theories and methodologies

Provincializing the Reformation

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ON A RECENT TRIP TO NICOSIA, CYPRUS, I GRABBED A CITY MAP FROM MY HOTEL. THE VENETIAN WALLS OF THE OLD CITY FORMED A PERFECT circle on the map. But the northern part of Nicosia was blank—not a road named or landmark identified, not even the airport or the Venetian column that marks the center of the circular city—except for the notation "Area under Turkish occupation since 1974." Of course, Turkey is a secular nation, but the divide between Turkish and European Cyprus is also a divide between majority-Muslim and majority-Christian populations. A member of the European Union since 2004, Cyprus is, like the rest of Europe, haunted by a spectral Islam that it has difficulty acknowledging, let alone assimilating into a broader cosmopolitan identity.

The field of early modern studies is haunted by a similar specter. Despite recent work on early modern Europe's relations with the Ottomans, the Mughals, and China, most scholars still define the Europe of that era as a Christian entity so that Muslim-dominated parts of the continent are either excluded from "Europe" or passed over as an unassimilable aberration. In a monumental recent study, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750*, Jonathan Israel displaces England's crypto-imperial claim to be the cradle of European enlightenment by pointing out the central role Baruch (or Benedict de) Spinoza and Spinozism, and therefore Jewish thought, played in the development of the Enlightenment across Europe. Before the onset of skepticism and tolerance associated with the Enlightenment, Israel summarizes, Europe had been engulfed in "inter-confessional conflict," some of which had been "ideological and political rather than physical but, in France and the Low Countries, between the 1560s and the 1590s, and in Germany and Bohemia during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), there had also been unprecedented slaughter, savagery, and destruction." As Israel notes, the wars over religion often had multiple sides and did not simply pit Catholics against Protestants: "More often, the religious battle was triangular or even quadrilateral, as in Lutheran Germany where

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the new State Church simultaneously fought Catholicism, Calvinism, and radical Protestant fringe movements" (22–23). Despite the complexity of his model, however, he omits the English Civil War of the 1640s, which was at least in part a confessional struggle between a Church of England bent on enforcing religious conformity and Puritans and radical Nonconformists bent on resisting it. Israel also omits Islam, even though for most of the period he covers the Ottoman Turks dominated vast tracts of eastern Europe, including Cyprus, which the Turks took from the Venetians in 1571.

This essay will focus on a small part of the larger picture of confessional conflict, the drive for confessional purity and insularity in early modern England, and only on a small part of that: some of the ways that drive is played out in Shakespeare. Religions with even an implicit claim to global reach must contend with the paradox that each expansion of confessional practices into a new community also creates a threat to the purity and uniformity of the religion as previously constituted. The risen Christ's imperative to his apostles, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (*Holy Bible*, Matt. 28.19), committed Christianity to a vision of global inclusiveness that was challenged in the early modern era, not only by encounters with New World populations but also by the internal splintering of confessional belief that accompanied the Reformation (Boyarin). Arguably, the two phenomena were linked: in Spain, for example, New World discovery was accompanied by increased efforts to create "purity of blood" at home. Turning to England, we can identify a striking homology between the paradox of religious expansion and the dilemma of English mercantilism as delineated by early modern writers: the discovery of the New World and the initiation of newly globalized trade routes signaled by the chartering of the Muscovy, Virginia, and East India companies were accompanied by what Jonathan Gil Harris has called a "pathologization of foreign bodies" that both enabled expansion of trade and simultaneously demonstrated its dangers (*Sick Economies* 2).

In early modern England, the mercantilist and religious paradigms, both of which combine a desire for extended global reach with a fear of contamination at home, are rarely fully separable. John Deacon complained in 1616 about England's "careless intercourse of trafficking with the contagious corruptions and customs of foreign nations," so that "many of our Englishmen's minds are thus terribly Turkished with Mahometan trumperies, thus Romanized with superstitious relics . . . thus spitefully Spanished with superfluous pride; thus fearfully Frenchized with filthy prostitutions" and so on through a catalog of moral diseases spread to England by many nations (10; see also Harris, *Sick Economies* 17). The newly defined confessional boundaries of the post-Reformation English church coincided with national boundaries, and the dangers of internal contamination associated with economic expansion were almost always understood at least in part through the lens of religious difference.

