliques and is presumed to have been a metrical version of The History of Titus Andronicus, which is a later version of what may have been the source of Shakespeare's play.<sup>1</sup> In the ballad, the term "Moor" is never qualified when it is used of Aaron's nameless counterpart - he is merely called "the Moor". His child by the Queen is, however, called "a blackamore": "And so in time a blackamore she bred." As it is used in this ballad, "Moor" signifies a black person. The passages from the prose history quoted by Sargent also show no qualifying word used for "Moor", while the child is referred to as a "blackamore", the term used in the ballad.

Neither the character nor the appearance of the Moor was elaborated in either the ballad or the prose history; that was left to Shakespeare, who for his own purposes decided to underline the blackness of Aaron's character with the blackness of his face, by giving him unmistakable Negro features - woolly hair and thick lips. Yet even in Shakespeare, except when Aaron's blackness is important and therefore necessarily to be stressed, he is referred to simply as "Moor". He is referred to more often in the play as "the Moor" than by his own name. The queen refers to him as "my sweet Moor" (II, iii, 51) and "my lovely Moor" (II, iii, 190). Lavinia, addressing the queen, refers to him as

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1: Ralph M. Sargent, "The Source of Titus Andronicus", Studies in Philology, 1949, pp. 167-183.

"your Moor" (II, iii, 68). Marcus calls him "the empress' Moor" (III, ii, 67). Indeed "the Moor" is an alternative to "Aaron", the man's proper name.<sup>1</sup> Those who dislike him in the play add adjectives to suit their feelings. "Barbarous", a commonplace epithet, is used by Bassianus:

Why are you sequester'd from all your train,  
Dismounted from your snow-white goodly steed  
And wander'd hither to an obscure plot,  
Accompanied but with a barbarous Moor.  
(II, iii, 75-78)

The term is also used by Lucius in conjunction with other abusive epithets:

this barbarous Moor,  
This ravenous tiger, this accursed devil.  
(V, iii, 4-5)

The adjectives "damned", "irreligious", "misbelieving" are commonplace terms automatically attaching themselves in pejorative contexts to "Moor". It is in similar pejorative contexts that the reinforcing colour adjectives - especially "black" - are frequently used. Marcus describes the fly he tries to kill as:

a black ill-favour'd fly,  
Like to the empress' Moor.  
(III, ii, 66-67)

Titus echoes this comparison in:

a fly  
That comes in likeness of a coal-black Moor.  
(78)

This intensification of "black" with "coal" only reflects the strength of Titus' feeling against the Moor - it is more insulting than descriptive - no more descriptive in fact than Bassianus'

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1. This is also true of Othello.

"swart Cimmerian". Both terms have force and sting, however, because they have relevance to Aaron's colour. They both reinforce the suggestion that the unqualified term "Moor" would have naturally had for the Elizabethan audience.

When all the evidence relating to Aaron's appearance is assembled, the resulting picture is of a Moor closely conforming to Borde's description of a Moor referred to earlier:

they have gret lyppes, and nottyd heare, black and  
curled; there skyn is soft; and ther is nothing white  
but their teth and the white of the eye. 1

Aaron himself describes his child as "thick-lipped" (IV, ii, 177).

He also speaks of:

My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls  
Even as an adder when she doth unroll  
To do some fatal execution.  
(II, ii, 34-36)

There are numerous references by other characters, often in scorn, to Aaron's or his child's colour, but Aaron himself occasionally refers to it:

Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace,  
Aaron will have his soul black like his face.  
(III, i, 204-205)

Angered by the Nurse's slighting references to the colour of his child, he exclaims: "is black so base a hue?" (IV, ii, 72) and, further stung by the scorn of Demetrius and Chiron, he defiantly asserts:

Coal-black is better than another hue,  
In that it scorns to bear another hue;

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1. See pp. 225-226 above.

For all the water in the ocean  
Can never turn the swan's black legs to white,  
Although she lave them hourly in the flood.  
(IV, ii, 100-104)

Of his son he says:

Look how the black slave smiles upon the father,  
As who should say, 'Old lad, I am thine own'.  
(IV, ii, 121-122)

To Demetrius and Chiron he says:

Nay, he is your brother my the surer side,  
Although my seal be stamped in his face.  
(IV, ii, 127-128)

He is also shown fondly chiding the child for betraying its  
father by its hue, and ending

But where the bull and cow are both milk-white,  
They never do beget a coal-black calf.  
(V, i, 31-32)

The other characters refer in several passages to Aaron's colour  
as "swarth Cimmerian", (II, iii, 72), "raven coloured" (II, iii,  
83), "coal-black" (III, ii, 78).

One of the commonest associations of the black face was  
with the devil and hell. Aaron's character makes such  
associations with him irresistible, and the play - especially in  
its later scenes after his nature has been fully revealed - contains  
a number of such references. Lucius refers to him as "the  
incarnate devil". (V, i, 40) He demands of him:

Say, wall-ey'd slave, whither wouldst thou convey  
This growing image of thy fiend-like face?  
(V, i, 44-45)

In V, ii, 85-90, Titus regrets that Tamora (disguised as Ate)  
lacks one more character in her train to complete her likeness  
to the queen and her train:

Well are you fitted had you but a Moor:  
Could not all hell afford you such a devil?  
For well I wot the empress never wags  
But in her company there is a Moor;  
And would you represent our queen aright,  
It were convenient you had such a devil.

Lucius calls him "this accursed devil" (V, ii, 5). The baby too is called "a devil" (IV, ii, 65) by the nurse. There is in the same scene a significant retort of Aaron's which later Moors (Eleazer in Lust's Dominion, Zanche in The White Devil, and Zanthia in Sophonisba) were to echo. When Chiron, reflecting on his mother's deeds, says "I blush to think upon this ignomy" (IV, ii, 116) Aaron replies:

Why, there's the privilege your beauty bears.  
Fie, treacherous hue! that will betray with blushing  
The close enacts and counsels of the heart.  
(IV, ii, 117-119)

He glories in the fact that his black face cannot give him away. This fact that the black face did not betray embarrassment seems to have interested several playwrights.<sup>1</sup>

A very interesting fact about Aaron is that, although he is portrayed as indubitably black, and is endowed with essentially negroid features - thick lips and woolly hair - yet not once does the term "Negro" occur in the play. I have suggested earlier that the word was new in English and that it had a scientific flavour.<sup>2</sup> That in itself would not have prevented Shakespeare from using it, had it fulfilled a real need. My inference is

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1. See for instance Zanche's reference to her complexion quoted on p. 202 above.  
2. See pp. 231-232 above.

that it did not. The term Moor was sufficient; it was suggestive of a black face, and its suggestions were long established. Reinforced with black (or, when necessary, coal-black) it contained all the suggestions the poet wished to arouse - evil, ugliness, wickedness, and lustfulness.

The adjective "tawny", whose meaning in other contexts might be ambiguous, appearing in a single phrase amidst such overwhelming suggestions of blackness, could quite confidently be taken as indicating black. The other adjective which in some contexts could be ambiguous - swarth - is here quite unambiguously used.<sup>1</sup>

Outside the play itself there is evidence that the Moor was portrayed as black. The contemporary drawing of a scene from the play endorsed "Henrye Peacham's hande 1595" shows a black Aaron. Dover Wilson in his article on the drawing quotes Chambers' comment:

Incidentally, [the drawing] may inform students of Othello as well as of Titus that to the Elizabethan mind a Moor was not tawny but dead black.<sup>2</sup>

### iii - LUST'S DOMINION

The character of Eleazer the Moor in Lust's Dominion follows very closely on that of Aaron in Titus Andronicus. There is no doubt that the author wished to portray Eleazer with

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1. Shakespeare also used the now current form "swarthy" in The Two Gentlemen of Verona to qualify Ethiope (II, vi, 26).
  2. Shakespeare Survey, vol. I, 1948, p. 21.



as dark a hue as his predecessor. There are more references to the Moor's colour in this play than in Titus Andronicus to Aaron's, and among them there is a particularly interesting reference to texture of the Moor's skin which was not used in Titus. The Queen Mother - in an apostrophe to night (III, i), which because of night's "black cheeks" she likens to her Moor<sup>1</sup> - uses the phrase "the soft skin'd Negro" (1405).<sup>2</sup> This characteristic is mentioned by Borde in his description of a Moor, which has already been quoted on p. 22<sup>6</sup>.

