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**GRESHAM'S WORLD:
GLOBAL TRAFFIC, TRADE AND THE METAMORPHOSIS OF ENGLAND**
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We begin in the 1570s, with Lucas de Heere's painting of a naked and sartorially-confused Englishman, which he may have produced initially as a commission from Edward Clinton, the Lord High Admiral of England, and replicated later in his costume book, *Théâtre de tous les peuples et nations de la terre*. The story is told by someone as close to an eye-witness as we can get, a pupil of de Heere who heard it from the artist himself:

When all but the Englishman were done, he painted him naked and set beside him all manner of cloth and silk materials, and next to them tailor's scissors and chalk. When the Admiral saw this figure he asked Lucas what he meant by it. He answered that he had done that with the Englishman because he did not know what appearance or kind of clothing he should give him because they varied so much from day to day; for if he had done it one way today, the next day it would have to be another – be it French or Italian, Spanish or Dutch – and I have therefore painted the material and tools to hand so that one can always make of it what one wishes.¹

The lecture shows that this trope of the impressionable Englishman, whose national identity was continually under attack from foreign influences, was in fact an old joke, adopted by multiple nations across Europe. In late sixteenth century England, however, it surfaced recurrently as a point of anxiety, both in popular print and in political and religious discourse. One of its earliest English incarnations is in *The Introduction of Knowledge* by Andrew Boorde (written around 1542 and published in the 1550's), where the similarly under-clothed, scissor-wielding Englishman announces:

I am an Englishman, and naked I stand here,
Musyng in my mynde what rayment I shal were;
For now I wyll were thys, and now I wyl were that;
Now I wyl were I cannot tel what.
All new fashyons be pleasaunt to me;
I wyl haue them, whether I thryue or thee.²

It also features in the 'Homily Against Excess of Apparel,' which Elizabeth I commanded to be preached in all English churches, and which Lucas's biographer claimed to be a direct royal response to Lucas's visual joke:

Therefore a certain man, that would picture every countryman in his accustomed apparel, [the homily goes] pictured the Englishman all naked, and gave him cloth under his arm, and bade him make it himself [...], for he changed his fashion so often. Thus with our fantastical devices we make ourselves laughing-stocks to other nations.

¹ Karel van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the first edition of the Schilder-boeck (1603-04)*, trans. Hessel Miedema, vol. 1 (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1994), p. 281.

² Andrew Boorde, *The Fyrst Boke of the Introduction of Knowledge* (London, 1550), sig. A3v.



The lecture uses this anecdote to open up a point of entry into the way England's global encounters, and its sense of itself as a nation, engaged with each other in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This is a period we tend to think of as a quintessentially English 'golden age,' an age that struck out and created its own national identity on its own terms. Yet Tudor England was far from closed to the world. Human movement across its borders led to radical developments in the way we think about human – and national – identities. Many concepts that evolved as a result of these processes (those defining strangers, foreigners, traitors, or go-betweens, for example) tend to be concepts that divide, label, and choose sides. At the same time, they also flag up the pervasive metamorphosis effected by cross-cultural encounters: no involved party emerged untouched from such exchanges. This lecture takes us through some stories that emerged from such moments of contact, and in the process, illuminate some aspects of the nation that was shaped as a result.

One of the things that Lucas's image highlights is the understanding that the dark thread of anxiety running through jokes about fickle, fashion-conscious Englishmen were not unfounded. It was a trend exemplified particularly by London, as the centre of political and mercantile activity, a 'citty filled ... abundantly with all sorts of silkes, fine linnen, oyles, wines & spices, perfection of arts, and all costly ornaments and curious workmanship.'³ Thomas Gresham's Royal Exchange, which opened in 1570, was an early indicator of burgeoning English mercantile confidence and appetite for global luxuries. We can gauge how central Gresham's Exchange was in the changing cultural life of London and England in general, by the fact that both Gresham and the Exchange continue to crop up on the public stage long after his life-time. Gresham himself becomes a leading character in Thomas Heywood's *If you Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part II* (1605). In another play, Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (c.1613), a character casually compares his pregnant wife's collection of trinkets to 'all the gaudy-shops/in Gresham's Burse.' It all gives us a sense of how far Gresham's Exchange had become the byword for what was perceived as a particularly English appetite for the world, and English propensity for conspicuous consumption.

