

MORE ABOUT THE MORISCO IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS:
CONVERSION AND SUBVERSION IN OTHELLO

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ملخص

لقد حاولنا من خلال هذه الدراسة التي خصصناها لعطيل، اعتمادا على مفهوم الاكتساب المجازي، كما فصله ستيفن جرينبلات، وهو أحد الوجوه البارزة للتاريخانية الجديدة الأنجلوساكسونية، وبتمعن أكبر في السياق التاريخي، كما نادى به هذا التيار النقدي، إثبات أن شكسبير كان أكثر عناية واهتماما بالحوار الحضاري السياسي المطروح في عصره بتواجد المسلم في أوروبا مما أقر به النقد الغربي الذي حرص على وصف هذا الأخير بالمالك القوي لمجتمع امبريالي عنصري بارز للوجود.

عندما حاولت بعض الأصوات الناشئة إبراز المغاربي المسلم (المور)، وبالخصوص عطيل، كان ذلك بطريقة غلب عليها الطابع الأوربي الوسطي. أما نحن، فقد نحاول الدفاع عن فكرة أن قصة عطيل التي كتبت تحت تأثير السياق الدائر في البحر الأبيض المتوسط، ما هي إلا تعبير عن الهواجس والتخوفات من بروز قوة مسلمة في أوروبا.

إن عطيل هو ذلك المسلم الإسباني المطرود من بلده والذي يحاول هداية صفوة المجتمع البندقي إلى اعتقاداته أكثر مما هو جاحد تنصيره. فالمسرحية تعالج إذا هداية المسيح أمثال ديسديمون، والوسائل المسخرة

لذلك هي نفسها الوسائل التي كرستها التفتيشات التعسفية الإسبانية والتي تجسدت في لاجو.

بهذا يكون شكسبير قد يبدع فن الدعاية، والذي بفضل إعادة كتابة إرث ثقافي قروسطي جد واع بالإسلام والسخرية من هذا الأخير، هو موجه ومخصص لتفادي أي انزلاق يمكن أن يحدث من جراء استغلال المغاربي للصعوبات السياسية، والثقافية، والدينية.

Othello's Venice looks like a reversed image of the brilliant, light-spirited, and enterprising metropolis which enjoys remarkable cultural and religious harmony in *The Merchant of Venice*. By the end of the latter play, indeed, infidel girls marry happily out of their religion into Christianity whereas their unwilling tribe is forced to accept conversion and integration, a thorough mutation which their wealth allowed them to resist. Significantly, Portia's expert legal handling of Shylock's beast-like hatred, which is based on clear, well formulated and unequivocally Christian arguments (Mercy is stronger than any other tougher law) is the central scene of the play. Her feat, indeed, symbolically ends whatever legal and economic influence a mercantile Venitian state, hardly aware of their hostility to its century-old identity, granted to foreign tradesmen and financiers. In fact, Shylock's conversion and forced donation of his wealth to his christianized daughter and Christian son-in-law indicate that the ethnic and religious other is definitely held in rein both legally and politically, as well as economically and culturally.

Owing to this hostility to religious and racial alterity, it is not surprising that the Venice which, in *Othello*, welcomes a Morisco as its savior against hostile and aggressive Moslem Turks, keeps very little of its previous optimism and self-complacency. It moves in an ambiguous, dark, counterfeited and treacherous atmosphere in which families are broken by deception, daughters, strangely blind to what, to others, looks as monstrous difference, elope with what they «should fear to look at,» whereas princes and rulers reward perpetrators of crimes rather than their victims. As a matter of fact, Venice's military dependence has allowed the non-Christian and non-white alien to impose his looks, views, and beliefs. When contrasted with Margaret's remark that Beatrice's conversion to normality hangs on looking with the eyes of her fellow women (*Much Ado About Nothing* (III, 4,31-33), the Venetians's alienation, which leads them to look not with their fellows' eyes but with the eyes of outlanders, forcefully suggests that Othello has actually converted to his own religious beliefs unsuspecting Venetians, all too eager to be protected and to feel secure. Such a state of affairs, which therefore is a call to action for any honest Christian to defend this land against a danger which is all the more deathly as it is internal rather than external.¹ Shakespeare is a suchlike man who sets out