Like Aaron, Eleazer is frequently referred to as "the Moor", with suitable adjectives added when the occasion demanded. But while the original home of Aaron was left unidentified, much is made of Eleazer's home, Barbary. It would be easy to prove that, at the time when Lust's Dominion was written, anyone who cared to find out could have discovered that the Moors of Barbary were not Negroes. That would not of course affect the fact that a dramatist could have created a black Moor and given him a home in Barbary, which is what Eleazer's creator did.<sup>3</sup>

Eleazer's hair is once mentioned, but in a manner less descriptive than suggestive. He himself refers to "hair as thick as mine" (272-273). The physical characteristic most

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1. A similar comparison of the Negro with night occurs in Mulleasses' invocation to night in John Mason's The Turke, ed. J. Q. Adams, 1913, p. 24.
  2. Lust's Dominion, ed. J. le Gay Brereton, 1931.
  3. A similar consideration would apply to Iago's remark that Othello was going to Mauretania (Othello, IV, ii, 229).

frequently referred to is that of colour - both Eleazer's and that of his attendants Zarack and Baltazar. In the opening scene - one very reminiscent of Titus Andronicus, II, iii, - Eleazer is trying to make amends for his offensive rejection of the queen's overtures. He says in reply to her complaint that he had called her a strumpet:

I'll tear out my tongue  
From this black temple for blaspheming thee.  
(161-162)

Echoing a simile in Titus (III, i, 205), Eleazer declares to Mendoza:

Cardinall, this disgrace,  
Shall dye thy soule, as inky as my face.  
(574-575)

Eleazer counsels his two henchmen Zarack and Baltazar:

Your cheeks are black, let not your souls look white.  
(953)

In another passage he attributes his complexion to the influence of the sun:

Now by the proud complexion of my cheeks,  
Tan'e from the kisses of the amorous sun.  
(1731-1732)

He speaks of "my jetty neck" (3117), and describes his face as being "in night's colour dy'd" (3616). He contends that "black faces may have hearts as white as snow" (3608). He promises Tragedy enough blood to "bath" her limbs "as black as mine" (3668). The total effect of all these references is to suggest a black rather than a white Moor. Because of this, the use of the adjective "tawny" by Eleazer in reference to his own colour is interesting. This occurs in a speech in which he

repeats some of the opprobrious names thrown at him by "the silken courtiers":

The Queen with me, with me, a Moore, a Devill,  
A slave of Barbary, a dog; for so  
Your silken Courtiers christen me, but father  
Although my flesh be tawny, in my veines  
Runs blood as red, and royal as the best  
And proud'st in Spain.

(227-232)

This use of "tawny" cannot neutralize the overwhelming number of references to Eleazer's blackness. On the contrary, it seems natural that Eleazer should on this occasion choose a term less tainted with pejorative associations in describing himself than those used of him by his enemies. (It is of some significance that when the adjective "tawny" occurs in Titus Andronicus it is used by Aaron of the one person for whom he cares - his child.) The terms used in addressing or alluding to Eleazer by other characters (practically everyone is his avowed enemy) are generally full of contemptuous suggestion, most of them deriving from his colour - black.

The natural association of a black character with the devil is always present in the treatment of Eleazer. In the very first scene of the play he complains to the queen that as he rode through the Castilian streets "every slave" would cry out "That's the black Prince of Divels" (126). The hostile characters call him "devil" and "fiend" or associate him with hell in some other way in numerous passages: 473-474, 480, 662, 1016, 1129, 1755, 1853, 2130, 2160-2161, 2215, 3372, 3384. Altogether there are over thirty passages in which Eleazer is called "devil"

or "fiend" or "son of hell". Indeed, the image of hell is woven into the fabric of the play, with Eleazer as the central figure.

The term "Negro" occurs five times in this play, a remarkable number of times considering how infrequently it is found in other plays of the period. The Queen Mother uses it in an affectionate context - "soft-skin'd Negro" (1405). Fernando, wooing Eleazer's wife, vowed:

It shall be death for any Negroes hand,  
To touch the beauty of a Spanish dame.  
(1537-1538)

Zarack, exulting at the accession of Eleazer, calls him: "the Negro king of Spain" (1930). In a passage already quoted the King of Portugal calls him "damned Negro". Mendoza too uses the word in 2484: "I have no power to spare the Negroes head." While this word, whose meaning was quite plain without the need for an adjective, confirms the type that the dramatist had in mind, it does little more, and seems to have been introduced merely in the interests of variation. It adds little more than confirmation (for the modern reader) that Eleazer was black in the author's mind.

The word "black" is used quite often by the other characters in conjunction with "devil" or "fiend" to describe Eleazer. Mendoza (2485) refers to the wounds that Eleazer's "black hand" had inflicted on him. The queen uses the term "Blackamore" when consenting, with a pretended reluctance, to the accession of Eleazer:

Wherefore my lords  
By my consent crown that proud blackamore.  
(1835-1836)

She deliberately chooses a rather contemptuous term to show her pretended reluctance. Friar Cole in the antiphonal passage in which he and Friar Crab proclaim the bastardy of Philip, and Eleazer's fitness for rule, applies an antithesis to him (used to better purpose of Othello) when he refers to him as "a fair black Gentleman" (1999). Philip ends the play with the banishment of Moors from Spain:

And for this Farbarous Moor, and his black train,  
Let all the Moors be banished from Spain.

There can be no doubt of Eleazer's colour, which is emphasized by the author of Lust's Dominion even more than by the creator of Aaron. As in Titus, "Moor" is equivalent to "black Moor" or "Negro".

The use of the term "Indian" in reference to Eleazer occurs three times - 528, 1819, 2316. It merely illustrates a loose usage.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the occurrence of "tawny" and "Indian" and the frequent use of "Moor" without qualification in this play, there is no evidence of confusion in the mind of the author or any doubt of the colour of his villain-hero. Eleazer, like Aaron, must have been portrayed on the Elizabethan stage as a black Moor.

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1. See p. 235 above. A similar use seems to be indicated in the play Captain Thomas Stukeley, 1594:  
Ten thousand foot of gallant Spanish bloud,  
Men borne in honour; and exploits in war,  
And not one Indian or base bastard Moor.  
(ed. R. Simpson, 1878, 2167-2169.)

iv - CAPTAIN THOMAS STUKELEY

The clear lines of distinction between Muly and his foes, which are so evident in The Battle of Alcazar, do not appear in the later play of Captain Thomas Stukeley (1596).<sup>1</sup> The term "Moor" seems to be used here in the sense of a native of Barbary with no strong implications of colour. Both Muly - "that straggling fugitive the Moor" (2302) - and his uncle, the "proud Moor" (2411), are designated by it. The author's concern is not principally with the Moors, but with his hero Stukeley. So he treats them only sketchily. He seems to have known of the difference between Muly and his uncle - the latter refers to Muly as "my brother's bastard and a slave" - but he does not stress this. The civil nature of their strife - their affinity, rather than their difference - is what is stressed, as Philip's question implies:

Are then Molucco and his brother king  
At civil mutiny among themselves?  
(1439-1440)

Terms like "Negro", "black", "white" and "tawny" do not occur at all. Instead the more generally applicable terms - "Moors" and, notably, "African" - are used without distinction. The term "Indian" (2169) also appears as a synonym of African, a meaning noted also in Lust's Dominion.<sup>2</sup>

Although the author of Captain Thomas Stukeley does not

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1. References are to Richard Simpson's edition of the play in The School of Shakespere, 1878, vol. I.

