

2018 Seminar: Warring Grecians, Turks, Afric Moors, and Others 1
Leader: Lisa Barksdale-Shaw, Saginaw Valley State University

Roya Biggie, College of the Holy Cross

Botanic Colonists and European Strangeness in John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*

As scholars have noted, John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*—set on the neighboring Malukan islands of Ternate and Tidore—stages both a romance quest and a conversion plot. The princess of Tidore, Quisara, promises her hand in marriage to the suitor who rescues her brother from the governor of Ternate. By act five, Quisara converts to Christianity and marries Armusia, the Portuguese soldier-merchant who completes the quest. The play, however, complicates the more familiar conversion plot by dramatizing different forms of European masculinity and developing what I will refer to throughout my paper as a masculine identity of idealized European colonial strangeness. In addition, the play reverses the trope of the colonized as stranger by representing Armusia as the drama's most foreign agent. While Armusia may initially strike us as an unremarkable European colonizer on the early modern stage, he is referred to throughout the play's five acts, by both Portuguese and Malukan characters alike, as "the stranger." In contrast to Rui Dias (the captain of the Portuguese fort on Tidore), Armusia responds immediately to Quisara's challenge, relying on gunpowder to cause a widespread fire. This plot frees the Tidorean king, but leaves Ternate in a state of destruction and chaos. I argue that the play represents an appropriate and even desirable form of European strangeness, marked specifically by the alacrity with which Armusia exposes Ternate's people, infrastructure, and natural resources to devastating violence. I show that Armusia's willingness to destroy Ternate in order to compete for Tidore's most valuable human resource, so to speak, is not lost on Ternate's governor. Following this scene of mass destruction, the governor of Ternate warns the Tidorean king and princess of the botanic and architectural consequences of colonization. The governor points to the Portuguese citadel, "clapped upon the neck of...Tidore," and later describes the Portuguese in botanic terms; they become "sharp thornes," almost as if to suggest that the Portuguese will replace what was lost in the fire with foreign plants and new architecture (4.1.52, 4.2.157). Although the governor briefly voices the dangers of colonization, the play affirms Armusia's violent colonial strangeness as Rui Dias follows his example and enacts a similarly destructive gunpowder plot. As such, Armusia's "strangeness," though repeatedly mentioned throughout the play, becomes not only less strange, but esteemed.

Matt Carter, University of North Carolina-Greensboro

Blackening Othello

The long performance history of Shakespeare's *Othello* is full of examples of Othello carrying a scimitar (a curved sabre associated with the Mediterranean). The choice of this weapon emphasizes his "Otherness," setting the actor further apart from the European characters onstage. In "Blackening Othello," I shall argue that the tendency to arm Othello with that particular weapon is anachronistic, and that it exposes our own racialization of the character. In our quest to emphasize Othello's status as the Moor of Venice, we sometimes forget that he is also the Moor of Venice. I shall show, through the lens of cultural materialism, that Othello would be better armed with a Venetian rapier, which would provide an emblem of his assimilation into, rather than his disjuncture from, European society. The cultural attitudes toward weapons in the period were

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tightly-held, and the associations an early modern audience might draw between these weapons and their regional origins were important, but it is important that Othello's race not be the single identifier of his character. After all, it is Iago who encourages the Venetians to exercise prejudice against Othello and reject his union with Desdemona. I shall provide a reading of Othello's death that attempts to reconstruct what may have been the original staging, and in the process, I hope to provide some insight not only into why I think the typical choice of stage property is incorrect, but why it matters to our understanding of the play. As I shall show, arming Othello with a scimitar says more about ourselves than it says about the character.

Andrea Crow, Columbia University

**"I'll make you feed on berries and on roots":
The Moorish Appetite in *Titus Andronicus***

This essay focuses on the presentation of the Moorish appetite in William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. The Moorish character Aaron's arc revolves around his relationship to food, from the bloodthirsty appetite he shares with the play's non-Moorish characters at the beginning of the play, to the transformational scene where he promises to raise his infant son on a vegetarian diet of berries and roots, to the closing scene in which he is sentenced to be publicly starved in view of all of Rome. I situate this focus on Aaron's diet in relation to the many early modern plays associating Moorish characters with bloody banquets, demonstrating how Titus responds to this body of plays in order to reflect on the larger consequences of England's growing economic and political relationships with North Africa.