A whole other lecture could be written about the material transformation of spaces as well as socio-cultural lives through traffic and trade, both specifically in London, and more generally across England, in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries. However, my focus here is more on the people who were caught up in the process, because with burgeoning English confidence about the country's place in the world, came anxiety, and much of it was about a potential loss of identity. And for better or for worse, immigrants like Lucas were integral parts of that unfolding double-edged story.

Following the traces of Lucas de Heere (1534 – 1584) shows how a good immigrant may have fitted into contemporaneous English life. Lucas was among the thousands of mainly Protestant religious refugees who escaped from Europe to England in repeated waves of migration in this period. He rose to be a painter of the English court, entrusted with creating royal likenesses, just as a number of immigrant artists like Hans Holbein had done before him, or as those like Anthony Van Dyke, who came after. Like them, he was a migrant maker of Englishness, of the collective national memories of English history.

Others, unlike Lucas, have left little or no traces of their existence. The lecture draws on the passing references and documentary fragments in the Tudor and Stuart 'Returns of Aliens,' and other archival records, to explore some of their experiences, and indicate the close interweaving of English and 'alien' lives. One figure who features in this section is William Shakespeare, who lodged at Silver Street in the upstairs spare-room of the Huguenot artisan family of the Mountjoys in the late 1590s/early 1600s, and was close enough with his landlords to get involved in their ongoing family drama, involving a pair of young lovers and a stingy father's refusal to hand over the agreed dowry.⁴

Of course, that kind of intermingling often triggered resentment, particularly when loss rather than enrichment, erasure rather than a palimpsest, was seen as the outcome. In this period, it quite often generated stories of paranoia and fear about those who, voluntarily or otherwise, inhabited that charged, changing landscape. There were anti-immigration riots like the one subsequently remembered as 'Evil May Day,' which occurred on 1 Mary

³ Edmund Howes, *The Abridgement of the English Chronicle, first collected by M. John Stow* (London, 1618), dedication.

⁴ For a very readable account of this case, see Charles Nicholl, *The Lodger* (Allen Lane: London, 2007).



1517. There was also anger and frustration about Tudor statecraft, which often identified strangers as the roots of multiple problems, ranging from property shortage, to threats to national security. The popular drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often reveal traces of the widespread nature of such fears. In George Wapull's *Tide Tarrieth No Man* (1576), for example, a stranger considering buying property and worrying whether his identity puts him at a disadvantage is assured by the broker:

For among us now, such is our country zeale,
That we love best with straungers to deale. [...]

In Robert Wilson's *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* (c. late 1580s), a handful of villains – all personifications of various unsavoury professions – try to convince their friend to side with an invading Spanish force against the English. In response to his protests ('Whatsoever ye do, be not traitors to your native country'), they remind him:

'Tis not our native country, thou knowest, I, Simony, am a Roman;
Dissimulation a mongrel – half an Italian, half a Dutchman; Fraud so
too – half French, and half Scottish; and thy parents were both Jews,
though thou wert born in London [...]

One particular historical instance turned what might have been simmering under the surface – a frustration with a perceived invasion of an English way of life – into the threat of a real invasion. The sensational story of Roderigo Lopez (c.1517–1594), who was sentenced to death for planning to poison the queen, reveals the dangers that attended negotiations of identity and national affiliation for those crossing borders of religion, language, and states. Historical evidence suggests that Lopez, despite the lack of confirmed evidence against him, was a plausible pawn in the Earl of Essex's attempt to consolidate his position at court by thwarting a 'Spanish plot' against the queen and nation. During Lopez's trial, the English repeatedly point out that he was a 'stranger' and an 'alien', a 'Portugal' not to be trusted. His fellow Portuguese on the other hand were all too willing to distance themselves from him by claiming that he was a crypto-Jew. If the mark of a successful immigrant is their ability and willingness to get involved and to fit in, then it is a deep, tragic irony that it was that very ability to settle into multiple cultures, languages, and nations, that meant that Lopez was doomed as a 'citizen of nowhere'.

