

## CHAPTER 4

## DON'T TALK TO STRANGERS: FOREIGNERS AND IMMIGRANTS IN ENGLAND

TO MANY EUROPEANS hard-pressed by the events of the sixteenth century, England must have looked like the land of plenty—plenty of money, plenty of freedom, plenty of opportunity. For all was not well on the Continent. The sometimes brutal efforts of French and Spanish Catholics to destroy the forces of Protestant resistance were making life difficult for non-Catholic Dutch and French Huguenots. And England's expanding trade activity dangled the prospect of great wealth in front of profit-minded European traders and merchants.

For whatever reasons, foreigners were flooding England—or so it seemed to the provincial English. In fact, the influx was small by today's standards. But like modern immigrants, they were eager to find the freedom they lacked at home or to fulfill their dreams in this wonderful new land.

The attraction was not at all mutual, however, and these foreigners were not exactly welcomed with open arms after they had made the Channel crossing and landed at Dover. The English had a well-deserved reputation for hating "strangers," as they called foreigners. More than one European traveler returned from a tour of England to echo the words of the Antwerp merchant who remarked that the English are "very suspicious of foreigners, whom they despise." Even an Elizabethan would acknowledge this fault in his people when he wrote a history of the age:

many citizens, said John Stow, " (especially the more ordinary sort) had no great love for them [strangers] and were glad of an opportunity of oppressing them."

For England, unlike the American nation it eventually spawned, took no pride in becoming a melting pot for many cultures. Even though Elizabethans were living in an age when explorers, scholars, merchants, and writers were flinging open the doors to other cultures, most people preferred to hang back, tarrying on the well-trodden thresholds of ignorance and fear.

Except for the very rich or the very enterprising, the majority of Elizabethans never crossed the Channel to get to know Europe on its own terms. As one observant German summed it up, "because the greater part, especially the tradespeople, seldom go into other countries, but always remain in their houses in the city attending to their business, they care little for foreigners, but scoff and laugh at them." Aside from the thrown-together companies of traveling English "comedians" and the British troops—each group going for reasons other than tourism—not many bona-fide Elizabethan travelers ever graced the countries of Europe with their presence.

As far as their queen was concerned, this was all for the good. The government was chronically worried about the considerable dangers of Catholic infiltration. Since Europe was largely Catholic, Protestant England was deathly afraid that its impressionable young Protestants would be first taken in by foreign hosts and then taken over by Catholicism. Accordingly, the government made getting there no fun at all; an Elizabethan had to have a fairly intense desire to travel—and good connections in the government—to cut his way through the red tape. In order to leave England, testimonies to the good upstanding Protestantism of the prospective traveler often had to be given, a defense of the value of the trip might have to be advanced in the presence of opposing government officials, and a special license or passport had to be wangled. Even then the Elizabethan traveler couldn't rest easy; several times, when Catholic fears gripped the queen, she issued proclamations calling back any English subjects who were studying or traveling in Catholic countries.

Not only did foreign travel expose impressionable young men to the lurking forces of Catholicism, it also made them

vulnerable to foreign fopperies and fripperies. According to this theory, people who went abroad as upstanding Elizabethans returned as pretentious snobs, mindlessly aping the trends, fashions, phrases, and manners of foreign lands—just the sort of affectation that Rosalind credits Jaques with in *As You Like It*: “Farewell, Monsieur Traveler. Look you lisp and wear strange suits, disable all the benefits of your own country, be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are; or I will scarce think you have swam in a gondola.” Portia delivers a similarly withering criticism of her English suitor as she dismisses him before he ever makes it onto the stage of *The Merchant of Venice*: “I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behavior everywhere.”

Instead of going to all the unnecessary trouble and expense of travel, these practical English suggested, why not just read about it? Books written by others were far better—and much safer—sources of information about other lands. As one upper-class noblewoman advised her son: “The language to be learned with the sight of countries [can be learned] here at home by books with less danger than, in these days, by journey. The certain fruits daily found of young men’s travel nowadays [are] nothing but pride, change, and vanity.”

But in advocating such books, these armchair travelers were putting their trust in notoriously unreliable sources of information, full of what a critic called “sweet-sauc’d lies.” The farther some travelers got from home, the taller their tales of other lands seemed to get. Rather than giving sympathetic and objective portraits of other countries and peoples, most of these travel accounts simply reinforced damaging—and marketable—stereotypes, perpetrating far-fetched and best-selling myths. And so it wasn’t surprising that the English lacked a realistic understanding of other cultures.