2. See p. 251 above.

distinguish between types of Moors, we can hardly argue that he was ignorant of the differences. He seems to have chosen to ignore the differences and present a generalized picture because that seems to have suited his purpose best.

v - THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

The significance of the phrase "tawny Moor" has been dealt with earlier in this chapter (pp. 222-4). It points unambiguously to a light-skinned rather than a dark-skinned Moor. I believe that the general mildness with which the Prince of Morocco is referred to bears out this conclusion. The Prince's own words on his complexion are:

Mislike me not for my complexion,  
The shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun,  
To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.  
(II, i, 1-3)

"Shadow'd" is a mild word suggesting darkened, not blackened. Similarly the kindly suggestions of "neighbour" seem to be far removed from those of "victim", which is nearer the Elizabethan conception of the relationship between the black Moor and the sun. (See for instance Eden's statement that the Negroes were "so scorched and vexed with the heat of the sunne, that in many places they curse it when it riseth".)<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that even the slight tan with which Morocco was probably portrayed would have been entirely acceptable in the eyes of Portia, in an age when "every woman chooseth white and red".<sup>2</sup> But I believe that

1. Hakluyt, Principal Navigations, 1904, vol. VI, p. 167.

2. The Blind Beggar of Alexandria, Sc. 10, line 162.

the text would bear the interpretation that when Portia encounters the Prince she experiences something of relief. When he is first announced her mind flies to the extremes of colour:

if he have the condition of  
a Saint and the complexion of a devil, I had  
rather he should shrive me than wive me.

(I, ii, 140-142)

She is, however, more complaisant when, having encountered Morocco, she says that had she been free to make up her own mind,

Yourself, renowned prince, then stood as fair  
As any comer I have look'd on yet  
For my affection.

(II, i, 20-22)

There is neither here, nor in any other speech of Portia's, the conventional horror and loathing of an alliance with a black Moor. She is, however, relieved - again her relief is mildly expressed - when Morocco chooses unluckily:

A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains: go.  
Let all of his complexion choose me so.

(II, vii, 78-79)

Shakespeare's other "Moor" mentioned in the text, if she ever appeared on the stage, as she may have done, must have been made up as a black Moor, in contrast to the Prince. She is referred to in the text both as Negro and Moor:

I shall answer that better to the commonwealth  
than you can the getting up of the negro's belly:  
the Moor is with child by you, Launcelot.

(III, v, 40-43)

Quite clearly here, Moor is synonymous with Negro.



vi - WONDER OF WOMEN: THE TRAGEDY OF SOPHONISEA

Though he sets his play in Libya, Marston does very little about local colour except through names like Afric, Libya, Carthage, and Cirta which occur in the text, and the inclusion of one black character, Vangue, described as an Ethiopian slave. He is portrayed as a Negro, as were all Ethiopians, and is so called: "Dear Ethiopian Negro" (I, i, 60),<sup>1</sup> "gentle negro" (III, i, 147). Vangue's black face also evokes the usual association with the devil (III, i, 185). His blackness has a symbolic value in the play which was discussed earlier in chapter III (pp. 149-150). His name becomes interesting when one discovers that "Vangue, a kingdome beyond Zaire" is one of the territories listed among the possessions of Prester John by John Pory.<sup>2</sup> (Zaire was the ancient name for the Congo.) It seems as though Marston made sure of the authenticity of this one item of local colour. Zanthia's name suggests that she too may have been portrayed as a Moor, although there is no textual evidence for this. The name seems to have become the stock-name for Moorish maids in the plays of the

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1. The Works of John Marston, ed. A. H. Bullen, 1887, vol. II.
  2. History and Description of Africa, ed. cit., vol. I, p. 30. This is too little evidence on which to base any firm conclusions, but the suggestion is tempting. Did Marston too read Leo's book ?

period.<sup>1</sup>

vii - OTHELLO

The question of Othello's colour at one time threatened to run away with criticisms of the play. An examination of the works of 19th century critics who sought to prove that Othello was not meant to be black is one of the most effective of critical curatives. H. H. Furness offers a good selection of such criticisms in the appendix to his Variorum edition of the play (pp. 389-395). Miss Mary Preston occupies a unique position in this group, for she openly admits that her image of Othello was arrived at in defiance of Shakespeare's intentions. She writes: "In studying the play of Othello, I have always imagined its hero a white man. It is true the dramatist paints him black, but the shade does not suit the man". She ends her essay on the triumphant note: "Othello was a white man!"<sup>2</sup> Preposterous as this statement sounds, it is surprisingly close in its premises to some of Coleridge's remarks on the subject. Miss Preston rejects a black Othello for the following reason.

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1. See The Knight of Malta, Believe As You List, The Bondman, and The White Devil, where the form is Zanche. F. L. Lucas in his edition of The White Devil, 1958, p. 140, assumes that Marston's Zanthia too was a Moor. Gunnar Boklund, in The Sources of The White Devil, Uppsala, 1957, pp. 96-99, identifies the name with that of Lady Sancia d'Aragona, who "was notorious for her promiscuity", "was unusually dark-complexioned", and whose ancestors, the Neapolitan Arragons, were rumoured to have had Moorish blood in their veins. This would satisfactorily explain the name's attraction for the portrayers of lascivious Moorish maids.
  2. Mary Preston, Studies in Shakespeare, 1869, p. 71. The underlining represents Miss Preston's italics. The exclamation mark at the end is also her own.

"Shakespeare was too correct a delineator of human nature to have colored Othello black, if he had personally acquainted himself with the idiosyncracies of the African race." Coleridge, more surprisingly, writes: "Can we imagine him so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous negro plead royal birth, - at a time, too, when negroes were not known except as slaves?"<sup>1</sup> Both critics seem to ignore the fact that primarily and in its most important aspects, Othello was the creation of Shakespeare's imagination, and not a historical or anthropological being. But even at that both underestimate the kind of knowledge that was available to the poet and his contemporaries. They had access to materials which described Negroes who could claim with Othello that they fetched their life and being from men of royal siege. In the most publicised battle since Lepanto, the battle Alcazar, a European king had lost his life trying to set a "negro Moor" on the throne of Fez. Richard Eden had described the court of the king of Benin,<sup>2</sup> and Leo Africanus (translated by John Pory) had described a king's brother in Negro Africa in terms not unlike the Duke's words about Othello:

I my selfe am acquainted with Abu Bacr, sirnamed Pergama, the kings brother, who is blacke in colour, but most beautifull in minde and conditions. 3

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1. S. T. Coleridge, Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare, ed. R. Ashe, 1885, p. 385.
  2. Richard Eden, The History of Travayle, 1577, p. 340. Reproduced in Hakluyt's Principal Navigations, 1904, vol. VI, p. 149.
  3. The History and Description of Africa, 1896, vol. III, p. 826.

Even the historical arguments against a black Othello do not have any validity.

Attempts to locate the exact birth-place of Othello are equally futile,<sup>1</sup> since Shakespeare had no particular location in mind.<sup>2</sup> Most modern critics are now content to derive their opinions of Othello's visage from the language and the various emphases of the play itself.<sup>3</sup>

The references to Othello's external appearance are not many, but they are significant. They have to be put against the whole background of the play. Iago's references to Othello, for instance, have to be very carefully examined because of the very nature of his character. He is usually out to mislead his hearer, and make him draw the wrong conclusions from the facts. But even he has to have some fact to go on, even though this may be no more than the temporary possession of a mere handkerchief. With this in mind, we can examine the evidence of the play.

The term "Moor" by which Othello is called could be regarded as pointing towards a certain colour. It has been shown that

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1. See for instance Fernand Baldensperger's article "Was Othello an Ethiopian?" Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature, XX, 1938, pp. 3-14.
  2. Iago's reference to Mauretania is merely a lie produced on the spur of the moment.
  3. The current dramatic trend is to play Othello black, thus reversing the trend which followed Edmund Kean's innovation in 1814 of a light-brown Othello. (See F. W. Hawkins, The Life of Edmund Kean, 1869, vol. I, pp. 221-222.) Probably the seal of acceptance of the current tradition was set when Paul Robeson, a Negro, played the part in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-on-Avon in 1959.

it was frequently used without qualification to indicate a Negro. This is our starting-point. Soon after the opening of the play, Roderigo, who admittedly has no reason to love the Moor, refers to him as "thick-lips":

What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe,  
If he can carry't thus!