to contain what he considers as Islamic propagation in a largely unstable world in which the issue of the competition between Islam and the West is still uncertain. In this contest, his contribution is symbolical. He deprives the Moslem Moor of his gains on Christian land and mind by subverting his manœuvres and turning them against himself. For this purpose, he is not averse to using the techniques of propaganda, control and surveillance put at his disposal by a centuries-old ideological warfare, however unpalatable their origin. In particular, he will not hesitate to draw upon the methods of the Spanish Inquisition, however hostile the latter might be to the Reformation and therefore to Britain. At the same time as it reveals that Shakespeare considered himself as a Christian before a Reformed one, this enterprise presents him under the unexpected light of a darkly ideological and intolerant propagandist eager to expose difference and diversity especially when they are outlandish. One of the reasons for this militant spirit may lie in the fact that at the time of the play, the Barbary pirates had become so bold and enterprising that they even raided British coasts, hereby raising great anxiety about a possible Moslem invasion which, at a time when the Islamic presence in Europe was still visible and active, might perhaps make for another Moorish Spain. It is therefore not surprising that Shakespeare felt much in common with a Catholic Spain which counted among Britain's bitterest enemies. Commenting on the British identification with Spain that followed the Barbary corsairs' incursions into the Atlantic and on their literary implications, Samuel Chew has perceptively noted that Britain made its own the ideology of the Reconquista and that the Medieval Romance and Geste became fashionable again.² Whereas the historical context of the play has been acknowledged by most critics, it has, however, been only selectively so. Indeed, as noted earlier, references to converted Christians, whose situation was well known in Seventeenth century Britain, have been omitted by a later criticism which, raised at a time of Western colonialism and Eastern decadence, and oblivious of a confrontation whose issue was undecided in the early years of the Seventeenth Century, has, as Kenneth Parker claims, erred through amnesia and misreading.³

In this paper I propose to probe into the different strategies used by Shakespeare to achieve this purpose. My study will go through three main steps. I will first support my belief that, rather than focusing on Othello's difficulty to keep to his Christian baptism, as recently defended by Daniel Vitkus, the play primarily tackles the problem of «turning Turk,» that is of Christian conversion to Islam.⁴ Whereas Vitkus's reading is to be commended for being one of the earliest to highlight an articulate and complex treatment of the Moslem in the play, indeed, it is nonetheless Western-centered in that it focusses on Othello's difficulty to remain Christian. My contention, on the other hand, is that the play deals with what, to Shakespeare, was the gloomier issue of the fascination of Islam and with the threats this posed to European integrity. In a second step, I explore the mechanisms of subversion set up by Shakespeare, in a manner strongly reminiscent of the methods of the Spanish Inquisition, in order to undo this silent but potentially effective conquest of Christendom. Iago, whose cynicism, pragmatism and secret doings and undoings typify the ways in which the Inquisition used to ferret out the heretic and the relapsed New Christian, stands foremost in this vicious fight against a resourceful enemy. Thirdly, I take a closer look at the ways in which the play reveals Shakespeare's effort to work out an openly ideological art in order to contain the Moslem threat at a decisive moment in Christian European history, that is when Europe was distancing itself from Medievalism and was about to set up its enterprise of world domination. One of the foremost characteristics of the Medieval heritage was a multicultural, multiracial Europe which had no place in a monolithic Early Modern Age eager to impose its superior view of itself.

Before moving to the detail of what I claim to be another dimension of *Othello*, I would first like to explain how I came to the present reading of the play, and in particular how I came to relate it to the Reconquista and its aftermath of inquisitorial persecution of the Morisco and fight against the expansion of Islam. Whereas recent criticism has shown that the influential post-colonial view of the play as a tale of race relations only partly reflected the concerns of the play, this reappraisal, as exemplified by Vitkus, still looks a long way from presenting Othello as a crypto-Moslem missionary converting Christian souls by devious methods.⁵