**Javad Ghatta, University of New Brunswick
Ryerson University**

Tamburlaine as Militant Terrorist

In this essay, I read Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* to demonstrate how imagined and emergent forms of early modern terror, influenced by Machiavelli's political philosophy, anticipate the militant terrorism of our age by simultaneously allowing unrestrained agency to man and appealing to divinity. This is enabled through the enlistment of a non-European racial Other as the protagonist and the appropriation of European perceptions of violence. On the one hand, Tamburlaine's 'militant terrorism' emerges as an innovation in the political sphere and on the English stage, for his celebrated agency (*Virtù* in Machiavellian terminology) and sustained rule of fear and terror. On the other hand, his example supports the claim that an ideology or intent (in this extreme case, the will to power/destroy) is always present to legitimize (or condone) the inhumanity of politically-motivated cruelties and violence (in its pure, mythical, or divine forms). *Tamburlaine* demonstrates how, similar to modern extremists, early modern 'imagined' terrorists expediently invested in associations with the supernatural, an attribute which helped designate them as superhuman forces on an unalterable mission. In the ecclesiastical discourse, acts of cruelty were often justified as *ira Dei*. With Machiavelli's materialist political discourse advocating the employment of all means available to the political 'actor', traditional conceptions of divinely legitimized vengeance may still be appropriated as yet another instrument to help justify assaults or deflect criticisms from those assaults. In essence, the techniques that Marlowe deploys for his

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protagonist in the play—such as arbitrary and unconditional use of force and cruelty, the threat trope inherent in psychological warfare, use of duplicity and deception, and emphasis on the histrionic quality of terror to maximize dramatic affect—presage the terrorist's *modus operandi* in our own era. Collectively they make a compelling case for *Tamburlaine* as a play epitomizing the perceived cultural poetics of terror and terrorism in the age of theatre.

Stephanie Kucsera, Loyola University Chicago

**Pirates, Privateers, and Proselytism: Ottoman Seamen as Religious Warriors
and Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turn'd Turk***

Criticism of early modern drama has long explored the socio-economic factors fueling the apostasy of English Christians in Islamic lands across the first half of the seventeenth century. However, as Jonathan Burton has observed, “scholars regularly disregard the fact that Islam was a religion, a force whose capacity to offer narratives of salvation interacts powerfully with, sometimes even superseding, other axes of social formation.”¹ Is there a way to reconcile what seem to be competing narratives about the motives of English apostates and the reality of Muslim proselytization, especially as they are presented in the drama of the period? One of early modern Islam's methods of proselytization begs special consideration, drawing together, as it does, the socio-economic benefits of embracing Islam in Ottoman territory and Islam's claim to religious supersession. As Islam spread largely through trade, exploration, and conquest in the early modern period, it was Ottoman pirates and privateers who saw themselves as religious warriors, standing as spreaders and defenders of the faith. In his creative retelling of the historical John Ward's piratical career and conversion to Islam in *A Christian Turn'd Turk* (c.1612), Robert Daborne puts his protagonist in contact with the proselytizing efforts of military men in the tradition of those early modern Muslim mariners—men bent on the gaining of personal wealth, certainly, but men who posit a striking conflation of economic and spiritual concerns in their persuasive efforts expended on the English renegade.

Rachana Sachdev, Susquehanna University

Warring Muslims and Kind Moors

Fletcher's *The Island Princess* begins with a description of the treachery of the “false and desperate” Islamic Islanders, the Ternateans, who have attacked the King of Tidore, but the moral landscape of the play is far more complex than can be described by a simple perfidious Muslim/staunch Christian binary. Besides the supposedly Muslim rulers of the two Islands, the play includes a few characters specifically identified as Moors—these prison guards can see the injustice of their Governor and the natural nobility of the rival King, helping to dismantle the stereotypical associations of the word Moor in the early modern era. In addition, Fletcher seems to play with the category “Christian” by making his hero Armusia a Portuguese. The Spanish Argensola's history, on which the play is based, has clear and virulent anti-Protestant, anti-English, and in particular, anti-Francis Drake biases, making it all the more surprising that Fletcher's response to this invective would be to choose a Catholic hero for his play. I propose that neither Islamic nor Christian is a stable, unproblematic term in this play-- each identity is divided or muddied by conflicting religious affiliations. The complexity of religious positioning deliberately

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and repeatedly disrupts any easy binaries in order to undermine in advance the stridency of the final conversion spectacle. Fletcher, in my reading, subscribes to cultural relativism—the unconvincing conversion caps off the demonstration of equally muddied categories of Moluccan Islam and Portuguese Christianity. In so arguing, I also hope to steer clear of the problematic assertion that the early modern era was culturally and religiously fanatical and blind, unable to see through or appreciate the complexities of human positioning.