(I, i, 66-67)

This reference to a well-known characteristic of the Negro or black Moor is sometimes written off as evidence because in the mouth of Roderigo it is obviously malicious.<sup>1</sup> Against this one may quote with approval M. R. Ridley when he writes: "thick-lips" would lose all its venom if it could not be recognizably applicable to Othello's mouth, if he had had the sort of mouth of, for example, Bellini's Doge, which one could derogatorily describe as "thin-lipped".<sup>2</sup> Iago's images, which he uses in his attempt to rouse the worst feelings of revulsion in Brabantio, should similarly be regarded, as malicious and distorted, but as having some basis either in fact or in popular belief. Using carefully selected animal and devilish images, he shouts:

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram  
Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, Arise!  
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,  
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.

(I, i, 38-91)

Othello is no more a black ram than he is the devil, but were he not black, neither image would have any force. Iago succeeds

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1. See, for instance, S. T. Coleridge, Lectures and Notes, 1885, p. 385.
  2. Othello, Arden edition, ed. M. R. Ridley, 1958, p. lii.

in his plan to the extent that when Brabantio confronts Othello (I, ii) his words echo Iago's ideas. "Damn'd" (63) and "sooty bosom" (70) recall Iago's references to Othello's colour, and the association of that colour with the devil and damnation. Iago also refers to "black Othello" in II, iii, 33.

We must not be so absorbed in looking for single terms, however, that we miss whole attitudes which are more eloquent than individual words and phrases. Brabantio's plain refusal to credit the possibility that Desdemona may have willingly loved Othello makes the poet's intention clear. According to conventional attitudes - and Brabantio is nothing if not conventional - Othello is a "thing ... to fear, not to delight" a well brought up Italian maid like Desdemona (I, ii, 71). He must therefore have practised on her with "foul charms".

Leaving the references to Othello's colour by other characters, we turn to his own references. Turning over in his mind the hints which Iago had clearly dropped, Othello says:

Haply, for I am black,  
And have not those soft parts of conversation  
That chamberers have.  
(III, iii, 263-265)

Iago had subtly thrown in a hint about Othello's "looks" earlier:

And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,  
She lov'd them most.  
(III, iii, 207-208)

Convinced of Desdemona's guilt, Othello makes what is the clearest reference of all to his colour:

Her name, that was as fresh  
As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd and black  
As mine own face.  
(III, iii, 387-389)

H. H. Furness describes this passage as the one piece of evidence "which will not down".<sup>1</sup> All these individual passages combine with the whole weight of suggestion in the play to indicate that Shakespeare intended to portray a black hero in a characteristic departure from the traditional portrayals of black characters on the English stage.

viii - ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA

Shakespeare's Cleopatra, unlike other Cleopatras on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, seems to have been portrayed with a touch of colour. The evidence for this assumption lies in a few significant references. Twice she is referred to as a gipsy - I, i, 10 and IV, x, 41. The term was usually associated with a dark complexion, which was unfashionable during the period. Thus it was used as a mild abuse for a dark-complexioned European. Philo slightly refers to her "tawny front" (I, i, 6) - her dark face - and she herself refers to her dark complexion in I, v, 28 - "with Phoebus' amorous pinches black" - where "black" is used in the milder sense of tanned. These references indicate that Shakespeare's heroine was portrayed with only a light touch of make-up to suggest a sun-tan. (Even this mild touch of colour was something of a coup-de-théâtre since Cleopatra's greatest asset was her physical attractiveness, while Shakespeare here deprives her of one of the cardinal features

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1. Othello, ed. H. H. Furness, 1886, p. 396.

of physical beauty as seen in his age.)<sup>1</sup>

ix - THE WHITE DEVIL AND THE KNIGHT OF MALTA

When the name of Zanthia occurred in Marston's Sophonisba, nothing was made of her colour in the text, although it is likely that she was represented on the stage as a Moor. About the representation of two of her successors - Zanche in The White Devil and Zanthia (alias Abdella) in The Knight of Malta - there can be no doubt. Numerous references to their colour in the text indicate that they were portrayed as black, even though they are both designated as "Moors" when no special qualification is necessary. Zanche is referred to as "Zanche the More" (I, ii, 14),<sup>2</sup> and in other places as "that Moore" (V, i, 148), and "the Moore" (V, vi, 216). There are other and more indicative references to her colour. She is called "devill" and is compared to "crowes" by Marcello (V, i, 85 and 189). She applies the "sunburnt" proverb to herself - "And wash the Ethiop white" (V, iii, 270-271) - and Gasparo, about to kill her, addresses her: "Thou art my taske black fury" (V, vi, 228). She is proud that "Death cannot alter my complexion" (V, vi, 231).<sup>3</sup> (Stage

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1. This was a deliberate innovation in the portrayal of Cleopatra - See pp. 209-214 above.
  2. The White Devil, ed. F. L. Lucas, Complete Works, 1927, vol. I.
  3. Niger, in Ben Jonson's Masque of Blacknesse, 1605, had used this as an argument to persuade his daughters that their black complexion was the most beautiful:  
Since Death her selfe (her selfe being pale and blue)  
Can never alter their most faithfull hiew;  
All which are arguments, to prove, how far  
Their beauties conquer, in great beauties warre;  
Ben Jonson, ed. Herford and Simpson, vol. VII, pp. 173-174.



black Moors - Aaron, Eleazer, Zanche and Zanthia - frequently boasted that they could not betray their feelings by blushing.)

The references in the text of The Knight of Malta to the colour of Zanthia are even more numerous than those in The White Devil to Zanche's colour. She is constantly being referred to as black: "my black cloud" (p. 83),<sup>1</sup> "my black swan", (p. 84), "thy black shape" (p. 136), "thy black sire, the Devil" (p. 143), "black beauty" (p. 149), "her black jaws" (p. 159). She is also called "My little labour in vain" (p. 86), a reference to the popular adage that it was vain labour to wash an Ethiop white.<sup>2</sup> She is called "blackamore" (p. 81), and she attracts the usual association with the devil and hell (pp. 136, 143, 145, 159). It seems clear that the creators of both Zanche and Zanthia intended them to be portrayed as black Moors. Their use of the term "Moor" also conforms to the common usage of this word to refer to black Moors.

#### x - THE FAIR MAID OF THE WEST

The fifth act of the first part, and the first three acts of the second part of Heywood's play are set in Mamorah in Barbary, at the court of Mullisheg, King of Fez. Such a person Mullisheg, had he lived, would probably have been a white Moor, and if the author cared for these things we would expect to see

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1. The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher, ed. Arnold Glover and A. R. Waller, 1905-1912, vol. VII.
  2. Morris Tilley, A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England, 1950, E 186.

him portrayed as such. There are many suggestions in the text of the play, however, which seem to indicate that Mullisheg and his court were represented on the stage as black Moors.<sup>1</sup> One of the earliest indications we have of the proximity of Mullisheg's colour to black occurs in V, i, when on learning the name of Bess Bridges' all-black ship - the Negro - the king exclaims:

Ominous  
Perhaps, to our good fate. She in a Negro  
Hath sail'd thus farre, to bosome with a Moore.<sup>2</sup>  
(p. 320)

He gives another hint when he refers to "our Sun-burnt clime" (p. 327). Clem, the clown of the play, soon makes three references to the king which strongly suggest a black Mullisheg. He calls him (addressing Bess) "the black a Morrian king" (p. 328), and in an impertinent expression of his good wishes (which the king is not to hear) says:

Maist thou never want sweet water to wash  
thy blacke face in, most mighty monarke of Morocco.  
(p. 328)

When Mullisheg kisses Bess he expresses his disapproval (again in an aside):

Must your black face be smooching  
my mistresses white lips with a moorian!  
(p. 328)

These references cannot be dismissed as mere expressions of contempt in the mouth of an irresponsible character, for other and

1. R. R. Cawley, Unpathed Waters, 1940, p. 232 says of Mullisheg: "we know that he is black ... " It may also be recalled that Mulai, one of the participants in the battle of Alcazar, and one time King of Fez, was black.
2. Works, 1874 (the Pearson edition), vol. II.

more responsible characters give the same impression of Mullisheg's colour. For instance, when the king suddenly sheds his generosity and plans to seduce Bess, Goodlack applies to him the traditional association with the devil:

Who but a Moor,  
Of all that beares mans shape, likest a devill,  
Could have devis'd this horroure?  
(p. 350)

Spencer, the hero, says of him

His lust outwaide his honour: and as if his soul  
Were blacker then his face, he laid plots ...  
(p. 370)