Neither does Cherrell Guilfoyle's more intertextual approach to *Othello* as a palimpsest of *Otuel*, the Medieval romance of conflict with Islam and conversion to Christianity, help us look at the play as a broadside against this tale of miscegenation and diversity where the converted Moslem knight, Otuel, marries Charlemagne's daughter and becomes a champion of Christianity. Guilfoyle's perspective, indeed, is purely technical as she mostly focuses on textual resemblances and transformations which she uses only to prove the influence of the Medieval gestes on Shakespearean drama.⁶ Moreover, my belief that the play concerns itself with the religious fight against Islam seems to clash with the very events of the play which quickly dispose of the Moslem threat after the Armada-like disruption of the Ottoman fleet by a heavenly sent sea-tempest. The Ottoman naval disaster could rather be taken for an episode of the Early Modern grand narrative, or set of exemplary tales, of a post-Medieval Western Europe liberated from its fear of Islam, in the Western Mediterranean sea at least. According to this view, whatever implicit references to Spain and to the Reconquista make it into the play--such as Othello's Spanish sword and Iago's Spanish name together with the mention of Mauretania and the Moor—are props aimed at reinforcing the play's concern with alterity. It looks therefore as if these brilliant and thorough readings of *Othello* have relied on those aspects of the play which confirm their basic assumptions. They have neglected those historically meaningful structural elements, tropes and facts which, when receiving due attention, form a coherent story claiming for recognition as the framework into which many current readings of the play can be integrated. In particular, following the New Historical advice to recontextualize the Western canon leads us to link such apparently unimportant and isolated details as Othello's homelessness, the Spanish-named Iago's hatred of Othello and the play's consistent concern with dissembling to the Moriscos' persecution by an Inquisition eager to expose their infidelity to Christ and their fidelity to Islam, which they concealed behind devout Christian appearances. Othello's wandering could be that of a Morisco expelled from Spain after the Catholic Church had decided that he could never become part of Spain. Further contextualization would relate the Reconquista with the Barbary States, and in particular to Mauretania

which Othello intends to sail to after being discharged from office in Cyprus. Barbary, indeed, served as a base to Moriscos expelled from Spain and determined to return there. In the meantime, they retaliated forced conversions of Moors to Christianity by converting Christian captives and hostages to Islam. In this context, Desdemona sailing to Cyprus with a Moor forcefully conjures up the scene, familiar to the Early Modern imaginary, of women hostages taken to Barbary and converted to Islam. To this image, Vitkus, though alert to most of the significant tropes of the play, has devoted only passing mention.⁷ Tropes, metaphors and images therefore converge to tell a tale of religious fidelity and infidelity in Christendom, a term which literally means *Domus Christi*, that is the house of Christ. More than domestic jealousy and infidelity, indeed, the play deals with the more fundamental problem of conversion or religious infidelity and with the means to subvert it. Greenblatt's acute point that religion can be represented on the stage metaphorically through secular scenes, a process which he describes as metaphorical acquisition of social practices by the stage, has further allowed me to pay increased attention to those scenes and tropes which were forcefully reminiscent of the religious conflict in which, I contend, Shakespeare rooted his play.⁸ His other perceptive remark that these metaphors, which are overlooked or misread by the present-day Western secular audiences and even critics, were familiar to Shakespeare's more religious contemporaries, has further encouraged me to look deeper into what might well prove turn out to be a neglected religious content.⁹ In what follows, I expose the results of the investigation carried out along the critical considerations presented below.

At the beginning of the play, Othello has brought Venice and its elite to see the world through his own eyes, a metaphor which in Shakespeare's plays stands for conversion. His blackness is constructed as fairness by Desdemona and the Venetian state backs him against the most respectable and eldest Christian citizens who, like Desdemona's grieving father, warn that relinquishing Desemona is tantamount to willingly surrender land to Turk. The Venetian elite's inertia is related in the play to their all too willingly listening to tales, stories and rumors which they favour over concrete evidence. The Venetian senators, ignoring the valorous Venetian soldiers at

their disposal, prefer Othello who is favored by rumor. In this respect, a Venetian senator exclaims that opinion is «a sovereign mistress of effects.» (I,3,224). Othello's mind control is all the more dangerous as he is set to convert the elite which controls Venice. The powerful, the young, the skillful, are his favorite targets. Through them, Othello roots durably the Moorish presence biologically (Desdemona's fruitful nature is often stressed), politically (through the Senators and the Magnifico) and culturally (through Cassio whose love of arithmetics and inexplicable encouragement of Othello's and Desdemona's union could easily have led the inquisition to persecute him as a heretic or a crypto-Moslem.

Othello's narrative, which, to use Brabantio's words, infects Desdemona's blood, and therefore reproduces the popular trope of heresy as poison and infection, is a powerful instrument of conversion. It metaphorically brings Desdemona to leave her house, parents, friends and land and therefore to conform to the literal meaning of conversion as «going the other way.» Her reaction to the tale is cast in openly religious rather than metaphorical terms. She emits "a prayer of earnest heart/ that I would all [her] pilgrimage dilate. She indulges in the sighs, cries and tears characteristic of converts' strong emotional state of mind. Quite understandably her father refuses her access to his home which she has symbolically deserted when she turned to another faith.

