
Abstract

Abstract

This thesis analyses the workings of difference operative in the process of ‘cultural othering’ in a selection of early modern plays. Of particular interest, this research aims to study four marginalized and altered figures in the early modern stage: the Turk, the Moor, the Renegade, and the Cannibal. Associated with Islam, the Ottoman Empire, and the Barbary region of North Africa, these peripheral literary figures are approached against a revisionist historical background that acknowledges the centrality of Muslim presence in the disputes of the age and gauges the implications of England’s geographical histories of contact as well as their entrance in the global world of trade. Nascent epistemological discourses of race are equally traced as fuelling ‘cultural othering’. Although the four figures are all, to varying degrees, informed by the presence of Islam in the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary coast of Africa, they remain, nonetheless, highly ambivalent. It is this ambivalence that shall be tackled and considered as bespeaking the era’s conflicting attitudes towards the Orient and Islam. The extent to which the selected plays are culturally informed and the way they fostered and remodelled an already entrenched discourse of differentiation and alterity shall equally be assessed. Scrutinizing the networks of meanings in which these playwrights were caught up is central to understanding the collective imperative of ‘cultural othering’. The theatre, as a cultural institution, was the springboard onto which these mappings of difference were enacted and the English collective cultural identity can be glimpsed. This study contends that one cannot read early modern spectacles of alterity without contextualizing these texts in duly decentred counter-histories. Thus forging, the bridge between New History and literature from fresh angles is requisite to affirm the discriminating nature of othering. To this end, New Historicism is adopted in

approaching these plays that are deemed focal texts in Renaissance English culture. In their orientalizing proclivity, these texts are treated as belonging to Proto-Orientalism, and as such postcolonial theory will also be deployed in this study.

Keywords: Cultural othering, Alterity, collective cultural identity, New Historicism, Proto-Orientalism, counter-histories.

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