Other Moorish characters, particularly Joffer and the Queen, are referred to as though they were black. When Spencer first perceives the nobility of Joffer, he exclaims:

Is honour fled from Christians unto Moors,  
That I may say in Barbarie I found  
This rare black swan.  
(p. 371)

Clem, who has most of these references to colour, says that he is tired of "dancing with these same black shee-chimney-sweepers" (p. 355). He tells the Queen that "English gentlewomen could be as "fair" as Bess one moment, "and within an hower the same Gentlewoman as blacke as your selfe, or any of your Morians" (p. 342).<sup>1</sup> In an aside he says of the Queen:

Ile see you damn'd as deep as the black father  
of your generation the devill first.  
(p. 342)

All these references reinforce the suggestion of "Moor" and

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1. This is a reference to the practice of disguising the features for the masque.

indicate that Heywood made his Moors of Fez black. Only one passage which introduces a character designated as "a negro" makes us pause and wonder if all these suggestions are after all misleading. In Part II, iii, i (p. 373), a messenger enters to tell the king that the English have escaped. The stage directions read "Enter a negro". (The list of dramatis personae for the second part also calls for a "Negro".)<sup>1</sup> This character is followed by another messenger (presumably a Moor) who is designated in the stage directions as "a second Messenger" (p. 374). The question is why, if all the Moors in the play are presented as black Moors, this one character is called "a negro"? How would he have been distinguished from all the other black faces on the stage?

There are several possible interpretations of this stage direction. The first is that this was the only black person on the stage, and that all the other characters - in spite of the numerous references to their blackness - were portrayed as tawny Moors with only light make-up. That is to say that all the terms which suggest that they are black are loosely used. We would seem to be upsetting a mass of evidence with one little piece of evidence, but this possibility must be faced. Another possibility is that Negro here is merely another variant of Moor (as it frequently is in plays of the period). That is to say

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1. Both the stage directions and the list of dramatis personae appeared in the first published edition of 1631.

that all the Moors including this Negro were of the same colour, and that the stage directions may just as well have read "Enter a Moor". A third possibility follows on the second, namely, that no difference in colour was intended here, and that the term Negro is used with a slightly pejorative meaning to suggest a Moor of low class - perhaps a slave - who perhaps was differentiated only by his costume.<sup>1</sup> (It would still seem strange that the second messenger is not so treated.) I am unable to offer a definite solution to this issue, but the weight of evidence seems to be on the side of a black Mullisheg.

xi - ALL'S LOST BY LUST

This play is based on the historical invasion of Spain by the Moors. The Moors who invaded Spain were preponderantly white or tawny Moors with black mercenaries. How Rowley intended Muly Mumen and his Moors to be portrayed is another matter. Here again there are numerous references which would seem to indicate that they were portrayed as far darker than historical accuracy would warrant. The first reference to colour, however, is "tawney" in the phrase "The barbarous and tawney Affricans" (I, i, 20).<sup>2</sup> But this is the only use of

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1. Cf. "drudges, Negroes, slaves and Muliters" in The Battle of Alcazar, ed. Greg, 1086.
  2. All's Lost by Lust, ed. C. W. Stork, 1910.

this or any other term which suggests that these Moors were portrayed as white rather than black Moors. In fact Julianus soon neutralizes the effect of "tawney Affricans" with "blacke Affricans" (I, ii, 46). All the other references seem to indicate black Moors. Roderigo likens their sooty faces to those of the inhabitants of hell:

They would deter us with their swarty lookes:  
Were they the same to their similitude,  
Sooty as the inhabitants of hell,  
Whom they neerest figure; cold feare should flye  
From us as distant as they are from beauty.  
(I, i, 31-35)

Their climate is "sun-burnt" (I, i, 85), and Dionisia calls them "Blackamoores" and likens them to chimney-sweepers - (II, ii, 21 and 23). She declares that her suitor Muly Mumen is "frightful" to her (thus expressing the conventional attitude of a white lady to a black suitor). Iacinta makes another conventional reference to the soul in relation to the skin:

Thy inside's blacker then thy sooty skin.  
(IV, v, 15)

Other confirmatory references are to Muly's "Cymerian face" (V, v, 126), "that black monster" (V, v, 186), and "sooty fiend" (V, ii, 17). Muly himself in an invocation to the sun makes a glancing reference to the proverb about washing an Ethiop when he says:

we that are stamp't with thine owne seale,  
Which the whole ocean cannot wash away.  
(II, iii, 5-6)

All these references are sufficiently indicative for us to

assume that, in spite of history, Rowley's Moors were black, and to class the use of "tawney" with others in which the word is used as a synonym of black.

This examination of the use of terms in particular plays has shown that "Moor" by itself was frequently used for a black person, and that to an Elizabethan playgoer it usually suggested a black person if it was unqualified. This was in spite of the fact that it was known that there were white as well as black Moors. It also shows that while we may be confused in our interpretation of some of the colour terms used by the playwrights of the period, they were in most cases quite clear as to what they wished to portray when they used terms like Moor, black Moor, Ethiop etc. Finally, it shows that we ought to pay the closest attention to the weight of suggestion in plays and passages as a whole, rather than attempt to transfer established meanings of terms signifying race or colour to other contexts.

CHAPTER V

A NOTE ON PHYSICAL PORTRAYALS - MAKE-UP AND COSTUME

The masquers and players who appeared as Africans had to be made up to look the part. The accounts of the Office of Revels, some references in the texts of plays and masques, and a few surviving drawings give us some idea of how this was done. The evidence relating to the masque is more direct. In King Henry VIII's "disguising" in 1510, the masquers used "fyne plesaunce blacke" to cover their faces, necks, and hands. Edward Hall's account, cited earlier,<sup>1</sup> indicates that this method was considered successful at that time. We know that in the mediaeval village festivals soot had been used to blacken the faces of the participants. Soot was no doubt considered unsuitable for courtly disguising at this early date, probably because it was likely to rub off too easily. In spite of the apparent success of the material used in 1510, by 1547 black velvet masks, gloves and stockings had come to be substituted, according to the charges recorded for a pageant of young Moors in that year. Black velvet was used again in 1559 and seems to have become established as the standard material for this purpose.<sup>2</sup> The use of black velvet illustrates how absolutely the term "black" as it relates to the colour of Africans was interpreted. This literal interpretation would have made the symbolic contrast with white, and the associations with hell and the

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1. P. 63 above.

2. See pp. 65-67 above.



devil, even more obvious. The use of masks, gloves and stockings could have been neither too realistic nor particularly convenient for masquers who had to dance in them. For a time, however, it answered the purpose. Up to this time, the masque had not sought a very high degree of realism.

Ben Jonson's Masque of Blacknesse (1605) set new standards of realism for the masque, and in line with this new realism, paint and not cloth was used to effect the disguise. This device may have been borrowed from the popular theatre, where a higher degree of realism would have been required and almost certainly attained by this time. (The Battle of Alcazar, Titus Andronicus and Lust's Dominion had all been produced.) Sir Dudley Carleton's comments on the whole production of The Masque of Blacknesse were unfavourable.<sup>1</sup> But we are indebted to him for the information that paint was used to disguise the characters. He also went on to make a remark which suggests that the paint used came off rather easily. Writing of the Spanish Ambassador who was present at the performance, he notes: "He took out the Queen, and forgot not <sup>to</sup> kiss her Hand, though there was Danger it would have left a Mark on his Lips."<sup>2</sup> This remark appears to be more sarcastic than factual, and should be treated with some caution. It does not appear as though his attitude was generally shared. Certainly ( and contrary to E. K. Chambers'

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1. See pp. 71-72 above.

