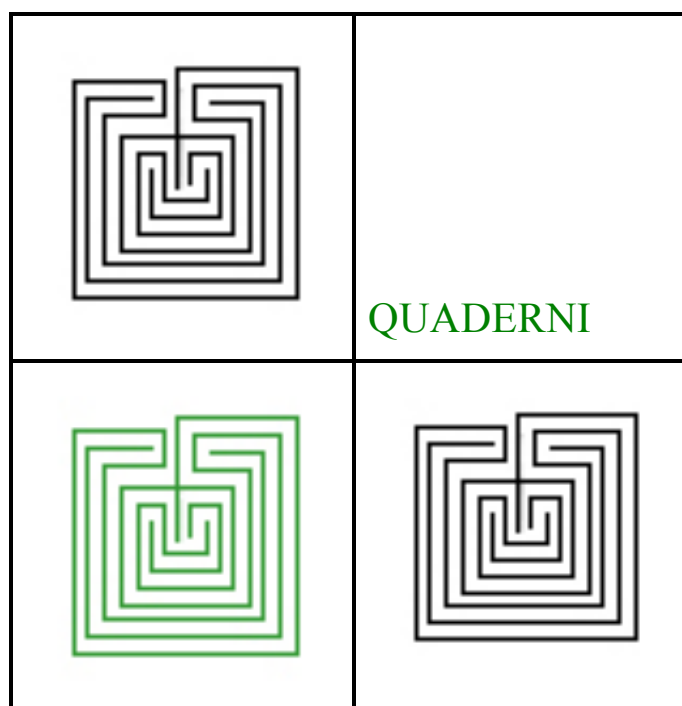

CONTACT ZONES

CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC AND LITERARY
CONNECTIONS IN ENGLISH

edited by Maria Micaela Coppola,
Francesca Di Blasio, Sabrina Francesconi



LABIRINTI 179

Università degli Studi di Trento
Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia

Labirinti 179



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TRENTO
Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia

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Il presente volume è stato sottoposto a procedimento di *peer review*.

Collana Labirinti n. 179
Direttore: Andrea Comboni
© Università degli Studi di Trento-Dipartimento di Lettere e Filosofia
Via Tommaso Gar 14 - 38122 TRENTO
Tel. 0461-281722 - Fax 0461 281751
<http://www.unitn.it/154/collana-labirinti>
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ISBN 978-88-8443-852-2

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EMANUEL STELZER

TRANSFORMATIVE TOUCHES IN TUNIS:
IMAGINARY CONTACT ZONES IN TWO EARLY MODERN ENGLISH
'TURK' PLAYS

1. *Contact Zones and Acts of Touching in the 'Turk' Plays*

The concept of the 'contact zone', first articulated by Mary Louise Pratt,¹ has not been extensively used in early modern literary studies.² This essay aims to test if the framework it provides can profitably cast a light on the representation of the multicultural life in Mediterranean cities as staged in early modern English 'Turk' plays. The definition of 'Turk' plays is still uncertain, but what has come to the fore in recent scholarship is that these plays, centred on the representation of Islam in the Ottoman Empire, constitute both a coherent and a very popular genre, one that evolved across decades. I will focus on two plays, Robert Daborne's tragedy *A Christian Turned Turk* (1609-1612) and Philip Massinger's tragicomedy *The Renegado* (1624).³ The latter has been described as a rewriting of the former:⁴ although they have different sources and narratives, they share key themes concerning the conversion of Christians to Islam. Both plays are set in Tunis, where «[a] confluence of all nations / Are met together» (*The Renegado* 1.2.111-112).

¹ M.L. Pratt, *Arts of the Contact Zone*, «Profession», 91 (1991), pp. 33-40.

² The only important exception is J.G. Singh (ed.), *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester 2009, cfr. the Introduction.

³ The editions used throughout the paper refer to, respectively, D. Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England: Selimus, A Christian Turned Turk*, and *The Renegado*, Columbia University Press, New York 2000, and M. Neill (ed.), *The Renegado* by Philip Massinger, Methuen, London 2010. Quotations will be found parenthetically in the body of the text.

⁴ D. Vitkus, *Three Turk Plays*, p. 43.