In popular writing, Shakespeare's work is often still interpreted as a celebration of nascent British Empire and of the global spread of English Protestant values. We need to reinterpret the period in terms of twenty-first-century Europe's newly diminished status as a nexus of imperial power and also in terms of our increasing cross-cultural knowledge that claims to "Universal Empire" were common during the period—not only in Europe but also in Turkey and northern India, as part of the Muslim tradition, and in China and pre-Columbian America (Chakrabarty; Subrahmanyam). England's legal status as an empire began with the official birth of English state Protestantism in 1533, when Henry VIII separated from the Catholic Church and a

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parliamentary "Act in restraint of Appeals" proclaimed that

> this realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king, having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown of the same and unto whom a body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people divided in terms and by names of spirituality and temporalty, be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience. (Adams and Stephens 229; see also Lehmberg 161–69)

This newly constituted Tudor "body politic," which redefined itself over the following decades as Protestant rather than Catholic, was more vulnerable to outside influences and "diseases" than was the more cosmopolitan, inherently international Catholicism that preceded it (Harris, *Foreign Bodies*).

The mere fact of England's legal status as an empire did not make England a credible rival of imperial powers like Spain and the Hapsburgs, the Ottoman Turks, and, if one expands one's vision sufficiently, China and Mughal India. We need to place early modern England in a Eurasian web of global connections, even though by doing so we are forced to recognize England's relatively unimportant place in that broader network. In his court masques, James I of England imagined himself as the generative center of an expanding spiritual and imperial entity called "Britain." The cosmopolitan Shah Jahangir of India had similar visions. He collected pictures of rulers from around the world: in one famous miniature, he is sitting in state high above images of world leaders copied from actual portraits in his possession. Jahangir offers favor only to the Sufi; James I of England is placed in a marginal position, huddled at the bottom left.[1] In considering Shakespeare's negotiation of the clash of religions, we can usefully frame our inquiry in terms of "little England" rather than "Great Britain," a political entity that was in any case not created until the eighteenth century. But we need to bear in mind simultaneously that English provincialism was itself a construction, in no small part a reaction to the shock of separation from Rome and to the establishment of independent networks of connection with other peoples, especially in the New World, the Near East, and Asia.

English reactions to Islam did not necessarily replicate the demonization of the Turks common in Catholic Europe, where the confessional wars against Protestantism often registered, as in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, as a replay of the Crusades against Islam. Unlike the Hapsburgs, the Ottomans did not make a consistent practice of enforcing their own religion on the populations under their dominion: Cyprus, conquered by the Turks in 1571, is now populated predominantly by Greek Orthodox families who go back many generations, despite three centuries of Muslim rule. English Protestants who visited Hungary could observe that Protestantism was flourishing in the sector under Ottoman rule while Protestants were persecuted in areas under the Hapsburgs. In the late Elizabethan period, England pursued an alliance with the Ottoman Empire against Spain and the Hapsburg Empire. Nevertheless, by comparison with other dramatists of the period such as Christopher Marlowe, who made the Muslim conqueror Tamburlaine the hero of two enormously popular plays in the late sixteenth century, Shakespeare is relatively insular. He makes fleeting references to exotic locales like the "vexed Bermoothes" (*Tempest* 1.2.229), and occasionally his history plays celebrate English expansionism, as in the second *Henriad* and perhaps, as has been argued, in *The Tempest*.[2] But at the end of *The Tempest* everyone goes back to Milan, leaving the "brave new world" of the island deserted or perhaps returned to its sole native, Caliban (5.1.183). And in the epilogue to *Henry V* Shakespeare goes out of his way to acknowledge the brevity of Henry's conquest