Hand in hand with the Elizabethan people’s provincial outlook went the certainty that they were better than everyone else. Once the English had more or less settled the religious question, built up a powerful navy, and established themselves as a power to be reckoned with in

international politics, they experienced a wave of intense patriotism. This is the emotion that Shakespeare appeals to throughout *Henry V*, especially as the hero-king Henry leads his men against France with stirring words: “On, you noblest English, Whose blood is fet from fathers of warproof . . . And you, good yeomen Whose limbs were made in England, show us here The mettle of your pasture; let us swear that you are worth your breeding.”

If the Elizabethans saw a good-looking but obviously foreign man on the street they pitied him for not being an Englishman—as if that were the pinnacle of existence. Stereotypes rose easily to their lips, and they were quick to pin pithy national characteristics on foreigners. Thumbing through the work of one popular prose-writer, an Elizabethan might come across statements such as “pride is the disease of the Spaniard”; the Italian is “a cunning proud fellow”; the Frenchman “for the most part loves none but himself and his pleasures”; and the Danes are “the most gross and senseless proud dolts.”

On top of these traditional stereotypes and the instinctive English dislike of anything foreign was a pile of specific fears about church and pocketbook. There was a general prejudice, for example, one shared by all the Christian nations of Europe, against the so-called infidel races—Turks, Moors, and Jews. To an Elizabethan it was not shocking for the witches in *Macbeth* to toss “Liver of blaspheming Jew,” “Nose of Turk and Tartar’s lips” into their cauldron along with such delicacies as “Finger of birth-strangled babe” and “baboon’s blood.” There was a storehouse of concocted myths about ritual murders of Christian infants by Jews for religious purposes, myths that usually surfaced around the time of the Jewish Passover. And Turkish atrocities—the torturing, imprisoning, and impressing of children into the Turkish army—were chronicled in John Foxe’s gory, gossipy, contrived best-seller, *The Book of Martyrs*.

Where infidels feared to tread, Catholics rushed in to pose another big threat to Elizabethans’ sense of well-being. As acknowledged leaders in the free world of Protestantism, the Queen’s English were implacably opposed to Catholicism in *any* form—especially its Spanish form.

But even the state of their Church wasn’t as troubling as the state of their wallets, and many Elizabethans were

worried about foreign bodies in their economic system. The inclination to shun homemade English products in favor of foreign imports raised a protest from protectionists and patriots in London: "many things thereof are not there [in London] made, but beyond the sea; whereby the artificers [craftsman] of our towns are idle." The trade imbalance was enough of a threat on its own, but when foreign workers kept popping up in the English labor force during the heavy unemployment of the late sixteenth century, the level of English anxiety about losing jobs to foreigners rose dramatically. Though Shylock might believe that "the trade and profit of the city Consisteth of all nations," the English preferred that profit to consist of one nation only—their own.

A would-be European immigrant on the eve of his departure for England might very well have second thoughts. He might realize that he just wouldn't win with the English, no matter who he was. If Turkish or Jewish, he'd be scorned as an infidel; if Dutch or French Protestant, he'd be resented as an economic rival; if Spanish, he'd most likely be drawn and quartered. With sinking spirits, he might wonder whether it was too late to change his mind about going—better to face a known enemy at home than an unknown one in a strange land. But then a cheery thought might strike him: these expectations were based on nothing more solid than rumor and hearsay. Perhaps things would be different once he arrived.

## TURNING TURK

ALTHOUGH THEIR GOVERNMENT had recently established trade relations with the English nation, Turks didn't take the idea of going to England very seriously. In fact, the first Turkish official to visit London didn't arrive until after Elizabeth's death. But if they rarely appeared in the flesh, they were certainly there in spirit, a subject of endless fascination to Elizabethans, whose imaginations were fed by "true-to-life" accounts of travelers and merchants cap-

italizing on the newly-established trade relations between England and the Levant.