These dramatic Tunises, peopled by Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant characters, can be described as ‘contact zones’, provided one acknowledges that they are a Jacobean English construct. However, the foundational study on ‘Turk’ plays, Daniel Vitkus’s *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (2003), fittingly links these plays with Pratt’s concept of the contact zone, but emphasises a crucial difference. The cultural history of the early modern Mediterranean is so ambivalent and overdetermined that:

The Mediterranean littoral formed an extensive network of ‘contact zones’, but not of the colonial variety described by Mary Louise Pratt [since it was a world] comprehended through residual history and contemporary cross-cultural encounters, not in terms of East-versus-West or colonizer-versus-colonized, but as a complex and unstable meeting ground for divergent cultural and religious groups.⁵

Of course, the English perception and representation of this network of cultural zones was in no way neutral and was fraught with appropriations, misperceptions, and stereotypes.

While detailed studies on the portrayal of Turks in early modern English drama have been flourishing,⁶ this essay wishes to investigate the plays from a specific point of view, juxtaposing the literary representation of contact zones with insights drawn from historical phenomenology:⁷ the term ‘contact zone’ can be connected with the sense of touch. The

⁵ D. Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York 2003, pp. 7-8. See also B. Fuchs, *Mimesis and Empire: The New World, Islam, and European Identities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001.

⁶ See, for example, *ibidem*; L. McJannet, *Early Modern English Drama and the Islamic World. Islam and English Drama: A Critical History*, «Early Theatre», 12 (2009), 2, pp. 183-193; R. Hertel, S.L. Müller, and S. Schülting (eds.), *Early Modern Encounters with the Islamic East: Performing Cultures*, Ashgate, Burlington and Farnham 2012.

⁷ See B.R. Smith, *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2009; Id., *Phenomenal Shakespeare*, Wiley Blackwell, Chichester 2010.

sexual, mercantile, and ethno-religious exchanges involving acts of touching that are either staged or evoked in the plays can be explored through early modern perspectives on tactile experience.

In the Renaissance, touch was regarded as the most ‘bodily’ of the senses.⁸ Because of its direct materiality, touch could most powerfully affect and transform the persons involved in the perceptual experience, because, following the predominant phenomenological discourse of humouralism, the body is marked by permeability and porosity. Pre-Cartesian passions crossed physiology and psychology: they were thought to «comprise [...] an ecology or a transaction».⁹ It is common to note that touch was not generally considered one of the higher senses according to the Platonic hierarchy, but we should remember that, for many early modern individuals, the very sense of sight could have a tactile quality, since light was made up of physical matter: thus, «spectatorship was itself a form of bodily contact».¹⁰ The tactile transaction could thus affect the other senses, as well, and this had important implications. «[P]roblems raised by touch epitomized the deepest and most productive ambivalences of the age»,¹¹ including the epistemic reliability of the senses, the distinction between body and soul, and the appropriate ways of divine worship.

The contact with the Other could activate cultural fears as well as desires, and produce knowledge. It may be not coincidental that the texts of the period dealing with this theme

⁸ See J. Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures: The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014; and also E.D. Hurley (ed.), *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2003.

⁹ M. Floyd-Wilson, G.K. Paster, and K. Rowe (eds.), *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2004, p. 18.

¹⁰ E.T. Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York 2012, p. 57.

¹¹ J. Moshenska, *Feeling Pleasures*, p. 3.

are replete with sections introduced by the preposition «touching» (e.g. «touching the things of the Turk»;¹² «touching the Turk»;¹³ «touching their sect»;¹⁴ etc.), as if this preposition reinforced those embodied exchanges. This suggestion can be further bolstered considering that, in the early modern period, «ethnic identities could be understood as fluid»,¹⁵ although the seeds of the later racial classifications were already germinating. Joining this conceptual framework with the aforementioned epistemic discourses, it follows that not only could acts of physical and metaphorical touching give rise to anxieties of miscegenation, but were also thought to have an actual transformative, hybridising power.

The Turkish ‘identity’, in particular, was seen as highly unstable and hybrid *per se*: being a Turk in early modern texts could entail anything from being a Muslim to a vaguely defined heretic or even polytheist; from a desert wanderer to a sophisticated imperialist; from an Arab to a person from Turkey. Religion, place of origin, politics, and economics were mixed and did not produce a single image, in contrast with the definition of a series of stage stereotypes, such as the irrationally inhuman, bombastic ‘raging Turk’,¹⁶ the lustful

¹² G.F. Nott (ed.), *Sir Thomas Wyatt to Cromwell, Lord Privy Seal*, in *The Works of Henry Howard Earl of Surrey and of Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder*, Bensley, London 1816, 2 vols., II, p. 419.