The autobiographical form of Othello's tale evokes the Gospels, which similarly focus on the life of Christ. But Othello's tale is made to look like one of war and violence. As such, it stands as a heretical reading of what was considered as a peaceful Christian message and perfectly answers the description of Islam as *perfidia* by Christian propaganda¹⁰ As if to contrast him with the Lamb of God, he is described as a bellicious «black ram,» thus fitting another distorted rendering of the Moslem as an animal and a brute. Its oral rather than written nature aptly echoes the propaganda spread during the Spanish Reconquista that Islam was based not on a book but on an oral tradition, a fact which made Christianity appear superior as it relied on the written Bible. Just like Othello's tales, this supposed emphasis on the oral law was dismissed as stories, tales, and affabulations. The large space attributed in the play to tales, rumor, and other oral

forms of improvisation sharply contrasts with the emphasis put on written law and contracts in *The Merchant of Venice*. It further clashes with the written Law which rules Venice and, notwithstanding Brabantio's protest, is ignored by Venetian senators in their eagerness to please Othello. Significantly, the written code is back when a letter puts an end to Othello's control of Cyprus. It consecrates the return of the Christian order over the Island through what is ultimately a divine intervention which ends the state of superlative damnation, chaos and blasphemy brought about by Desdemona and Othello. This ending perfectly answers the definition of the Reconquista as a renaissance, as a return to order after anarchy.

That Othello could be removed only by death and violence implies that he intended to settle in Christian land much as the Moors did in Spain. His seduction of Desdemona can actually be viewed as a dangerous repetition of the legendary tale of rape and revenge which led Count Julian to call the Moors to Spain in order to retaliate his daughter's rape by the Goths. As a convert, Desdemona leaves her past and move to another life and land with her new lord. Her total adhesion to her new faith and subsequent transformation, though conveyed in a most subtle manner, is never lost sight of. From a Christian «moth of peace» She has turned into a soldier, or, to use Joan Ozark Holmes's words, into a «woman warrior.»¹¹ This attitude can be viewed as an endorsement of the bellicious behavior associated with Islam. Cassio states that she is the «captain's captain.» Whereas Venetian women are still ready to «walk barefoot to Palestine» and are thus potential Christian pilgrims, her statement, that she would rather waste her purse full of «crusadoes» rather than anger Othello, can be taken as another sign of her new faith. Her being branded as an adulteress whose not only intensifies the religious metaphor of infidelity which structures the play, but can also be taken as an echo of the Christian popular dismissal of the Moslem marriage as immoral and illegitimate because not blessed by a Christian priest. Whereas Iago and Roderigo repeatedly mention her elopement rather than any wedding ceremony, Cassio asking Othello whether he is securely married casts some doubt on the legality of her union to Othello. Moreover, instead of receiving a ring as a token of her union, she is offered a handkerchief whose family value as a sacred symbol of fidelity Othello insists on. For

the loss of this handkerchief, which will be interpreted as faithlessness, she will be tried and condemned to death. Similarly, Othello's rejection of Napolitan wind instrument and bells indicates that he rejects any Christian way of celebrating his union to Desdemona who thus marries in a Moslem way. Besides, this opposition to Western music would have been interpreted by the Inquisition as undeniable evidence of his hidden attachment to Islam.¹² The discussion over the fact that her physical appearance might well have changed from modest to alluring further underlines her passage to a religion believed to be sensual and sexually licentious : «Her eye must be fed. And what delight shall she have to look on the devil? When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be again to enflame it and to give satiety a fresh appetite_loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners and beauties; all of which the Moor is defective....I cannot believe that in her; she's full of most blest condition."(II.1.222-246). Desdemona, however, views herself and is presented to the audience as a pure, innocent and faithful girl unaware of her evil dimension which is more symbolical than real. Her plea is that of the convert who is unaware of his changed nature, faith, and fools himself with the belief that he can control his nature. The convert is therefore the ultimate counterfeiter whom only proper counteraction can subvert and expose to himself and to others. As Joan Holmes Ozark perceptively notes, «entering the play as deceiver of father, she dies as «deceiver of the world.»¹³