The relentless push of Turkish forces into eastern Europe and their political domination of the peoples they conquered were casting a shadow over the rest of Europe; the Ottoman Empire hung like a dark rain-cloud on the European skyline. The free world speculated endlessly about the "glorious empire of the Turks, the present terror of the World," as one historian christened them. The Elizabethan curiosity seemed unquenchable—they thirsted to know *why* the Turks were so successful. Was it their native hardiness? Stern discipline? Stamina on the battlefield? Was it Islamic unity? Everyone had an opinion. But whatever the secret of their success, one thing was for sure—the Turks were much admired from afar.

And yet the Elizabethans' admiration was tinged with both fear and scorn. They disdained Turks as infidels, unbaptized and unblessed by the Christian church. Elizabethan diplomatic documents and treaties with other European nations referred to the Turkish nation as the "ancient common enemy and adversary of our faith." The Turkish infidels were considered the stubborn antagonists of Christian Europe and were disparaged accordingly.

The infidels were seen as creatures of boundless cruelty, holding no act of violence too extreme. Stories of their atrocities sent shudders up and down Elizabethan spines—plunder, pillage, and barbaric executions, like that of the man who was buried waist-deep in the earth and pierced by hundreds of arrows of sharp-shooting Turkish archers. The legend of the Turkish sultan Amurath, who had his nineteen brothers (potential rivals for power) strangled as he looked on, was another widely-circulated story. When Prince Harry becomes King Henry in Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 2*, he reassures his anxious brothers that "This is the English, not the Turkish court; Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds, But Harry Harry."

Several other characteristics that came under the label "Turk" included stubbornness, lustfulness, and general barbarism. "Stubborn Turks," declares the Duke in *The Merchant of Venice*, are "never trained To offices of tender courtesy." And in *As You Like It*, Rosalind's reaction to Phebe's supposedly antagonistic letter is this: "Why, she

defies me, Like Turk to Christian." As Edgar plays the part of a lunatic in *King Lear*, he boasts of his lust by saying that he has "in woman out-paramoured the Turk."

"Turk" also served as a handy catch-all term of insult. An Elizabethan could vouch for his character or his word by swearing he was not a Turk. Iago in *Othello* declares to Desdemona that he means what he says, "or else I am a Turk"—that is, a liar. Turks were evil, shifty, not to be trusted; Hamlet speculates on his shifting luck as he wonders, "if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk with me . . ."

The less the English knew, the more they feared, and the readier they were to assume the worst. Islam was for pagans. The Turkish Empire, because it was a vague but frightening threat on the fringes of Europe, was peopled by supersoldiers of unearthly stamina and power. And the Turkish people, never seen on a London street, were lustful, cruel barbarians. Was it any wonder that Turks in the sixteenth century kept a safe distance from England?

## OUT OF AFRICA

THE ELIZABETHANS ACTUALLY had a chance to scrutinize black Africans, unlike the Turks, and could ponder the mystery of their existence first-hand. Londoners saw their first black men in the 1550s, when a few natives of Guinea came out of Africa with an English explorer; all but one returned home—and that one married a white Englishwoman and fathered a black child. But by 1601, Elizabeth was so perturbed by the numbers of Africans "which are crept into the realm" that she employed another foreigner, a German merchant, to transport them out of England.

No one was quite sure what to make of the blacks who appeared in sixteenth-century London. Gawking, gaping, and rudely whispering as they glimpsed Africans on the streets of London, the Elizabethans were especially curious about the dark skin of this unfamiliar people. With their usual zest for argument and debate, they tackled the question over and over. Some advocated the "climatic theory"—Africans were black because they lived near the sun. The Prince of Morocco, recognizing this English prej-

udice, explains his dark skin to Portia on these grounds in *The Merchant of Venice*: "Mislike me not for my complexion, The shadowed livery of the burnished sun, To whom I am a neighbor and near bred." The religious narrow-mindedly interpreted it as evidence of God's curse.

Everyone was especially intrigued by the fact that black skin couldn't be washed off; no matter how much water and soap were vigorously applied. In fact, "to wash an Ethiop's skin" became a favorite metaphor for any pointless task. In *Love's Labor's Lost*, Berowne gives this a neat twist as he comments on the cosmetic-caked faces of Englishwomen; unlike his dark-skinned Rosaline, he declares to his friends, "Your mistresses dare never come in rain, For fear their colors should be washed away."