¹³ J. Gairdner (ed.), *Henry VIII to Ghinucci, Benet, and Casale*, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic [...]*, H.M. Stationery Office, London 1965, p. 376.

¹⁴ R. Brown (ed.), *The History and Description of Africa by Leo Africanus*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1896, p. 1013.

¹⁵ A. Loomba, “Delicious Traffick”: *Racial and Religious Differences on Early Modern Stages*, in C.M.S. Alexander and S. Wells (eds.), *Shakespeare and Race*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, p. 203.

¹⁶ J.E. Slotkin, “Now will I be a Turke”: *Performing Ottoman Identity in Thomas Goffe’s The Courageous Turk*, «Early Theatre», 12 (2009), 2, pp. 222-235. This stage stereotype has been shown to have a mixed origin, both from Marlowe’s portrayal of Bajazet in *Tamburlaine* and from Herod’s rage in medieval drama: see L. McJannet, *The Sultan Speaks: Dialogue in English*

sultan with his harem, the virgin slave eagerly awaiting conversion, etc.

Humoural exchanges with the Turks were both dreaded and a cause of titillation. The fascination for this different culture coexisted with active mercantile relationships with the Ottomans and fears for their tremendous military and economic power. The cities of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli contained large communities of English renegades, who, for various reasons, had converted to Islam and managed to live in prosperity, to the amazement of their former compatriots. Their exploits were sung in ballads and reprimanded in pamphlets; their piratical adventures gripped the English imagination, as did the sexual liberties they supposedly enjoyed. Interestingly, one way of describing renegades in the plays is seeing them as abject and toxic individuals, whose very sight and name are poisonous («His name / Is poison to me», *The Renegado*, 1.1.107-108).¹⁷ At the same time, they are especially prone to sensuality, be it greedily mercantile or directly sexual (see John Rawlins's narrative: renegades «never knew any god but their own lusts and pleasures»¹⁸). Indeed, «to “turn Turk” carried a sexual connotation»¹⁹ that could extend from adultery to sodomy. Religious conversion implied a transformation of one's ethnicity and of one's self,²⁰ the reversibility of which was contested.

Plays and Histories about the Ottoman Turks, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2006, esp. pp. 64-89.

¹⁷ Admittedly, Vitelli's exclamation is dictated by personal hatred: the renegado, Grimaldi, has kidnapped his sister as well as desecrated the Eucharist; see below.

¹⁸ J. Rawlins, *The Famous and Wonderful Recovery of Ship of Bristol called the Exchange, from the Turkish Pirates of Argier*, N. Butter, London 1622, p. 255 (retrieved from EEBO, 05.10.2017). On renegades, see N.I. Matar, *The Renegade in English Seventeenth-Century Imagination*, «SEL 1500-1900», 33 (1993), 3, pp. 489-505.

¹⁹ D. Vitkus, *Turning Turk*, p. 88.

²⁰ See J. Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624*, University of Delaware Press, Newark 2005; J.H. Degenhardt, *Islamic Conversion and Christian Resistance on the Early Modern Stage*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2010; and S. Ditchfield and H. Smith (eds.),

'Turk' plays explore the figures of the renegades and often end with a divinely-sanctioned providential catastrophe. On the other hand, mercantile, religious, and sexual exchanges – all processed through the sense of touch – complicate dualisms in 'contact zones' and are often indissolubly interrelated in the dramatic texts.

2. *Sensual Conversion in A Christian Turned Turk*

Agar, the wife of the converted Jew Benwash, poses an interesting question when told that the English pirate Ward, the play's protagonist, lately arrived in Tunis, is «a reasonably handsome man of a Christian» (Scene 6, 7-8). She asks: «Doth religion move anything in the shapes of men?» (9). A servant, Rabshake, replies: «Altogether!» (10), and describes the stereotypical physical traits of Jews and Turks («gouty legs and fiery nose», 10) and Puritans («upright calf and clean nostril», 10-11). This is only a half-joking remark, since, in the early modern period, the boundary between ethnicity (itself seen as fluid) and religion was perceived as peculiarly labile. 'Turk' plays are centred on the definition of the foreign Other to define one's Englishness *ex negativo*. Just as the theme of piracy could interrogate English patriotic feeling concerning their naval prowess,²¹ so binary categories are repeatedly challenged in this dramatic corpus. For instance, Benwash is a Jew who has converted to Islam, but he is labelled as a «renegado Jew» (Scene 5, 37). He has then a liminal status: is he both a Jew and a Muslim, or neither?