2. Winwood's Memorials, 1725, vol. II, p. 44.

supposition)<sup>1</sup> paint continued to be used to make up masquers appearing as Africans. Jonson specially mentions Mr Woolf, who prepared the paint used by the characters in The Gypsies Metamorphosed (1621):

Knowe, that what dide our faces was an oyntment  
Made and laid on by Mr woolfs appointment,  
The Courte Lycanthropos: yet without spelle,  
By a meere Barbor, and no magicke elle,  
It was fetcht of with water and a ball. 2

The references to disguising on the popular stage suggest that painting was the method generally adopted. For special occasions when a quick discovery may have made this method inconvenient, other means were used. In the last act of Robert Greene's Orlando Furioso (1592), Orlando, who had come in disguised as a Moor, has to shed this disguise on stage after his fight with Oger. The stage directions indicate that this disguise was effected by means of a mask: "Enter/Orlando, with a scarfe before his face".<sup>3</sup> Presumably this unrealistic device was resorted to because it was more easily shed than paint. In some later disguise scenes paint was used, and was either applied and taken off off-stage or was applied on-stage to the accompaniment of dialogue. Indeed it is from scenes like the latter that we derive most of our information about the materials used for disguising in stage plays. In Lust's Dominion (1599), Philip and Hortenzo, having killed Eleazer's black henchmen,

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1. See p. 73, note 4 above.
  2. Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson, vol. VII, p. 615, lines 1481-1485.
  3. Greene, Life and Works, ed. Grosart, 1881-1886, vol. XIII, p. 189.

Zarack and Baltazar, are counselled by Isabel to disguise themselves to look like the slain men: "Once rob the dead, put the moors habits on, and paint your faces with the oil of hell, so waiting on the Tyrant".<sup>1</sup> The "oil of hell" is an obvious reference to black paint.

In two much later plays we have scenes in which the disguise is applied or taken off on the stage to the accompaniment of dialogue. In Richard Brome's play The English Moor (1637) the unwilling Milicent is disguised by Quicksands, who, as he applies the paint, describes the process by which he blots out "Heaven's workmanship" from her face:

Take pleasure in the scent first; smell to't fearlesly,  
And taste my care in that, how comfortable  
'Tis to the nostril, and no foe to feature.

[He begins to paint her.]

Now red and white those two united houses,  
Whence beauty takes her fair name and descent,  
Like peaceful Sisters under one Roof dwelling  
For a small time; farewell. Oh let me kiss ye  
Before I part with you - Now Jewels up  
Into your Ebon Casket. And those eyes,  
Those sparkling eyes, that send forth modest anger  
To sidge the hand of so unkind a Painter,  
And make me pull't away and spoyle my work,  
They will look streight like Diamonds, set in lead,  
That yet retain their vertue and their value.  
What murder have I done upon a cheek there!  
But there's no pittying: 'Tis for peace and honour;  
And pleasure must give way. Hold, take the Tincture,<sup>2</sup>  
And perfect what's amiss now by your glass.

The stage directions require for this operation "A Box of black painting".<sup>3</sup>

Sir William Berkeley's play, The Lost Lady (1638), has a

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1. Lust's Dominion, ed. J. le Gay Brereton, 1931, lines 3584-3586.
  2. The Dramatic Works of Richard Brome, 1873, vol. II, p. 38.
  3. Ibid., p. 37.

scene in which the paint is taken off on the stage and this too is masked by dialogue. Acanthe, who has been disguised as a Moor throughout the play, faints, and has to be revived with water. During this process, the paint washes off, and her identity is revealed. Irene's words accompany the action:

Bring some water here, she does but swoone:  
So chafe her Temples, - Oh Heavens! what prodigy  
Is here! her blacknesse falls away: My Lord, looke on  
This Miracle, doth not Heaven instruct us in pittie  
Of her wrongs, that the opinions which prejudice  
Her vertue, should thus be wash't away with the  
Blacke clouds that hide her purer forme? 1

Complexion was not the only feature of Africans which was simulated in the production of masques and stage plays. Attempts were made to simulate the hair as well. The accounts of the Office of Revels record payments for "Corled hed sculles of blacke laune" for characters representing Africans.<sup>2</sup> Similar headgear must have been used by the player who played Aaron in Titus Andronicus, for that character makes pointed reference to

My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls  
Even as an adder when she doth unroll  
To do some fatal execution.  
(II, iii, 34-36)

The Peacham drawing<sup>3</sup> shows him with short curled hair bound with a cord or ribbon. The binding might have been used to keep a skull cap in place, or to conceal its rim.

The thick lips of Negroes were often mentioned in plays of the period. Roderigo calls Othello "thick-lips",<sup>4</sup> and Aaron

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1. The Lost Lady, 1638, p. 43.
  2. See p. 67 above.
  3. See Shakespeare Survey I, 1948, plate I.
  4. Othello, I, i, 66.

calls his child "thick-lipp'd."<sup>1</sup> How far this feature engaged the attention of make-up artists is not certainly known, but some attempt may have been made to simulate this also. In Massinger's play The Parliament of Love, nothing is done to give Beaupre (disguised as the Moor, Caliste) any suggestion of thick lips or curled hair, but the text covers up for this. Bellisant says of her:

tis the hansomest [sic]  
I ere saw of her Cuntry shee hath neither      2  
thick lips nor rough Curld haire.

This covering up for the incompleteness of Beaupre's disguise suggests that attempts at more thoroughgoing simulation were made in other representations of African characters.

### COSTUMES

Reference has already been made to some of the costumes used by African characters in the masque.<sup>3</sup> They indicate a tendency towards splendour and strangeness rather than accuracy. The popular theatre does not provide records as helpful in this matter as the accounts of the Office of Revels, and so we know less of how African characters were dressed on the popular stage. I believe that this may have varied according to the type of Moor portrayed. The Peacham drawing shows Aarori dressed very much like the two sons of Tamora, in a long-sleeved square-necked skirted doublet and tight-fitting breeches. This costuming fits

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1. Titus Andronicus, IV, ii, 177.
  2. The Parliament of Love (Malone Society Reprints), 1929, lines 103-105 (p. 4).
  3. See Chapter II above.

very well with the spirit of the play, which presents us with a man totally divorced from his African background, and very much at home in his adopted environment. (He is even, it appears, competent in Latin.)<sup>1</sup> Except for his difference in colour and his greater ingenuity he is not very different from Demetrius and Chiron like whom he is dressed. A Moorish robe with its strong suggestions of a follower of Mohammed hardly fits the atheist Aaron. If the Admiral's men had followed the 1595 stage portrait of Aaron as closely as the authors of Lust's Dominion had followed Shakespeare's portrayal of the character of Aaron, then they probably put Eleazer in doublet and hose.

Aaron represents one type of Moor - the African in exile. Some Africans in the plays of the period were pictured in their own homes, or only temporarily removed therefrom - Abdelmelec and the Prince of Morocco are good examples of this type. Such Moors were no doubt put in flowing oriental robes and turbans, "after Turkey fashion", as Henry VIII's disguising costume was described.<sup>2</sup> Othello's background is sufficiently remembered in Shakespeare's play to suggest that it was not entirely left out of account in his costuming, but he was also sufficiently part of the Venetian military scene to suggest that he may have adopted their style of dress. He after all speaks slightly of "a malignant and a turban'd Turk"<sup>3</sup> and, unless this is discounted as evidence, it strongly suggests that he was not himself dressed like a Turk.

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1. Titus, IV, ii, 20-31.

2. See p. 63 above.

3. Othello, V, ii, 352.

## CHAPTER VI

A NOTE ON AFRICA AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE PLAYS

Africa was important enough to the dramatists as a source of character and setting. As a source of images its influence was even more pervasive. Many dramatists who never created a single African character referred to the gold of Barbary or to the tears of the crocodile, the monsters of Africa, the horses of Barbary, or merely used the terms Moor, Negro or Ethiop in a simile of blackness, cruelty, jealousy, lustfulness or some other quality commonly credited to Africans. So numerous and scattered are such references that only illustrations are given here.

Massinger was particularly fond of using Africa's reputation as a breeder of monsters and prodigies in his poetry. In The Emperor of the East, Theodosius, accusing Eudocia of infidelity, says:

To show you a miracle, a prodigy  
Which Afric never equall'd: - Can you think  
This masterpiece of heaven, this precious vellum,  
Of such a purity and virgin whiteness,  
Could be design'd to have perjury and whoredom,  
In capital letters, writ upon't? 1  
(IV, v)

A similar use occurs in The Bashful Lover:

Would thou hadst shown me  
Some monster, though in a more ugly form 2  
Than Nile or Afric ever bred!  
(IV, ii)

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1. The Plays of Philip Massinger, ed. William Gifford, 1856, p. 306. (The echo of Othello in this and other lines in the play is obvious.)
  2. Ibid., p. 484.