Actually Desdemona's allegedly changed appearance is the first of the many blasphemous acts and desecration of Christian symbols that she performs in the eyes of what stands for the Christian community. From a symbol of divine-like purity and perfection which led her supporters to portray her like a live incarnation of the Virgin, she has changed into a desecrating representation of the Virgin, and of the symbols attached to Christian purity. Her sailing from Venice to Cyprus, along the very route followed by pilgrims to the Holy Land, suggests the parody of a Christian ritual anticipating her equally blasphemous rendering of the Lord's prayer before she dies. She, indeed, recommends herself to her lord Othello rather than to the Lord, therefore going to eternal damnation.¹⁴ Her name is a further symbol of her evil nature. She

is unfortunate, and therefore in the original meaning of the term «unblessed» and «damned». Her name contains a double reference to Dis (Pluto) and to the demon. To quote Iago, "If she had been blest, she would never have loved the Moor." (2.1.248).

The tragedy of damnation, heresy and purifying death, which dominates the play, is a unique opportunity to confront, and expose, an elusive and confounding enemy able to make out of tales a solid reality competing successfully with what should stand as the only reality, that is the reality of the Book. Significantly, Shakespeare's counteroffensive starts with conveniently sending Othello from Venice to an Island situated at the margins of Christendom. Its limits signals a deep desire to contain infection and contagion. Shakespeare's apt choice of Cyprus as the symbolic geographical recipient of the world engendered by this ill-starred union has been noted by many critics who have not always related it to religious reasons.¹⁵ This borderland between Islam and Christianity, traditionally described as a fortress and a citadel of the faithful—it was the last stop before Palestine for the Christian pilgrims --, faces an internal threat which leaves it undefended against evil for some time in the play. A powerful reference to the danger within is made by Othello stating that Cassio and Montano are behaving in a way which heavens forbade the Ottomites to do. The tempest which precedes Othello's and Desdemona's arrival to Cyprus, by symbolically joining «heaven and hell» and bringing a beast and a prostitute to the Island, conjure up an apocalyptic atmosphere which makes it not surprising that the heretic evil should outevil evil. Cyprus's evil actually defies the devil with hypocrisy and mockery; Othello is induced to believe that Desdemona might be acting in a way which would be «hypocrisy against the devil.» With most of the forbidden action taking place, either actually or symbolically, at night, with its monsters and poisonous creatures (toads, horned beasts), its infections, and its dark chambers enticing to murder, plotting and ensnaring, Cyprus is the very world of the counterfeited, of the deserter of Christianity who belongs neither to one world or to another. It is governed by the moon and evil stars which seem to have instilled into people an uncontrollable hatred that can be set right only by divine intervention which, through Iago, will use evil against evil. The liberated land will then be handed down to the man who

has reverted to safety and whose change of heart, and estrangement from Othello, suggests that he is a better Christian than those who never doubted. Cassio's ultimate triumph is foreshadowed by his assertion that he, rather than Iago, will be saved : «The lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient (II, 3,109).»

Coupled with the carefully calculated destruction of Othello and Desdemona by a character whose name critics have interpreted as an allusion to Santiago Matamore, the Patron Saint of the Reconquista, the Moor's departure to Cyprus is a potent trope of the banishment of the Morisco which was on when the play was first performed.¹⁶ Similarly, Othello's property will be transferred to his Christian in-laws. It is worth remembering that Shakespeare went through a similar process in *The Merchant of Venice* in order to punish Shylock. Unlike Shylock, however, Othello will «renounce his baptism,» a difference which points at the Moor's basic unwillingness to become a faithful Christian. Shakespeare, therefore, makes his own the claims of the Spanish Inquisition that the Moriscos could not be trusted and should not be allowed to remain in Spain.