More than many other plays belonging to the genre, *A Christian Turned Turk* does not simply pit Christians against

Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2017.

²¹ See C. Jowitt, *The Culture of Piracy, 1580–1630: English Literature and Seaborne Crime*, Ashgate, Burlington and Farnham 2010.

Muslims, but also engages with clashes among Christians themselves, Jews, and renegades. A few examples can serve to indicate the range of ethnic and religious identities found in the play. Rabshake plays to the British public when he says that he would never convert to Christianity because «[t]hey have Jew enough already amongst 'em» (Scene 6, 16-17). The English officer Gallop is described by Rabshake as «a mere goat – look on his beard else» (Scene 16, 68): this seems ironic, because goats, known for their lechery, had been associated with Jews in Europe since the Middle Ages.²² In the last scene of the play, Rabshake and his master, Benwash, have a dialogue in which the word «equivocation» occurs six times: far from being a neutral term, in Jacobean England, «equivocation» designated the set of casuistic strategies employed by Catholics to avoid recognition and protect the recusants' community.

Benwash has turned Turk paradoxically because he does not want any Muslim to touch his wife, but he flaunts his wife's beauty to make profit, believing he can keep «that gem untouched» (84-85). Sex, marriage, and religion: all is monetized, but the commodities resulting from these exchanges are viewed with distrust. This questioning can be triggered by the lure of anxiogenic touch. As Benwash says, conversion is attained through sensual transformation: «if the flesh take hold of him, he's past redemption» (Scene 6, 442). The play repeatedly focuses on the permeability of the human body. Alizia, a French girl abducted by the pirates after her brother's murder, wonders: «Thou flinty breast, / Art thou impenetrable?» (50-51). The answer is obviously negative: in the play, humans, regardless of their ethnicity, are constantly assailed by emotions.

Captain Ward is seduced by the deceitful Voadia, the sister of Crosman, the captain of the janissaries, but she will marry him only if he converts to Islam. He complies (note that Daborne's

²² See R. S. Wistrich (ed.), *Demonizing the Other: Antisemitism, Racism, and Xenophobia*, Routledge, London and New York 1999, p. 4.

play is based on a historical figure, John Ward, later known as Yusuf Reis, c. 1553-1622, the subject of ballads and pamphlets). Since such a conversion was considered something awful and unnatural (the Chorus probably refers to this incident when stating that our Muse must «reach the heart itself of villainy», Prologue, 14), Daborne chose to represent it through a pantomime. The staging of such a scene may have been the reason why this play encountered harsh criticism when first staged: in the preface, the dramatist terms it his «oppressed and much martyred tragedy» (Preface, p. 151). The dumb show reinforces our perception that the conversion ritual is operated through touch: Ward must put on Muslim garments, he is «*laid on his belly, the tables [... are] offered him*» (Scene 8, SD); he is girded with a turban and a sword, and must swear allegiance on both the tables and on a «*Mahomet's head*» (SD). Touch introduces the deeply-fraught theme of idolatry.

The other act of tactile transaction that closely follows Ward's conversion is castration, according to the English misapprehension that circumcision was tantamount to gelding.²³ Only a glimpse of hope that Ward has not really turned Turk can be heard in a character's comment that perhaps he deceived the Muslims during the circumcision rite: «Marry, therein I heard he played the Jew with 'em, / Made 'em come to the cutting of an ape's tail» (i.e. instead of his foreskin or penis, Scene 9, 3-4). Playing the Jew: that is, lying, tricking. But this constant insertion of Judaism into the ostensible Christian-Muslim divide has the effect of interrogating the performativity of one's 'identity'; Daborne's model for this strategy may well have been Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*.