Though curious, the English were generally uninformed and xenophobic. They often lumped all dark-skinned peoples together under a single name, completely oblivious to, or uninterested in, geographical and physical differences. The terms "Moor," "blackamoor," "Ethiophe," and "Negro" were interchangeable, despite the fact that these peoples spanned the African continent. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Lorenzo distastefully reveals this provincialism when he accuses the servant Launcelot Gobbo of "the getting up of the *Negro's* belly. The *Moor* is with child by you, Launcelot."

If to be nonwhite was to be black, then to be black, in the prejudiced Elizabethan mind, was to be ugly. English standards of beauty called for red cheeks and white skin; in Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis*, the goddess of love praises her "rose-cheeked Adonis" for being "more white and red than doves or roses are." Black obviously didn't have much of a place in this two-dimensional rose-and-lily scheme. When Tamora, the Queen of the Goths, gives birth to a black baby fathered by Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*, the Nurse laments, "A joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue! Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime."

Apparently it didn't occur to many Elizabethans that the pallid white flesh of the English might leave much to be desired in some people's eyes. But Shakespeare lets Aaron the Moor fiercely defend his dark-skinned baby: "is black so base a hue? Sweet blowse, you are a beauteous blossom, sure." And Berowne, whose beloved Rosaline is

"black as ebony," is another exception when he chirps, "No face is fair that is not full so black." Yet most Elizabethans would probably agree with the King, who buys into the myth that black equals evil as he answers Berowne, "Black is the badge of hell, The hue of dungeons, and the school of night."

Since the Elizabethans firmly believed that outward appearance reflected inner reality, to them, a black skin mirrored a sinful soul. As one contemporary wrote, "A black soul may and doth take the shape of a blackmoor." Indeed, as the "irreligious Moor" Aaron exults in his savage crimes, he exclaims that he "will have his soul black like his face." In *As You Like It*, Rosalind calls Phebe's harsh words "Ethiophe words, blacker in their effect Than in their countenance."

Since ancient times, evil spirits and demons, especially the Devil, had been portrayed with black skin. To the Elizabethans, the logic seemed impeccable: since Satan was black, it followed that black people were satanic. By this satanic reasoning, Africans were lustful, cruel savages who delighted in evil for evil's sake.

An Elizabethan only had to pick up any of the numerous travel accounts written by explorers to find a multitude of these stereotyped images of blacks. Alongside balanced and even impartial descriptions of the people of Guinea—"And albeit they go in manner all naked, yet are many of them and especially their women, laden with collars, bracelets, hoops and chains, either of gold, copper or ivory"—the Elizabethan reader could revel in stories of Ethiopians who were eight feet high, or had only one eye in the middle of their foreheads, or had the heads of dogs. The explorers were happy to provide their reading public with descriptions of wild lands and wilder monsters, such as the tales Othello tells Desdemona, "of antres vast and deserts idle, Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven . . . And of the Cannibals that each other eat, The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads Do grow beneath their shoulders."

More than one of these explorers saw only what they wanted to see. Prejudiced by centuries-old myths and childhood stories about strange African lands, a ship's captain might persuade himself that he really had encountered such monsters and savages walking about on

the deserted shore. And whatever his Elizabethan imagination couldn't supply, ancient volumes by such Greek geographers as Herodotus and Pliny could, with fantastic descriptions galore.

Rarely did the Elizabethans stretch their lively minds beyond their own rigid preconceptions to try to understand black Africans for what they were; it was far easier to reject them for what they were not—not Christian, not white, and not English. Because African peoples embodied a different kind of beauty and lived in a society built according to a different cultural, economic, and religious standard, they were dismissed and disdained. Simplistic and simplifying stereotypes of black Africans flourished in the foggy, raw, and dull climate of Elizabethan England.

Despite such prejudices, Shakespeare was one of the first playwrights to create a leading role for a black character. Even though he reflected the conditions of his time, he was unique in producing two roles, one for a black and one for a Jew—Othello and Shylock—that are among the greatest and most challenging roles in English drama. Living as he did in the narrow-minded society of sixteenth-century England, Shakespeare may not have intended Othello to be portrayed by a black man. But it is a measure of his genius that some of our greatest contemporary black actors—including Paul Robeson and James Earl Jones—have performed the role, giving it a modern resonance that Shakespeare couldn't have imagined. Nowhere was this clearer than in Johannesburg, where a black South African actor played Othello in a recent production that made a powerful statement against racial prejudice.