Massinger uses this idea in several other plays: The Guardian, II, iii,<sup>1</sup> The Parliament of Love, IV, ii,<sup>2</sup> The Bondman, IV, iv,<sup>3</sup> and Believe As You List, II, ii.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare also employs this common notion in Coriolanus when Aufidius says to Coriolanus:

Not Afric owns a serpent I abhor  
More than thy fame and envy.  
(I, viii, 3-4)

General references to monsters as well as to individual beasts of Africa abound in the literature of the period.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the Elizabethan ideal of beauty - a white skin, blonde hair, red lips and cheeks - the African with his dark skin came to symbolize the opposite of beauty. There are instances in the literature of the period where "Moor", "Ethiop" and "blackmoor" were used in this way. This could be well illustrated from the pages of Shakespeare:

And Sylvia - witness heaven that made her fair! -  
Shows Julia but a swarthy Ethiop.  
(Two Gentlemen, II, vi, 25-26)

In Troilus and Cressida, Pandarus in feigned anger says of the heroine's beauty, "I care not an she were a black-a-moor."  
(I, i, 80-81) In Much Ado About Nothing, Claudio expresses his determination to marry Leonato's niece by saying: "I'll hold my mind, were she an Ethiop." (V, iv, 38) Shakespeare's

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1. The Plays of Philip Massinger, ed. William Gifford, 1856, p. 416.
  2. Ibid., p. 163.
  3. Ibid., p. 112.
  4. Malone Society Reprints, 1927, p. 31.
  5. See R. R. Cawley, The Voyages and Elizabethan Drama, Book I, Chapter 3.





best setting off from the black."<sup>1</sup> Jonson was not the first to make the discovery. Shakespeare had used this contrast as the basis of a simile in Romeo and Juliet:

It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night  
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear.  
(I, v, 49-50)

Shakespeare's simile may have been inspired by the sight of a "Moor" decked out in pearl for a play or masque.

The white teeth of the African, set off by his black complexion, had also attracted early attention. Andrew Borde had noted of black Moors that "ther is nothing white but their teth and the white of the eye".<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare uses this idea in a simile in The Winter's Tale:

As soft as dove's down, and as white as it,  
Or Ethiopian's tooth  
(IV, iii, 375-376)

The comparison between a black complexion and night is implicit in Romeo's simile. Other writers make the comparison more explicitly. In Robert Daborne's play A Christian Turn'd Turke (1612) Gallop addresses night as "thou black ei'd Negro".<sup>3</sup> In John Mason's The Turke, Mulleasses uses the same comparison in an elaborate invocation:

Rise, rise ye mistie-footed Iades of night,  
Draw your darke mistresse with her sable vayle,  
Like a blacke Negro in an Ebone chaire,  
Athwart the worlds eie: from your foggy breaths  
Hurle an Egiptian grossenes through the ayre,  
That none may see my plots.  
(II, i, 729-734)

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1. Ben Jonson, ed. Herford & Simpson, vol. VII, p. 171.

2. See p. 226 above.

3. First edition, folio F 3 ii.

4. Ed. J. Q. Adams, Louvain, 1913.

Mulleasses uses the comparison again later in the same play - III, iv, 1489-1492.

The easy associations between the Moor and the devil have been mentioned frequently in earlier chapters. It was probably the most facile and the most frequently used of all the associations. Less frequent but quite pervasive was the occurrence of "the sun-burnt proverb" of washing a black Moor white. The expression "You wash an Ethiop",<sup>1</sup> meaning you labour in vain, became quite common-place. Some variation of the proverb occurs in at least a dozen plays and other literary works of the period.<sup>2</sup>

The popularity of this proverb whose biblical provenance has been mentioned earlier was enhanced by its appearance in the immensely popular emblem books of the period.<sup>3</sup>

Poetical references to the Nile and its inundations are found throughout the period. The Nile, its connection with the fertility of Egypt, and its potential dangers are basic to the imagery of Antony and Cleopatra. Lesser dramatists were content to snatch an individual image or two from the great river. Marston uses one of the less frequently mentioned denizens of the Nile, the dog, in Sophonisba where Syphax says of Zanthia:

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1. Fletcher's The False One, I, ii. (Plays, ed. A. Glover and A. R. Waller, III, p. 313.)
  2. Among these are: The Parliament of Love, The White Devil, All's Lost by Lust, The Knight of Malta, The First Part of Jeronimo, The English Moor, James IV, and Dekker's pamphlet, A Rod for Run-Awaies.
  3. See pp. 58-59 above.

I'll use this Zanthia,  
And trust her as our dogs drink dangerous Nile 1  
(Only for thirst), that fly the crocodile.

The crocodile itself was very frequently used. Webster's elaborate use of the story of the crocodile and Trochilus as an illustration of ingratitude has been discussed (pp. 53-54). More frequently the crocodile's hypocritical tears formed the basis of poetic images. When Mustapha in Massinger's The Renegado discovers Donusa's unfaithfulness, he silences her protestations with:

O land crocodiles;  
Made of Egyptian slime, accursed women. 2

The animal's indifference to bullets (because of the hardness of its skin) forms the basis of the Soldan of Egypt's comparison in Tamburlaine:

While you faint-hearted base Egyptians,  
Lie slumbering on the flowrie bankes of Nile  
As Crocodiles that unaffrighted rest,  
While thundering Cannons rattle on their Skins.<sup>3</sup>

Barbary and Ethiopia are the two other areas which are frequently referred to by name. Places further south and west had to wait till later to be absorbed into the language of poetry.<sup>4</sup> The Canaries and Niger and Guinea are occasionally used. In

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1. Marston's Works, ed. Bullen, vol. II, p. 281.

2. Plays, ed. Gifford, p. 132.

3. Marlowe's Works, ed. Tucker Brooke, 1910, 1379-1382 (p. 46).

4. Milton, seeking for a southern source for winds to contrast with the arctic blasts, uses Sierra Leone:

With adverse blasts upturns them from the south  
Notus with Afer black with thunderous clouds  
From Sierraliona.

Paradise Lost X, 901-903.

connection with the last of these, Iago's pejorative use of the term "guinea-hen" (Othello I, iii, 318) may have been of Shakespeare's coinage. It is not recorded earlier by the Oxford Dictionary. The fowl is, however, mentioned by other writers. The gold for which Barbary became proverbial (it was actually obtained from Negroes south of the Sahara) was frequently used. Abdelmelec's queen presents Bassa with gold in Peele's Alcazar:

Wear thou the gold of Barbary,  
And glister like the palace of the Sun.  
(II, i, 404-405)

I have suggested earlier (p. 142) that Morocco's choice of the golden casket in The Merchant of Venice was almost inevitable in Elizabethan England.

The Moors were sometimes associated with the occupation of diving for pearls. In Chapman's The Blind Beggar of Alexandria, Aegiale expresses her determination to find Cleanthes in these words:

Or I will, Moor-like, learn to swim and dive 1  
Into the bottom of the sea for him.

A similar use of the association is seen in Heywood's The Fair Maid of the Exchange: "The swarthy Moor, diving to gather pearl."<sup>2</sup> This occupation is more characteristic of East Indians, as Othello's reference to the 'base Indian' implies.

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1. The Comedies of George Chapman, ed. T. M. Parrott, 1914, p. 4.
  2. Ed. Barron Field in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood (General editor, J. P. Collier), 1850, vol. I, p. 18. (Each play in this volume is separately paginated.)

Africa yielded up a variety of associations for poets, and some aspect or other of the continent was used to conjure up images both pleasant and unpleasant. For Ancient Pistol, however, the whole continent seems to have been associated with total bliss: "I speak of Africa and golden joys."

(II Henry IV, V, iii, 101)

### CONCLUSION

This study has shown how Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists accepted the opportunities offered them by the increased contacts between England and Africa which took place in their time. In the areas of character, setting, and imagery Africa contributed something of significance. A line of African characters reaches its highest point in the hero of Shakespeare's play Othello. In his portrait of Othello, who stands out from the rest of the tradition, Shakespeare is seen as a pioneering dramatist for whom the prevailing idiom was only a starting-point and not a goal. A comparison between his Aaron in Titus Andronicus and his noble Moor shows two extremes in his work. In the earlier play, he is the young dramatist exploiting the tastes of the times; in the later play he is the mature dramatist flying in the face of tradition - a creator rather than a follower of popular taste.