Renegades are described as abject and when, in the play, they are repeatedly called «false renegades» (see e.g. Scene 13,

²³ See D. Britton, *Muslim Conversion and Circumcision as Theater*, in J.H. Degenhardt and E. Williamson (eds.), *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*, Routledge, London and New York 2016, pp. 71-88.

104; Scene 15, 92), the adjective seems oddly pleonastic. Voada scorns Ward: she had never loved him, but says that his fate is well deserved, since «our just Prophet [...] hates false runagates» (Scene 13, 27). Alizia had warned him: «If none of these move, let the example / Of that contempt is thrown on runagates, / Even by these Turks themselves, at least move you / To fly this slavery» (Scene 7, 217-220). However, immediately before the conversion scene, Ward ponders that he is already an untouchable: «with what brain can I think / Heaven would be glad of such a friend as I am? A pirate? A murderer?» (274-276). By voicing this suicidal feeling, he signals he has committed a Christian's worst sin: not believing in God's infinite mercy. The original audience would be distressed by this portrayal. Ward repeats this sense of abjection in a later scene, after the conversion: «Should I confess my sin, / There's not an ear that can with pity hear / A man so wicked miserable» (Scene 13, 108-110). Ward's misery becomes so complete that, when he is sentenced to prison and fears starvation, he finally welcomes a conversion of his own body and soul into the stereotypical raging Turk: «I shall rave, / Run mad» (Scene 15, 111-112); «allow me / But every week a Christian. I am content / To feed upon raw flesh. If't be but once a month / A Briton, I'll be content with him» (117-120). For Ward, touch is no longer enough: he wants to feed upon Christians, cannibalism being the ultimate way of assimilating the Other. At the same time, with these words, Ward validates the superiority of the British.

3. *The Renegado: Tactile Transformation and Prohibition*

Massinger's *The Renegado* is a much better structured play than *A Christian Turned Turk* and it explores in detail the psychological aspects of religious conversion as well as the social lives of the inhabitants of the cities under the Ottoman

rule. The playwright drew on a group of texts by Miguel de Cervantes, but also consulted several travelogues and similar texts on the Turks. In this play, sexual intercourse, trade, and religious conversion foreground the transformative power of touch but, in its Christian ecumenical view, *The Renegado* exploits tangible objects and rituals to cope with Islam's overwhelming sensuality.

In the play, Vitelli, a Venetian nobleman, dresses up as a merchant at the market of Tunis in order to save his sister Paulina, who has been kidnapped by Antonio Grimaldi and his pirates and has been sold to the Viceroy's harem, the constant object of seduction attempts (the Viceroy seeks «to *touch* [her] pureness» 2.5.147, emphasis mine). Grimaldi is the titular renegado who, after desecrating the Eucharist in St. Mark's cathedral by throwing it on the floor, has converted to Islam and lives a life of rapine, drinking, and whoring under the protection of the Viceroy: he maintains that merchants turn renegades because once they «touch the shore, [they] wallow in / All sensual pleasures» (1.3.52-53). He soon provokes the Viceroy's displeasure because of his defiant attitude and, deprived of means, sinks into despair. Meanwhile, Donusa, the niece of the Ottoman sultan, falls in love with Vitelli, who initially succumbs to her seduction and seems well-disposed to turn Turk («You are too strong for flesh and blood to treat with» 3.5.9). Francisco, a Jesuit, helps him keep his original faith and also orchestrates Grimaldi's repentance.

The opening words of the play are uttered by Vitelli and his servant, Gazet, who immediately refers to their wares as «brittle as a maidenhead at sixteen» (1.1.3). Mercantile relationships with the Turks are thus both sexualised and the locus of anxiety. Although they are at the market in Tunis, Vitelli orders to his servant: «meddle not with the Turks, / Their manners nor religion» (47-48). This injunction not to mix with the Other in a mercantile situation is symptomatic of a culture that regarded the Turks with fear as well as wonder. Vitelli states that he

dislikes having «[t]o mix with such whose difference of faith / [...] Must [...] / Strangle such bare desires» (1.3.18-20), but when it comes to the Turks' commodified women and «fingering money» (32), this abhorrence encounters resistance. According to Benedict Robinson, Massinger «abandons the possibility of any legitimate contact with “Turks”, because such intercourse can only be “contaminating”».²⁴ This judgment is misleading because it seems to deny the mercantile and proto-orientalist allure of the Ottoman Empire to the British. It is true that contamination is something to be reckoned with. For instance, Donusa, showing herself in pomp to Vitelli, assures him: «Why do you shake? My soft touch brings no ague» (2.4.18). However, the transformative power of tact goes both ways.