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of France: "Small time; but in that small time greatly lived / This star of England."[3]

If the locales of Shakespeare's plays are any guide, his cultural imaginary is bounded by the Mediterranean, and its limits are Cyprus, as depicted in *Othello*, and Egypt, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*. His plays acknowledge cosmopolitanism and religious diversity but simultaneously reject them in favor of an achieved communal harmony that is at least implicitly based on commonality of belief and custom. It is, perhaps, this recurrent pattern of provincialization that has caused Shakespeare in particular to be celebrated as Britain's early modern poet of empire: he captures both a dream of English expansion and a nostalgic vision of "little England" freed from the religious and cultural contaminations that are entangled with the dream. And like many of his more recent European counterparts, he underplays the broad reach of Islam.

In this brief essay, I can do no more than gesture toward more elaborate readings that could be made. First, let us consider *Othello*. Arthur Little has shown how the play functions to expel the Moor, Othello, from Venice in the same way that Queen Elizabeth I had issued a series of orders between 1596 and 1601 expelling "blackamoors" from England (85–86). England was at war with Spain, and the queen's orders were probably based less on racism in our understanding of it than on fears of political and religious contagion, since the blackamoors in England were presumed to be Spanish and therefore Catholic, if not crypto-Jewish or Muslim. As a way of registering the provincialism of Elizabeth's orders, we might compare them with the 1593 Medici charter of Livorno, issued during the same decade, which invited "merchants of all nations, Levantine and Ponentine, Spanish and Portuguese, Greeks, Germans and Italians, Jews, Turks and Moors, Armenians, Persians and others" to relocate to the port of Livorno (called "Leghorn" in English) for trade. Jews were free to follow their religion there. Livorno even had a special building where Muslim slaves were housed and allowed to practice Islam (Trivellato 76–82). *Othello* recognizes Livorno's sort of religious eclecticism in the person of its central character, Othello, a onetime prince and, later, slave, possibly a convert from Islam, who works as a distinguished general in the service of Venice but transcends national identity.

Othello's distinctive style of speech, which used to be called the "Othello music" (Knight 97), is above all cosmopolitan, full of the romance of trade in exotic substance—Arabian gums and spices—and the exploration of unknown worlds peopled by Egyptian soothsayers, "Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3.144–45). Othello is a Christian, though whether by birth or conversion is not stated. He is Venice's best hope for the defense of Cyprus from the Ottoman Turks, who are threatening to invade it. But as in English mercantilist theory, cosmopolitanism is accompanied by vulnerability to disease: Othello is easily contaminated by Iago and Roderigo, both identifiable by name as Spaniards, who racialize his identity according to the Spanish theory of "purity of blood" and link him with fears of miscegenation. The process by which Othello is gradually enmeshed in negative images of blackness is not limited to the world within the play; it can also be traced in the history of the material text. Though we do not understand by what agency the changes were made, there is a significant expansion of racially charged language between the publication of the first quarto of the play, in 1622, and that of the first folio, in the year following (Marcus, "Two Texts"). In the end, instead of returning to Venice as a captive destined for execution, Othello kills himself and in doing so identifies with the Turkish enemy:

> [I]n Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk

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> Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him—thus. (5.2.352–56)

By this point in the play, the Turkish fleet has dispersed and no longer represents a threat to Venetian Cyprus. In killing himself and the Turk within him, Othello symbolically rids the Venetian state of an internalized version of the Ottoman menace. The historical record was less kind to the Venetians. The Turkish navy had not dispersed, and the Venetians had not held off the Ottomans in Cyprus, who had captured the island in 1571 after massacring many Christians and looting Christian monuments. The Ottomans controlled the island until 1878, when it came under British rule. Like the modern map of Nicosia, Shakespeare's play symbolically effaces the Muslim presence in Cyprus by extinguishing the person of Othello, who is simultaneously a dangerous, attractive, cosmopolitan outsider and the remedy for the threat of Ottoman domination. With Othello's suicide, Venice is saved from internal contamination by Islam, but the city-state is hugely diminished in the process, having lost its most talented military leader.