Iago epitomizes the Inquisition in his beliefs as well as in his professional attributes. While he displays the same hatred of miscegenation and gold lust, his being involved with offices and office work reinforces his link with what was officially described as the «Holy Office of the Inquisition.» Whereas he reproaches the Moor for reducing him to «debtor and creditor» at the beginning of the play and hates him for having done his «office» in his sheet, Emilia accuses him of doing anything to secure «office.» His constant association with darkness and dark chambers further conjures up the Black Legend of the Inquisition. Moreover, as noted by Sandra Logan, he behaves independently from the state of Venice, whom he wants to revert to a pure and uncompromising Christianity, a fact which also relates him to the Inquisition which vied for power with the state in Spain and could sometimes be more influential.¹⁷

Iago embodies the *Santo Officio* in his dealings too. In a like manner, he acts secretly, spies and slanders on the basis of tenuous ocular evidence. Fighting Othello's mind-controlling narrative, he, as stressed by Catherine Bates, in turn develops tales which poison Othello's blood, making him see reality with other eyes and

act against himself.¹⁸ He undoes the Moor's charisma and deprives him of his followers such as Cassio and the Venetian State. The subversive impact of his tales leads Othello to go through the same torment as he inflicted on his opponents and, in particular, on Brabantio. When Iago wilfully raises the question of Desdemona's capacity for deception, Othello exclaiming "who would be a husband?" perfectly echoes Brabantio's earlier "Who would be a father?" He further makes Othello envisage the same scenes of Desdemona's infidelity as were insupportable to her father.¹⁹ He finally masterfully corners Othello into arranging by his own hand the indictment, trial and judgement of Desdemona and himself. Through Iago, Othello, the cryptoMoslem, is turned into a Grand Inquisitor arranging for his own death and his wife's in the best tradition of the Inquisition. Othello becomes an open traitor to his faith. Rather than killing him and therefore acknowledging his identity as a Moslem, Shakespeare thoroughly annihilates him by making him commit suicide after erasing all trace of his doings, and in particular of his control of Desdemona's mind. Through his subversive manœuvres, Iago has achieved a perfect revenge which imposes on the Moor what he wished to others. The motif of the Spanish revenge, which was so fascinating to the British Early Modern Readers and epitomized Spain in their eyes, is, in *Othello*, made inseparable from the Moor and his religion. It becomes a striking metaphor of acquisition dramatizing the Seventeenth Century cultural tragedy resulting from the necessity to break with a more plural past.

Desdemona's desperate questions and perplexity about her crime and her slanderers, together with her incapacity to bring to the bar any witness to prove her innocence, reproduce the endless questions and feeling of injustice of those who were arraigned at the bar of an institution whose aim, as has been noted, was more to sacrifice individuals at the altar of orthodoxy than to establish the truth. She cannot produce witnesses and is told about her «fault» only shortly before her execution.²⁰ Most significantly, Desdemona's indictment, starts on Sunday, the day in which congregations in Spain were encouraged to denounce heretics and sinners. She is similarly executed in a atmosphere of ceremony and prayer forcefully reminiscent of a Spanish *auto de fe*.

Shakespeare's religious zeal makes him go beyond plot development along conventional Christian lines. He, indeed, provides the spectator with a theatrical counterrepresentation of Islam which suggests that he ambioned not only to protect the integrity of Christendom but also to produce an art which would further his militant end. The predominantly dark atmosphere of the play amplifies the black sin of infidelity at the same time as it reinforces the association with the Black Legend of the Inquisition which runs through the play. Tropes and specific scenes distort those very customs and rites which, to the layman, stood for Islam. The structural parallel established between Othello's and Desdemona's union on the one hand, and Cassio's affair with Bianca, a prostitute, on the other hand, gives form and substance to the Christian rejection of Moslem marriage as illegitimate sex because not blessed in Church. In a like manner, Othello's murder of Desdemona, the yew, is a cruel recasting of the Moslem sacrifice of the Eid sheep as well as a powerful reminder of the Moslem brutal handling of the Christian lamb. Following the teachings of the ideologues of the Reconquista, Islam is actually staged as a parody of the holiest principles of Christ.²¹ Unsurprisingly so, an apocalyptic atmosphere prevails in the play which in the midst of tempests in which sea and sky join shows the emblematic figures of the Beast, the Whore of Babylon and the Antichrist. The latter who is said to make his advent like «a robber in the night» is powerfully suggested by Othello night elopment with Desdemona.