## JOINING THE JEWS

A YOUNG JEW of Spanish or Portuguese descent, looking around for a friendly country to live in after the horrors of the Catholic Inquisition, would certainly think twice about going to England, for every Jew knew about the terrible suffering his people had endured in medieval England. In the Middle Ages, English Jews weren't allowed to own land, master a craft, or ply most trades. Many of

them became moneylenders by default, encouraged by a society that needed credit desperately but was forbidden to charge interest. But it wasn't long before the English began to resent the affluence moneylending brought the Jews. In addition to financial envy, there was hostility toward their non-Christian religious practices.

Sometimes hostility swelled into violence, as Jewish homes were plundered and Jewish families massacred—despite the nominal protection of the English Crown. By the late 1200s, the Jews' financial reserves were exhausted by heavy and unjust taxes and their emotional reserves were drained by chronic harassment. No longer useful to English society, they were banished in 1290—sixteen thousand people forced to leave England almost immediately.

Reflecting on this history, our young Spanish or Portuguese Jew might decide instead to sail for the safety of the well-established Jewish community in Antwerp, Belgium, making a stopover at Dover, England, along the way. But once in England, he might hear about a small Jewish community in London and choose to join their number—probably less than a hundred. After his awful double existence in Spain, where his family had lived secretly as Jews and publicly as “New Christians,” or Marranos, he might be overjoyed to find even a few Jews, especially since they, too, were exiles from Spain and Portugal.

The small community of Jews in Elizabethan London had worked out a relatively comfortable coexistence with Protestant England. Many of them were doctors, merchants, traders, and prominent citizens in the city. Outwardly, of course, they conformed, as everyone had to by the law of the land. They faithfully attended Sunday services at the Protestant Church of Saint Olave's down the street and even held their marriages and funerals there. But once a week, they trod the cobbled streets of the section of London known as Aldgate and, behind the closed doors of the home of a Portuguese Jew, quietly held Sabbath prayers. As a Spanish subject imprisoned in London eventually reported to his government, “It is notorious that in their own homes they live as such observing their Jewish rites; but publicly they attend Lutheran [Protestant] churches, and listen to the sermons.”

They knew that to keep their Jewish identity they had to keep it quiet, that being Jew-ish in the eyes of the authorities was better than being outright Jews. Still, a nagging sense of insecurity remained. In the first place, they didn't really have any legal ground to stand on—the decree of banishment handed down in 1290 wasn't officially repealed until 1650, and the government could have kicked them out at any time. In the second place, the English annals of anti-Semitism were too full and well thumbed for any Jew to think that the prejudice had vanished from the land. In Christian eyes, they were infidels just as Turks and Moors were. If “Turk” meant “cruel” and “treacherous,” then “Jew” stood for “villainous” and “untrustworthy.” Benedick uses this construction to declare his intentions toward Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*: “If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am a Jew.”

The Jew was automatically assumed by the English to be inferior to the Christian. The servant Launce makes this explicit when he issues an invitation to his fellow servant Speed in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: “If thou wilt, go with me to the alehouse; if not, thou art an Hebrew, a Jew, and not worth the name of a Christian.”

Elizabethan institutions everywhere seemed to support and encourage these derogatory notions about Jews. The Church teachings held that the Jewish people were not only shifty infidels but also the treacherous murderers of Christ, a belief officially repudiated by the Pope in the 1960s. The writers of the time adopted the old medieval stereotypes of wicked Jews; Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* presented Zachary and Zadoch, two diabolical medieval Jews who gleefully threaten to poison wells and murder Christian children—supposedly favorite Jewish pastimes and the cause of many an anti-Jewish riot in the Middle Ages.

Most playwrights, too, chose one of two caricatures when they came to depict Jews onstage: either a comically ugly figure with a red wig, big nose, and devil-like features, or a horrendously bloodthirsty and scheming villain, such as Christopher Marlowe's Barabas, the *Jew of Malta*. Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is a possible exception.