As Harris has pointed out, *The Merchant of Venice* is also steeped in the discourse of mercantilist expansion and fear (*Sick Economies* 52–82). In this play, the role of far-flung adventurer is played not by a foreigner but by the Venetian merchant Antonio, whose ships have been sent on daring voyages of trade to Tripoli, the Indies, Mexico, England, and other exotic locales (1.3.18–20). But despite his association with the romance of trade and travel, Antonio himself remains firmly anchored in Venetian culture. His friend Bassanio is also interested in taking risks for financial gain and borrows a huge sum so that he can take his chance at winning the hand of the heiress Portia, who lives in nearby Belmont. The thoroughly Venetian Bassanio triumphs over her suitors from other nations—most significantly, the Spanish Catholic Prince of Aragon and the Muslim Prince of Morocco. Bassanio thus keeps Portia's money and person in the Belmont-Venetian community, warding off threats of contamination from the outside.

In Harris's reading, the main threat of mercantile (and religious) contamination in Antonio's Venice comes not from the outside suitors but from Shylock, who lives as an alien under the protection of Venice. Scholars have long read the play in the light of the Lopez scandal of 1594, by which the Portuguese doctor Rodrigo Lopez, personal physician of Queen Elizabeth I, was accused on trumped-up charges of espionage for Spain and executed, probably at the behest of the earl of Essex, who resented Lopez's influence with the queen (Goodman 149–56). Lopez was a member of the "Portuguese Nation"—a Marrano Jew whose allegiance to Christianity was suspect and whose brutal treatment suggests a high level of English xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Additional evidence of fear of religious contamination comes from the "Dutch Church Libel," which in 1593 was affixed to one of the London churches used by foreigners and which threatened "strangers" in the city with death on a "fatal day" to come if they did not abandon England. The libel accuses foreigners of "usury," espionage, infection with "Egypt's plagues" and "Spanish gold," and a broad range of sharp trading practices that enrich them at the expense of native Englishmen. As Harris speculates, some of the targeted immigrants may well have been Catholics, and others may have come from Jewish backgrounds, especially the Dutch from Antwerp or Amsterdam, which had considerable Sephardi populations. At several points the libel appears to target Jews: "like the Jews, you eat us up as bread"; you are "intelligencers to the state and crown" (as in the accusations against Lopez), yet "in your hearts do wish an alteration"—that is, the overthrow of the government by Spanish agents. It threatens to reenact the

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Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre: "We'll cut your throats in your temples praying / Not Paris massacre so much blood did spill / As we will do just vengeance on you all / In counterfeiting religion for your flight" (Harris, *Sick Economies* 62–63; see also Harris, *Foreign Bodies* 94–95). Praying in "temples" again suggests Judaism. It is almost as though Lopez's execution in the following year was a sacrifice to London xenophobia.

Like the foreigners denounced in the libel, Shylock is associated with disease and economic predation, at least in the language of Antonio, who is in many ways Shylock's alter ego: Antonio too is a supplier of moneys, a businessman on a grand scale. Antonio habitually projects onto Shylock mercenary motives that he fails to recognize in himself. When Portia comes to judge Shylock's case against Antonio, she tellingly asks, "Which is the merchant here? and which the Jew?" (5.1.174). The Jew's insistence on his "pound of flesh" actualizes the fear expressed in the "Dutch Church Libel" that aliens will devour the citizens. In the quarto version of the play on which modern editions are based, speech-prefixes referring to Shylock alter from "Shylock" to the stereotypical "Jew" as the play edges toward the Jew's extraction of the pound of flesh (Marcus, "Note" 76), an act that recalls ancient blood libels against the Jews (Shapiro 121–30). In the end, the Jew and his daughter are not expelled, as was the alien in *Othello*, but they are sanitized by being assimilated into the Christian community. Since the laws of Venice do not allow Christians to charge interest, the newly converted Shylock will no longer be able to amass wealth by "feeding on" Christians. *The Merchant of Venice* is scarcely a comfortable play, but it may have been more acceptable for xenophobic Londoners than it is for us. It enacts an uneasy separation between "good" and "bad" trade; it neutralizes the most religiously and economically threatening elements of cosmopolitanism and international commerce in the person of Shylock while leaving much of their glamour intact in the restored fortunes of Antonio.