Moreover, the popular Medieval legacy, which bears evidence of an undeniable Moslem impact on European culture undergoes the sort of auto-da-fe that was recommended by the Spanish Inquisition that burnt and purified hundreds of medieval works. Shakespeare rewrites those Medieval romances which he judges too favorable to Islam and which therefore could legitimize the Moslem presence in Europe. Cherrel Guilfoyle's view that *Othello* held much in common with *Otuel*, the Medieval romance in which the Saracen prince Otuel converts to Christianity, becomes a champion in Christ's service and marries the kind of France's daughter, allows us to assess how eager to perform this task the Bard was.²² The happy end of the medieval romance, which suggests that the Moor can integrate religiously and culturally, is transformed into a tragedy of chaos and damnation which can be healed only by the perpetrators' death

after their banishment. This is a symbolic anticipation of the fate that awaited the Morisco and those who followed them or who aspired to follow them in Spain or elsewhere in Europe. Shakespeare's influence will impose his version of reality and culture which will be adopted all the more readily as time and circumstances will be an effective weapon for the furthering of the colonial venture in which Europe will soon get involved. His enterprise will stage another tragedy of misunderstanding, conflict and hatred whose negative impact has summoned literary critics and cultural scientists to do their best to develop counterdiscursive strategies. Indeed, as noted by Norman Daniel, «as knowledge and experience increased, the old intellectual barrier of antipathy dissolved, but a new barrier in the imagination was erected in its place.»²³ In literature, at least, undoing these barriers implies questioning the readings, or rather misreadings, that prevailed in the wake of a colonial enterprise that strove to cast a veil of obscurity and amnesia on a past that had not always been favorable to the new Master of the World and whose impact on the present cannot be fully assessed if it is not demystified. This paper aims to be a modest contribution to this end.

Notes

1. Sandra Logan, «Domestic Disturbance and the Disordered State in Shakespeare's *Othello*,» *Textual Practice*, 18.3(2004) :351-375.
2. *The Crescent and the Rose*(London :O.U.P.,1937) p.104
- 3.«Reading 'Barbary' in Early Modern England :1550-1685,»*The Seventeenth Century*,19.1(2004), p.88.
4. «Turning Turk in *Othello* : The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor,» *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 48.2(1997) :145-176.
5. The best known post-colonial readings are Emily Bartels, «Making more of the Moor : Aaron, *Othello* and Renaissance Refashionings of Race,» *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41.4(1990), 433-454, Michael Neill, «'Mulatos,' 'Blacks' and 'Indian Moors' : *Othello* and Early Modern Constructions of Human Difference,» *Shakespeare Quarterly*,49.4 (1998) :361-374, and Stephen Greenblatt«The improvisation of Power,» in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*(Chicago,London :The University of Chicago Press, 1980).
6. «*Othello*, Otuel and the English Charlemagne Romances,» *Review of English Studies*,38.149 (1987) :50-55.
7. Op.cit., p. 162.
8. *Renaissance Readings* (Berkeley : Univ. Cal. Press, 1987), pp. 10-11.
9. Ibid., p.12.
10. For the references to the Reconquista and the popular perception of Islam in Europe made in this paper, I am indebted to Samuel Chew, *The Rose and the Crescent*, op. cit., Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Edinburgh : E.U.P., 1960), Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh :E.U.P., 1966) and John v. Tolan, *Les Sarrasins, l'islam dans l'imagination européenne au Moyen Âge*, trans. Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat(Paris :Aubier, 2003).
11. «Desdemona, woman warrior : « O these men, these men,» *Medieval and Renaissance Drama*,17(2005), pp. 132-164.
12. For the references to the Spanish Inquisition and to the Moors under the Spanish Inquisition made in this paper, I am indebted to Louis Cardaillac, *Morisques et Chrétiens, un affrontement polémique : 1492-1640* (Paris :Klinsieck, 1977), *Inquisition d'Espagne*, Iberica-collection no 14 (Mars 2003) and Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Inquisition* (Harmmondsworth :Penguin, 2000).

13. Op.cit., p. 143.
14. Ibid., 140.
15. See, in particular, *Le proche et le lointain : sur Shakespeare, le drame elisabéthain et l'idéologie aux XVI^{ème} et XVII^{ème} siècles* (Paris :Minuit, 1981).
16. See, in particular, Eric Griffin's perceptive , «Un-Sainting James :or, Othello and the 'Spanish Spirits' of Shakespeare's Globe,» *Representations*, 62(1998), p. 68.
17. Holmes Ozark, op. cit., p. 144.
18. «Weaving and Writing in *Othello*,» *Shakespeare Survey*, 46 (1993)
19. Op. cit., 150.
20. Op. cit., 139.
21. Julia Reinhardt Lupton, «Shakespeare and the Pauline Discourse of Nation,»*Representations*,57(1997),p.74
22. Op. cit..
23. *Islam, the West and the Empire*, p. 23.