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## 2 First category title

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### 2.1 Second category title

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In *Universe of the Mind* (2001), Yuri M. Lotman argues that “[...] the ‘barbarian’ is created by civilization and needs it as much as it needs him. [...] No matter whether the given culture sees the ‘barbarian’ as saviour or enemy, as a healthy moral influence or a perverted cannibal, it is dealing with a construct made in its own inverted image.”<sup>1</sup> The instrumentality of foreigners in the process of construction of a national identity invites critical re-examination, as their presence is a recurrent element underlying the texture of many plays in early modern Britain. Foreigners are integrated in self-assertive discourses, structured around the glorification of the own nation, the greatness of which is defined in opposition to the negative features of other cultural semiospheres<sup>2</sup> deemed inferior. Foreigners are also present in those writings which, through a process of symbiosis with that ‘officially’ rejected otherness, deconstruct the myth of national greatness by highlighting its weaknesses. My analysis of four plays by Delarivier Manley, Mary Pix and Catharine Trotter sees them as belonging to this deconstructive pattern and is inspired by, among others’, Ruth Bernard Yeazell’s belief that “distant places and people have always tempted human beings to fantastic projections of their own wishes and fears [...]”<sup>3</sup> The alien settings represented by, for example, “the strange Barbarity of Portugal” (5.1.288),<sup>4</sup> in Catharine Trotter’s words, or the “barbarous [Turkish] Climate” (5.350-351),<sup>5</sup> in Mary Pix’s, are not mere ‘exotic’ loci, but useful contexts where, as Bridget Orr notes, “local political problems [...] could be re-imagined, explored and resolved.”<sup>6</sup>

Following Steven Mullaney, Orr asserts that “[...] the performance of aspects of alien cultures may be accounted for by the desire to establish a stronger sense of European selfhood against a clearly defined cultural other.”<sup>7</sup> It could be argued that the idiosyncratic contribution of many seventeenth-century British writers and ideologists to this European schema could be found in their assertion of “[...] ‘liberty’ as the most

<sup>1</sup> Yuri M. Lotman: *Universe of the Mind: a Semiotic Theory of Culture*, London/New York 2001, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> As defined by Lotman, the semiosphere is “the whole semiotic space of the culture in question. [...] The semiosphere is the result and condition for the development of culture. [...] We justify our term by analogy with the biosphere [...] namely the totality and the organic whole of living matter and also the condition for the continuation of life.” *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Ruth Bernard Yeazell: *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature*, New Haven 2000, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Catharine Trotter: *Agnes de Castro*, Cambridge 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Pix: *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks: a Tragedy*, Cambridge 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Bridget Orr: *Empire on the English Stage 1660-1714*, Cambridge 2001, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

seventeenth-century public [...] they are imaginatively central.”<sup>8</sup> One of the ideas resulting from their self-conscious assertion of this asymmetry, from their de-stabilization of what Bridget Orr describes as “an unproblematic sense of Western Superiority,”<sup>9</sup> is the textualization of different patterns of female irreducibility: these plays represent women who cannot be subsumed within a patriarchal discourse of stability, as they escape its restrictions and radically call its validity into question.

Susan K. Kent argues that the restoration of patriarchy after years of revolution had confined women to home, “the realm of ‘within’ [...] as opposed to the world ‘without’,” and most women “accepted and internalized the religious and scientific discourses that proclaimed their inferiority and need for subordination.”<sup>10</sup> However, the plays under analysis here demonstrate the existence of a fruitful oppositional context which generated dissenting voices that were getting increasingly ‘organized’ and gaining ground. Ina Schabert claims that, whereas during the 16th and early 17th century “it would have been difficult for women writers [...] to envision themselves as a separate group capable of collective measures of self-protection or revenge,”<sup>11</sup> the situation changed at the end of the 17th century:

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On the whole, it seems, Renaissance women, if they wrote at all, did not think of themselves as representatives of the female sex writing back at their male colleagues. They rather wrote *with* the men, hoping to be accepted as exceptional female citizens in the republic of letters. Neither was their feminism ‘individualist’ [...]. It was an attempt to establish oneself within a patriarchal, male-dominated society. Only in the last decades of the seventeenth century did a sense of community begin to develop among women.<sup>12</sup>