Othello, a tragedy, and *The Merchant of Venice*, a "problem play," are obvious choices for any discussion of religious and mercantile contamination in Shakespeare. I end by considering a play that has not generally been part of such a discussion, the delightful comedy *As You Like It*, and its troublesome character Jaques. In *As You Like It*, curiously, it is a virtue to be "inland bred." Rosalind attributes the fineness of her accent to the fact that she was taught by her uncle, an "inland man," and Orlando protests that, despite the roughness he exhibits in his initial encounter with the Duke, he is "inland bred / And know[s] some nurture" (3.2.345; 2.7.96–97). To be "inland" is to be distant from port cities and the diversity of accent and nationality that accompanies international commerce. The sole representative of that cosmopolitan world in the play is Jaques, who has traveled widely and has the moral cynicism and disease to match. Rosalind mocks him ("I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad—and to travel for it too!" [4.1.12–13]), and the exiled Duke attributes Jaques's moodiness to "all th'embossed sores, and headed evils, / That thou with license of free foot hast caught" and that he now wants to use to infect others, to "disgorge into the general world" (2.7.67–69). "License of free foot" suggests not just freedom to travel but also that such freedom is inherently licentious, subject to contagion, especially to the "sores" of venereal disease. Jaques embodies a sad truth of early modern travel, its association with the spread of new diseases, especially syphilis, in England called "the French disease," which every European nation attributed to contamination from a source outside itself.

As in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, the setting of *As You Like It* is displaced from England to a continental country, in this case France, though editors have quarreled over

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whether the forest at its heart should be called the French "Ardennes" or the English "Forest of Arden" (Hattaway 6–8). Either way, the bias of the play's central characters against what the play defines as the foreign, the well traveled, and the religiously alien or indeterminate links it with *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, even though Jaques's status as an outsider is grounded more in his own habits of mind than in any predefined racial or confessional difference. Jaques is associated throughout the play with strange rituals relating to cuckoldry and to fears of male impotence (esp. act 4, sc. 2). Many readers have been disturbed that Jaques exempts himself from the merriment at the end, when four remarkably diverse couples celebrate their marriages under the aegis of Hymen and with the blessings of Duke Senior. But, as we have seen, this is a recurring pattern in Shakespeare: the cosmopolitan figure represents a threat of contamination, even if only imagined by some of the other characters, to the harmony and well-being of the small world at the end of the play. Explaining that he is "for other than for dancing measures" (5.4.193), Jaques goes off to join the "convertite" Duke Frederick (184), who has ceded his usurped title to his older brother and put on a "religious life" (181). Jaques's license to travel has seemingly caused him to "catch" a monastic strain of Catholicism in addition to his other diseases. By obligingly removing himself from the final scene, he takes with him the threat of cosmopolitanism and religious difference that might otherwise taint Rosalind, Orlando, and the rest of the "inland bred." It is all handled light-heartedly and even this degree of interpretation may appear intrusive in consequence. But it is, I would suggest, part of the abiding appeal of Shakespeare for many readers even now that he is able to articulate so clearly, even in a pastoral play like *As You Like It*, the combined fascination with and fear of a broad world of commerce and confessional difference as seen from "little England."

Notes

All spellings are modernized in citations from early modern texts.

1. The image can be viewed online at www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00routesdata/1600_1699/jahangir/jahangirsufi/jahangirsufi.html. I am indebted to Ania Loomba for the reference.

2. Hulme. For a longer view, see Loomba; Bartels.

3. All citations of Shakespeare refer to *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

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