In his use of Africa as a setting and as a source of imagery Shakespeare's work is also peculiarly significant. Chapman's Egypt in The Blind Beggar of Alexandria leaves no poetic impression on the mind. Heywood's Mammoth is full of individual items of local colour which show familiarity with the travel literature and the talk of Barbary merchants, but it fails in the totality of its effect. Ben Jonson's knowledge of Africa as shown in The Masque of Blacknesse was

scholarly and thorough and far in excess of any specific knowledge of Africa shown by Shakespeare. Yet Shakespeare in Antony and Cleopatra creates a poetic image of Egypt and its queen which vibrates with energy and spirit, and provides an effective counterweight to Octavius' Rome. Crocodiles, serpents, the Nile, the pyramids and the other favourite allusions do not feature as scientific details but as threads in the fabric of the whole poetic structure.

Thus by the oblique route of a study of the use made of Africa by Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, the triumphant genius of Shakespeare can once more be demonstrated.



CHART OF PLAYS, MASQUES AND PAGEANTS INVOLVING  
AFRICAN CHARACTERS 1510-1638

(with some significant non-dramatic events)

NOTE: No texts exist for any entertainments before 1585. The main authorities used for dating are E. K. Chambers, The Elizabethan Stage, and G. E. Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage. Stars show where other dates have been preferred.

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF MASQUE, PLAY OR PAGEANT	AUTHORITY (where texts are not ex- tant)	SIGNIFICANT NON-DRAMATIC EVENT
1509			Accession of Henry VIII
1510	Shrove-tide at West- minster, Disguising at court	Edward Hall, <u>Henry VIII</u> , ed. C. Whibley, 1904, pp. 15-19 (The original work was Hall's <u>Chronicle</u> , 1548.)	
1522	Drapers' Pageant involving a king of Moors	Surviving list of expenses reproduced by W. Herbert, <u>The History of the Livery Companies</u> , 1837, vol. I, p. 405	

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF MASQUE, PLAY OR PAGEANT	AUTHORITY (where texts are not extant)	SIGNIFICANT NON-DRAMATIC EVENT
1547	Shrove-tide, Masque of Young Moors	Feuillerat, Documents .... <u>Edward and Mary</u> p. 26	Accession of Edward VI
1550			Publication in Italy of John Leo's <u>History and Description of Africa</u>
1551	Twelfth Night, Masque of Moors	Feuillerat, <u>Op. cit.</u> , p. 48	Thomas Windham's first voyage to Barbary
1553	Christmas, Masque of Female Moors	Feuillerat, <u>Op. cit.</u> , p. 85	Windham's Voyage to Guinea  Accession of Mary
1554			John Lok's first voyage to Guinea
1555			William Towerson's first voyage to Guinea  <u>Publication of Richard Eden's The Decades of the New World</u>
1558			<u>Publication of William Watermarks The Fardle of Facions</u>  Accession of Elizabeth

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF MASQUE, PLAY OR PAGEANT	AUTHORITY (where texts are not extant)	SIGNIFICANT NON-DRAMATIC EVENT
1559	January, Masque of Moors.	Feuillerat, Documents <u>Queen Elizabeth</u> , pp. 24, 25, 26, 29, 41. Also E. K. Chambers <u>Elizabethan</u> <u>Stage</u> , vol. I, p. 156	
1560	January, Masque of Barbarians	Feuillerat, Documents <u>Queen Elizabeth</u> , p. 20. Also <u>Diary of Henry</u> <u>Machyn, 1555-63</u> : ed. J. G. Nichols, 1844, p. 221	
1577			Edmund Hogan's Embassy from Queen Elizabeth to Mully Abd-el-Melek, Emperor of Morocco
1578			Publication of Ortelius' map, <u>Theatrum Orbis Terrarum</u>
1585	George Peele, <u>Device</u> <u>of a Pageant borne</u> <u>before Wolstone Dixi</u>		The battle of Alcazar (El-ksar el-Kebir)
			Letters Patents granted by Queen Elizabeth to Barbary merchants. Henry Robert's embassy from Queen Elizabeth to Mully Hamet, Emperor of Morocco

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF MASQUE, PLAY OR PAGEANT	AUTHORITY (where texts are not extant)	SIGNIFICANT NON-DRAMATIC EVENT
1587	Christopher Marlowe, <u>Tamburlaine</u>		Publication of John Poleman's <u>The Second Book of Battles</u>
1587 (?)	Robert Greene, <u>Alphonsus, King of Arragon</u>		
1588			The Armada
1588/89 *	George Peele, <u>The Battle of Alcazar</u>		
1589			Publication of Hakluyt's <u>Principal Navigations</u>
1589/90 *	William Shakespeare, <u>Titus Andronicus</u>		Norris & Drake led the disastrous expedition against Portugal
1590 (?) *	Anthony Munday, <u>John A Kent and John A Cumber</u>		
1591	Robert Greene, <u>Orlando Furioso</u>		
1592	<u>Tamar Cam</u>		
1593	Samuel Daniel, <u>The Tragedie of Cleopatra</u> (There was a later version in 1607.)		
			<u>Henslowe Papers</u> , ed. Greg, 1907, pp. 145-148 (Greg reproduces a 'plot' of this play.)

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF MASQUE, PLAY OR PAGEANT	AUTHORITY (where texts are not extant)	SIGNIFICANT NON-DRAMATIC EVENT
1596	George Chapman, <u>The Blind Begger of Alexandria</u>		
1596(?)	Author Unknown, <u>Captain Thomas Stukeley</u>		
1598	William Shakespeare, <u>The Merchant of Venice</u>		Second edition of <u>The Principal Navigations</u>
1599 *	Dekker, Haughton and Day, <u>Lust's Dominion</u>		Publication of John Pory's translation of John Leo's <u>History and Description of Africa</u>
1600			Embassy from Morocco to Queen Elizabeth.
1600-03	Thomas Heywood, <u>The Fair Maid of the West, Part I</u>		Queen Elizabeth's edict for the transportation of Negroes out of England
1601			Death of Elizabeth and Accession of James I
1603			
1604 (?)	William Shakespeare, <u>Othello</u>		

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF MASQUE, PLAY OR PAGEANT	AUTHORITY (where texts are not extant)	SIGNIFICANT NON-DRAMATIC EVENT
1605	Ben Jonson, <u>The Masque of Blackness</u>		
1606 (?)	William Shakespeare, <u>Antony and Cleopatra</u>		
1606	John Marston, <u>Wonder of Women: Sophonisba</u>		
1608	Ben Jonson, <u>The Masque of Beauty</u>		
1609	Ben Jonson, <u>The Masque of Queens</u> Robert Deborne, A <u>Christian Turned Turk</u>		Publication of first edition of William Liddulph's <u>The Travels of Foure Englishmen</u>
1610			Publication of Sandys' <u>Relation</u>
1611 (?)	John Webster, <u>The White Devil</u>		
1613	Thomas Middleton, <u>The Triumphs of Truth</u>		Publication of Purchas <u>His Pilgrimage</u>
1616	John Fletcher (with Field & Massinger) <u>The Knight of Malta</u>		
	Anthony Munday, <u>Chrysanaleia</u>		
1619 (?)	William Rowley, <u>All's Lost by Lust</u>		

DATE DESCRIPTION OF MASQUE, PLAY OR PAGEANT AUTHORITY SIGNIFICANT NON-DRAMATIC EVENT  
 (where texts are not extant)

1620 John Fletcher, The False One

1621 Ben Jonson, The Gypsies Metamorphosed

1623 Philip Massinger, The Bondmen

1624 Philip Massinger, The Renegado

Philip Massinger, The Parliament of Love

1625

1626 Thomas May, The Tragedie of Cleopatra

1630 (?) Thomas Heywood, The Fair Maid of the West, Part II

1631 Philip Massinger, Believe As You List

Aurelian Townshend, Tempe Restored

1637 Richard Brome, The English Moor

William Berkeley, The Lost Lady

Death of James I and accession of Charles I

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