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This period generated texts which Schabert describes as “exceptions to the rule of male-oriented female self-fashioning” and as “brave, isolated attempts to conjure up, with the help of the literary imagination, seducing images of female togetherness.”<sup>13</sup> In this respect, she mentions that “for better (for example in the laudatory section of Edward Philips’s *Theatrum Poetarum*, 1675) or for worse (as in satires such as the *Session of Poets*, 1676 and *The Female Wits*, 1696) intellectual women came to be considered as a group.”<sup>14</sup> Schabert illustrates this nascent sense of community by referring to two publications of the 1690s, Mary Astell’s *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of their True and Greatest Interest* (1694) and Judith Drake’s *An Essay in Defense of the Female Sex* (1696). This period generated texts which Schabert describes as “brave, isolated attempts to conjure up, with the

<sup>8</sup> Gray: *Women Writers and Public Debate*, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Orr: *Empire on the English Stage*, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Kent: *Gender and Power in Britain*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ina Schabert: “*To Make Frequent Assemblies, Associations, and Combinations Amongst Our Sex*”: *Nascent Ideas of Female Bonding in Seventeenth-Century England*, in: Anke Gilleir/Alicia C. Montoya/Suzan van Dijk: *Women Writing Back/Writing Women Back: Transnational Perspectives from the Late Middle Ages to the Dawn of the Modern Era*, Leiden 2010, p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

for agency on those foreign women who had traditionally been demonized. Their otherness was not perceived as something distant but, rather, in symbiotic connection with their own identity as women and writers. The presence of female foreigners in their plays paved the way for an assertion of their own ‘marginal’ systems of thoughts and beliefs. By literaturizing this symbiotic connection in their plays, Manley, Pix and Trotter rewrote the ‘official’ function of this genre, which had been used to glorify Britain’s greatness and to satisfy masculine desires for geographical and ideological expansionism. A careful analysis of their plays reveals that, with varying degrees of feminist commitment (normally far from intense), the literary channel which had been formerly devoted to strengthening national identity serves the purpose of dramatizing the irreducibility of what Rosalind Ballaster has described as female “expansionist selves.”<sup>15</sup>

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#### The Instrumentality of Foreigners in the Transmission

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The location of female agency in foreign contexts may be interpreted from a double perspective: as the product of a ‘cautious’ feminist consciousness, fearing to situate “unvanquished women”<sup>16</sup> in the own country (although Delarivier Manley clearly transgressed this limit in *The Lost Lover*) or as the materialization of a desire to universalize patterns of female agency, a desire nurtured by the oppressive environment that has previously been described. The second possibility looks more plausible if we take into account an identification which, transgressing separations, might have been firmly rooted in women’s consciousness: in a context in which, as Marilyn French notes, “patriarchy had triumphed over most of the Western and Eastern worlds,” with “Europeans slaughter[ing] indigenous people and seiz[ing] their lands, their natural resources, and, sometimes, their bodies, in a frenzy of religious fanaticism and capitalist greed [...] the peoples of these territories were subdued – enslaved or domesticated into servants – much as women had been over a much longer period.”<sup>17</sup>

Although the constellation of feminist ideas that these plays communicate may not be consistent enough to entitle us to speak of a transnational feminist movement, they are certainly permeated by the fluidity and dynamism that characterizes the semiospheric frontier which these writers ideologically inhabited and which certainly posed a meaningful reaction against the rigidity of patriarchy. Apart from including disturbing elements that unsettled the discourse of national stability edified upon women’s silence – elements that self-consciously addressed the four aforementioned transnational problems – the plays by Manley, Pix and Trotter deconstruct the ‘homogeneity’ enforced by the dominant discourse of empire on the British and other semiospheres: neither British males are presented as homogeneously virtuous nor foreign men as invariably tyrannical. The dynamic of their plays rather reveals, as Lotman argues, that “the structure of

<sup>15</sup> Rosalind Ballaster: *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2005, p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> Marilyn French: *From Eve to Dawn: a History of Women* (Vol. 2: *The Masculine Mystique*), New York, The Feminist Press 2008, p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95

[every] semiosphere is asymmetrical,”<sup>18</sup> and the acknowledgment and naturalization of this asymmetry paves the way for the generation as. As Gray claims, “though women may be statistically marginal to the transforming sev

<sup>18</sup> Lotman: *Universe of the Mind*, p. 125.