Although generally no one bothered the Jews, there

were a few incidents with unpleasant implications. The affair of Dr. Lopez was notorious and reverberated long after its conclusion. Roderigo Lopez, a well-known member of the Jewish community, had been Queen Elizabeth's trusted physician for years when the trouble started; as a Portuguese Jewish immigrant, he had also been invaluable to the government in foreign policy matters relating to Portugal. After years of faithful and honorable service to Elizabeth, during which she granted him a manor house twelve miles from Shakespeare's Stratford, Lopez was accused of plotting to poison her.

He swore he was innocent, but he was a convenient scapegoat in the power struggle between the queen's favorites. Done in by the combination of backstabbing Elizabethan politics and anti-Semitism (the State Papers referred to him throughout as "the vile Jew"), Lopez was convicted—on trumped-up charges—and executed in May of 1594. The execution was a major public event and set off ripples of anti-Jewish feeling around the nation that took some time to fade.

There were a few other incidents, although none as big as the Lopez travesty. A German miner who openly professed Judaism lived in England with no problem until he got into a theological argument with a clergyman; after fifteen years of keeping his mouth shut, he was expelled from the country.

But in some respects Elizabethans seemed glad that the Jews were around—especially English merchants and traders. Jews made excellent shipping agents and middle men in English trading activities with Portugal and Spain. Confronted with the desire and need to trade with Spain, England's number-one enemy, these resourceful Englishmen kept their hands clean by employing Jews as "secret" agents. When Spanish goods left Spain as exports for England, they would technically "belong" to the Jewish shippers, who were originally from Portugal or Spain; but by the time they arrived in England as imports, they would have become the property of the English merchants who had financed the voyage in the first place.

Elizabeth's government also benefited from the presence of Jews, for they brought to foreign policy matters the invaluable combination of knowledge and passion. As ex-citizens of Spain and Portugal who still kept up with

with their old communities there, many Jews in London were experts on Spanish and Portuguese affairs and indispensable sources of intelligence information. Because they had been brutally expelled from Spain in 1492 (and the hidden ones who remained hunted down by the Inquisition ever since then), many of them were zealously anti-Spanish—which fit right in with English foreign policy.

Although the life of the Jews in Elizabethan England was legally unstable and vulnerable to waves of anti-Semitism, by Shakespeare's time things weren't so bad. As long as they made their Jewishness a private matter, publicly fulfilling the minimum daily requirements of citizenship in a Protestant land, the Jews were for the most part tolerated, although they remained outsiders.

## ARMADAS AND ARMADOS

IF SPANISH JEWS were guided by signs instructing them to Proceed With Caution and Yield to Oncoming Traffic, Spanish Catholics coming to England would have been greeted by billboards screaming Keep Out! It had been that way for a long time. Even when the Spanish King Philip married the English Queen Mary, during a decade when both the ruler and the Church of England were Catholic, Spanish visitors had been given a cold reception.

After Elizabeth and the Protestant Church were enthroned in 1558-1559, that chill became a downright frost. In Elizabethan London, in fact, a Spanish face was a rare sight; unless he were the Spanish ambassador to the Court, or a sailor on a merchant ship, or, in 1588, a would-be invader aboard one of the ships in the Spanish Armada, it would be extremely unlikely that a Spaniard would venture into English waters.

Religious differences may have been at the heart of what was really a mutual dislike: Protestantism and Catholicism were to these two world powers what Democracy and Communism are to twentieth-century superpowers. But it was not religion alone; in that era, religion and politics were inseparable. The English might not have thought twice about Spanish Catholicism if Spain hadn't

also happened to be the greatest political and military power in the world.

It was probably as much envy as fear that caused Elizabethans to believe that Spain was an evil empire that intended to take over the whole globe—beginning, of course, with England. Every move the Spaniards made on the chessboard of international relations was seized on as evidence of their diabolical intentions. For example, the English saw right through the Spanish invasion of Spain's rebelling colonies in the Netherlands; what Spain was *really* trying to do was to build up its military power across the Channel.

To English minds, Spain was an evil second only to the Devil, and they never passed up a chance to vilify their hated rival. Accordingly, Spaniards were described as a bloodthirsty, greedy, cruel, and bigoted lot who would let no one prevent them from attaining their evil ends. They fed Indian babies to their equally bloodthirsty dogs while out conquering the New World and held contests to see who could disembowel a man fastest. They took extraspecial delight in torturing Protestants—although they might be hard put to outdo the diabolical English torturer of Catholics, Richard Topcliffe.