In order to resist tactile transaction, Paulina has been able to preserve her virginity by using the powers of a relic, which she always wears on her body; as Francisco explains to her brother, the relic «has power – / If we may credit holy men's traditions – / To keep the owner free from violence. / This on her breast she wears, and does preserve / The virtue of it by her daily prayers» (1.1.147-151). Paulina literally spits at the Viceroy's «flatteries» (2.5.124) and «stamp[s] upon all doubts, all fears, all tortures» (127). In a similar way, Vitelli rejects Donusa's attempt at converting him (since the two of them have been accused of promiscuity, Donusa faces a capital sentence if she fails in making him turn Turk) by making her renounce her own faith not only through verbal proselytising, but also through touch. First, Vitelli «[m]arks her forehead with the sign of the cross» (4.3 SD), to which Donusa says: «I perceive a yielding in myself» (148), and soon decides: «Then thus I spit at Mahomet» (158). Secondly, Vitelli baptises her on stage in an extraordinary scene. He sprinkles the water on her and the contact literally

²⁴ B. Robinson, *Strange Commodities*, in Id., *Islam and Early Modern English Literature: The Politics of Romance from Spenser to Milton*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2007, p. 141.

transforms Donusa, as she cries with triumph: «I am another woman» (5.3.121). At the same time, this conversion finally ‘undoes’ Grimaldi’s desecration of the Host.

At first glance, these tactile conversions seem perfunctory and mechanic. This is not true, however, for two reasons. Firstly, the play probes into the psychological aspects of these processes and is deeply interested in metamorphic exchange. Secondly, these conversions need to be historicised, since they are clearly coded as Catholic. Francisco constitutes the moral centre of the play when, as a Jesuit, he would normally be demonised on the English stage. Paulina’s wonderful relic and the beliefs in baptism as a sacrament capable of bestowing grace of itself (*ex opere operato*)²⁵ and in salvation obtained by works instead of pure faith would infuriate the Calvinists.

In an insightful article, Jane Degenhardt convincingly argues that the play «anchors Christian resistance in Catholic objects, ceremonies, and bodily practices, and repeatedly marks spiritual redemption in outward, visible, and material ways».²⁶ This may seem indeed surprising but, as Michael Neill shows,²⁷ the special temporal conjuncture of the play’s composition permitted it. The prospect of a match between the Spanish Infanta and Prince Charles had relaxed legal prosecution of the Catholics (though by 1623, it became clear that that marriage was unfeasible), and, at the beginning of 1624, when news reached Parliament that King James was planning a match with the French and still Catholic princess, the issue found a head with the anti-Catholic Petition of Religion in April. Factions were generated and, whereas Prince Charles and Buckingham momentarily sided with the Calvinists, King James may have found support in a number of dramatists, including Massinger

²⁵ See M. Neill (ed.), *The Renegado* by Philip Massinger, Methuen, London 2010, p. 38, n. 1.

²⁶ J. Degenhardt, *Catholic Prophylactics and Islam’s Sexual Threat: Preventing and Undoing Sexual Defilement in The Renegado*, «JEMCS», 9, (2009), p. 63.

²⁷ See M. Neill (ed.), *The Renegado*, pp. 38-41.

(whose affiliation with recusants is demonstrable to a point).²⁸ The king advocated Christian unity and tolerance, and *The Renegado* seems to be characterised by such a frame of reference.