The traffic that both threatened and shaped articulations of Englishness, however, was not only inbound. The lecture engages with the traces left by significant numbers of the English who were also heading out. These travellers were driven by multiple imperatives, from trade and diplomacy, to fashion and faith. Some among them were religious refugees themselves, seeking shelter in European Catholic states. Others headed towards the global trade routes of the Middle East and Asia. They, too, were part of that fluid, expanding world, and they too unsettled (and sometimes radically challenged) what it might mean to be English.

Two largely-forgotten stories, the case of Jack Ward the pirate, and the Ottoman Eunuch Assan Aga, serve to reveal how English subjects themselves could contest their national identity, and how such negotiations both horrified and fascinated England in this period. Ward sensationally converted to Islam under the name of 'Yusuf Reis' and retired with his wealth to Tunis, under Ottoman protection. He even had a play written about him in 1612 called *A Christian Turn'd Turk*. There, English theatre goers would see an Englishman on stage renounce his identity:

What is't I lose by this my change? My country?
Already 'tis to me impossible.
My name is scandaled? What is one island
Compared to the Eastern monarchy?

Real life was possibly even stranger. In June 1586, William Harborne, the first English ambassador to the Ottoman court at Istanbul, wrote a letter. Harborne was trying to make a very sensitive negotiation – the release of a few Englishmen taken prisoner by the Ottomans. The person who would decide the fate of the prisoners was the



Ottoman governor or Beglerbeg of Algiers, Uluç Ali Pasha, but Harborne was not writing to him. His letter was addressed instead to the Pasha's Treasurer, the Eunuch called Assan Aga, and Harborne wrote to him as one Englishman to another. Referring to the Biblical story of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt, he notes, 'I trust you be ordained another Joseph, to follow his example in true piety, in such sort that notwithstanding your body be subject to Turkish thralldom, yet your vertuous mind free fro[m] those vices'. In return, Assan Aga would be assured of the favour and gratitude of both Harborne and his queen, 'when & where you may have occasion to use [it]'. We do not know whether the prisoners received their freedom. Neither do we know what happened to Assan Aga, the recipient of that letter. The only other trace of him is a chance portrait in a German traveller's notebook, made two years later (c.1588), looking back at the viewer in full Turkish costume. But 13 years after Harborne wrote his letter, an English book would preserve at least a trace of who he was and who he used to be. Within the pages of Richard Hakluyt's monumental *Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1599-1600), a whole history of adventure, captivity, and transformation of a young man from Bristol, Samson Rowley, son of Francis Rowley, is condensed in a single terse headnote: 'To Assan Aga, Eunuch & Treasurer to Hassan Bassa king of Alger, which Assan Aga was the sonne of Fran. Rowlie of Bristow merchant, taken in the Swalow.'

One final example of that complicated, tangled, story of global traffic, trade, and the making of England and Englishness began in 1579. It is the year when Thomas Gresham died in London, and a runaway English Catholic called Thomas Stephens arrived in India as a Jesuit missionary. Stephens's interaction with his fellow countrymen, some of whom may have gladly seen him in the Tower as a potential traitor if he were to return to England, stands right at the beginning of England's long and complex relationship with India, the jewel in Britain's later imperial crown. At the same time, his writing is a palimpsest of place, identity, and intent, which resists identification of a single 'English' or 'non-English' character or affiliation.

When Lucas de Heere sketched his sartorially-confused Englishman, he was tapping into an old joke. That joke, as we have seen, was linked closely to fears about the instability of national identity at a time when the idea of an English nation was itself seen under threat from internal and external forces alike. Yet people like Lucas, and Lopez, and Jack Ward, and Thomas Stephens – and Gresham himself – all remind us that the story of the shaping of the nation in that age of trade and travels was far richer than that. And seen in that light, Lucas's English figure might take on a different kind of agency, asserting his right to an identity that is deliberately and self-consciously heterogeneous, contrapuntal and complex.

Note: For more information on the terminology, concepts, and historical examples discussed in this lecture, please see www.tideproject.uk.