When the Elizabethans weren't busily engaged in Spanish character assassination, they concentrated on mocking and ridiculing the hapless Spaniards. They might have simply been following the example of their queen: rumor had it that Elizabeth considered the Spanish ambassador a pompous fool and made fun of him whenever the opportunity presented itself. Perhaps he wasn't so different from the Shakespearean Spaniard in *Love's Labor's Lost*—Don Adriano de Armado, "a refined traveler of Spain, A man in all the world's new fashion planted, That hath a mint of phrases in his brain," and preposterous bombast on his lips: "Arts-man, preambulate," he trumpets, "we will be singuled from the barbarous."

Both Don Armado, in his own swaggering way, and the more serious matter of the Invincible Armada provided the Elizabethans with entertainment that was hard to beat; neither Armado nor Armada did very much to improve the English opinion of Spain. After the highly-publicized fear-inspiring Spanish fleet met its end on the Irish rocks, it was hard for Spaniards to hold their heads

up in the international set; and England went mad with the sweet taste of victory. Gloating ballads and pamphlets streamed from English presses, proclaiming the victory as final proof that God really was an Englishman after all—and a Protestant at that. Relations between the two countries continued to worsen. The raids of English pirates on Spanish cargo ships were frequent occurrences for years afterward.

And the legends of Spanish cruelty and bloodthirstiness continued to enjoy quite a following. Anti-Spanish pamphlets made the rounds in London; one, entitled *A Fig for the Spaniard*, described Spain as the natural habitat of those "that like bloody butchers continually thirst after blood." It would take a long time for tensions to ease. Until then, Spaniards preferred to stay put at home, safe from English swords—and English pens!

## DUTCH TREAT, PETTY FRANCE

THE PROTESTANT RELIGIOUS refugees who made their way into England might have expected to be welcomed with open arms. After all, they weren't Turks or Africans, Jews or Catholics, but good old Protestants. The King of Spain was flexing his Catholic muscles in the Netherlands, and France was thrown into a religious uproar on the death of its king in the 1570s; European Protestants were in trouble and called on their fellow Protestants in England for help.

But if religious differences ebbed with this particular tide of immigrants, economic jealousies flowed right in to take their place. These Dutch and French Protestants couldn't have picked a worse time to descend upon their Protestant neighbors than the last quarter of the sixteenth century. England had been periodically racked with famine, unemployment, and trade slumps, and the Elizabethans were in no mood to receive groups of destitute foreigners who arrived on their shores exhausted, frightened, and penniless—and also, it soon emerged, skilled.

Evidently the queen—always anxious to swell the Protestant ranks—was happy to see these refugees flooding

English shores and English churches. Perhaps she realized that they could bring desperately-needed skills to her battered economy. And so, glossing over the diplomatic sensitivity of England's welcoming political/religious exiles from allied or rival nations, she declared, "They are all welcome; I at least will never fail them." Many of her top advisors felt the same way, extending warm greetings, well aware of the potential economic improvements to England's backwardness in manufacture and industry.

Unfortunately, the Dutch and French immigrants couldn't live their daily lives among their high-level sponsors. Life among the ordinary Elizabethans—farmers, shopkeepers, artisans, weavers, merchants, and apprentices—wasn't always a cozy affair. Many of them resented the refugees simply because they were strangers, others envied their skills and workmanship, and no one was particularly shy about making his feelings known.

As a result, depending on the city or village, the Dutch and the French refugees found themselves stung by lots of little irritations and petty restrictions. Unscrupulous landlords might jack up the rent for a family of strangers, sometimes charging them seven times as much as a native English tenant. Some villages enforced an eight o'clock evening curfew for immigrants; in others, foreign-born bakers could bake and sell only the inferior wheat bread, while the English bakers enjoyed the monopoly on the more popular white bread. And elsewhere, alien weavers had to swallow their anger and pay "loom money" for permission to weave—on top of taxes that might already be twice as much as the Elizabethans paid.

Foreign craftsmen could hire only English apprentices—a requirement of the law—but the English certainly didn't have to respond in kind by hiring Dutch or French apprentices. Craftsmen from abroad also had to submit to regular monitoring by a supervisory committee of Englishmen—yet another Elizabethan maneuver to extract as many secrets as they could from the foreigners and thus prevent them from gaining a monopoly.