It is interesting to note what reasons are suggested by the Master of Grimaldi's crew to explain why the captain desecrated the Eucharist in Venice: «Whether in scorn of these so pious rites / *He had no feeling of*, or else drawn to it / Out of a wanton, irreligious madness» (4.1.27-29, emphasis mine). While «wanton» recalls the description of the Muslim in 'Turk' plays, it is notable that Grimaldi is described as 'not-feeling' the rites – Catholic rites which have a markedly tactile connotation: the whole city had gone to St Mark's «with barefoot steps» (20), «groan[ing] beneath the weight / Of past offences» (24-25). Just as Grimaldi, «snatching from [Francisco's] hands the sanctified means, / Dashed it upon the pavement» (30-31), so is he now tormented because he despairs of being forgiven «from his hands against whom / It [i.e. the foul fact] was committed» (41-42). In fact, Grimaldi is forgiven by Francisco, who appears to him «*in a cope like a bishop*» (SD). Grimaldi's repentance is also 'tactile'; Francisco had foreshadowed that he would «*apply* such cures / To his wounded conscience» (3.3.101-102), but Grimaldi must 'feel' again, both emotionally and practically. He exults:

Show me true Sorrow,
 Armed with an iron whip, and I will meet
 The stripes she brings alone with her as if
 They were the *gentle touches of a hand*
 That comes to cure me (4.1.92-96, emphasis mine).

Grimaldi sets out for a life of good deeds, casting off the renegade's infective touch: before learning that he can be forgiven, he had admitted that he, a «cursed lump of clay»

²⁸ See e.g. D. S. Lawless, *The Parents of Philip Massinger*, «Notes and Queries», 213 (1968), pp. 256-258.

(3.2.93), had poisoned even the air («Those vast regions I have infected», 90). In a finale that would not look amiss in a romantic swashbuckler film, Grimaldi succeeds in escaping the city, along with all the other Christians.

The theme of ‘castration fear/fantasy’ that pervades the play has already been investigated by other scholars²⁹ and goes beyond the aims of this essay. It has been shown that Carazie, Donusa’s eunuch and the only Englishman among the *dramatis personae*, embodies the fear of the British merchants of dealing with the Turks: riches and beauty come at the cost of emasculation. Gazet, Vitelli’s servant, pursues power and aspires to become a eunuch without knowing what the charge entails, which is suggested also by the episode of «an English pirate’s whore» (1.1.50) who is denuded «with a razor» (52) at the Tunisian market because she was wearing a green apron, the colour being apparently reserved to true Islamic believers. However, castration is only one, albeit the most significant, of a series of actions staged and evoked in the play that consist of cutting, separating, and breaking. For instance, Donusa, on first meeting Vitelli at the market, wilfully breaks his wares when she notices that he is amazed at her beauty. Similarly, after her baptism, her engagement with Vitelli becomes effective so that they form a unity, and the Viceroy aptly commands: «Sever ’em! » (5.3.134). This emphasis on cutting and breaking proves ineffective in the world of the drama, which is much more interested in the fluid transformations of touching.

4. Conclusion: Touching Cultural Identities

Significantly, one of Ward’s last hopes in *A Christian Turned Turk* is that his ships «are untouched» (Scene 13, 3). They are not: they have been taken by the other pirate of the

²⁹ See J. Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, 205; J.G. Harris, *Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism, and Disease in Shakespeare’s England*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2004, pp. 154-161.

piece, the Dutch repentant corsair Dansiker. Touch has transgressed all boundaries in the 'contact zone' of Tunis: the spectators have seen and heard of adultery, interracial sex, and the pirates' greed mingled with idolatry. In both this play and in *The Renegado*, it is very interesting to note that the actions that *seem* to prevail between Europeans and Turks in both plays are actions of division: breaking, cutting, circumcising, and castrating. All this emphasis on division contributes to emphasising the anxieties produced by acts of union and exchange, in all their forms (mercantile, sexual, religious, racial). When these acts are carried out, exchange is never neutral. A commodity, once sold, is hardly ever represented as the same object: it changes, acquiring different values and connotations. Similarly, sexual relationships between Christians and Muslims have metamorphic properties. For instance, Donusa wonders after meeting Vitelli, «What unknown desires / Invade and take possession of my soul?» (2.1.26-27). Instead, the Viceroy describes Paulina's chastity as something «That can work miracles [...] / Dispose and alter sexes» (2.5.150-151). Finally, as we have seen, religious conversion transforms one's self. These transformations, however, are highly asymmetrical: changes from being a Turk to being a Christian are positive, while the reverse is subject to vilification. This recalls what Pratt has indicated: contact zones are contexts characterised by extremely lopsided power relations. Touching is a means to define one's self, in that it tries to trace one's own boundaries, but, at the same time, it shows the interconnectedness and performativity of one's own identity also, and perhaps especially, in 'contact zones'.