Indeed, the main source of Elizabethan antagonism toward Protestant refugees was fear of foreigners' money-making potential. For as one foreigner noted, the English suspected that most foreigners "never come into their island but to make themselves masters of it, and to usurp

their goods"; and when foreigners were as competent and knowledgeable as these Europeans, suspicions were even greater. The immigrants were resented for surpassing their Elizabethan hosts "in dexterity, industry, and frugality," as one fair-minded Englishman said.

And so, instead of tolerating these skilled strangers, many Elizabethans demonstrated their own industry—in making scapegoats of vulnerable groups. The unfortunate Dutch and French workers were blamed for food shortages, price rises, housing shortages, rent increases, and anything else that went wrong.

Sometimes, when Elizabethans could no longer bear the burden of their inferiority, resentment shortened their tempers, turning to riot. English apprentices were usually the engineers of these free-for-alls, leading the way as they smashed market stalls, plundered strangers' goods, and turned their beefy fists on anyone who looked foreign. After three terrible riots in ten years, the government finally cracked down on the apprentices and sentenced five of them to hang. Things quieted down after that.

Actually these Protestant refugees, who gave up everything for their religious principles, had a good measure of religious freedom in England. They lived in their own communities—London had an area that was called "Petty France" because of all the Frenchmen living there—and kept their lives separate but parallel to the English. They attended their own worship services apart from the English. They maintained their own baptismal and marriage records, took care of their own poor, and were even excused from the law requiring weekly attendance at Church of England services.

And so, within the shelter of their communities, they went quietly about their business, despite occasional resistance from the ungrateful English. Gradually, grudgingly, the Elizabethans began to learn from these thrifty, talented craftsmen. The refugees showed their English pupils how to weave silk, make ribbon, and engrave glass; they taught them how to make canvas, parchment, soap, combs, and buttons. The immigrants demonstrated efficient techniques of copper-mining, knife-making, harbordredging, and marsh-draining. And one of them revolutionized English fashion when she introduced the practice of starching linen. After that, the upper classes never again

had to worry about floppy ruffs, and Mrs. Dingham van der Plasse never again had to worry about money—she grew rich practically overnight.

### LOCAL HABITATIONS

ELIZABETHANS WERE SO sensitive to anything foreign or strange that they reacted even to people who came from no farther away than the remote parts of their own islands. Although a Scotsman or an Irishman or a Welshman might not stand out at first—for he *looked* English—the minute he opened his mouth he gave the game away. Regional accents were very strong and immediately recognizable, especially to Londoners who spoke the standard southern dialect that was considered “correct.” Whether or not the English reacted with their customary hostility to foreigners when they heard such a “foreign” accent on the street, they certainly found these country yokels uproariously funny on the stage.

A Welsh citizen might be laughed at for the way he stumbled over his *p*'s and *b*'s, his *d*'s and *v*'s; Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* calls to the fairies, “Trib, trib, fairies. Come . . . Be pold, I pray you.” Or he might have reported to his military captain with the classic pronunciation of a Fluellen, in *Henry V*: “there is gallant and most prave passages. Marry, th' athversary was have possession of the pridge.”

An Irishman's distinctive accent never deserted him, nor did it ever fail to raise a laugh. Shakespeare has a lot of fun with MacMorris, an Irish comrade-in-arms of Fluellen: “I would have blowed up the town, so Chrish save me, la, in an hour. O, tish ill done, tish ill done; by my hand, tish ill done!” Nor did Scots get off scot-free; their broad vowels struck their southern neighbors in London as hilarious. The Scottish captain Jamy assures Fluellen and MacMorris that “It sall be vary gud, gud feith, gud captens bath.” The conversations that occur between these three officers in the army of Henry V are a comical smorgasbord of incomprehensible vowels, idiosyncratic speech mannerisms, and oddly-pronounced words.

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In the end, no matter what flag of race, creed, or nationality the immigrants waved, life couldn't have been easy for strangers in a country that considered even its own fellow islanders foreigners. The fabric of English society was woven so tightly that it seemed to exclude anyone who wasn't white, Anglo Saxon, Protestant—and male. For although Elizabeth sat on the throne, everywhere else in England a woman was just as much a second-class citizen as any stranger.