

AT SEA, IN TEXT, AND ON STAGE:
ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of Master of Research in Islamic Studies.

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September 2014

Word Count: 20,000

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Early Modern English drama. It begins with an analysis of the various types of relations that existed between the English and the Muslims of the day, particularly the Ottoman Turks and the North African Moors. Relations existed across almost all social groups, leading to a contradictory way of perceiving the Islamic world. Muslims were admired and envied for their superior wealth and spectacular exoticism; yet, were also vilified as followers of a deadly rival faith. Such ambiguity is reflected in the drama of the time and to demonstrate this, four specific plays, *Tamburlaine The Great Parts I and II*, *A Christian Turned Turk*, *The Tragedy of Othello: The Noble Moor of Venice*, and *The Renegado*, are compared and evaluated by studying their depictions of Islam and Muslims. The plays all share a number of common themes, with the most pertinent being the fear of English Christians 'turning Turk' or converting to Islam. Each play offers its own unique take on this phenomenon. Finally, the discussion is modernised when it is shown that the key worries which plagued the Early Modern mind are in fact, the same that plague thinkers today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of all my teachers, past and present. In particular, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to my supervisor, Professor David Thomas, for his patience, kindness and insightful advice. I have never felt rushed or under pressure to send drafts of chapters and this has made the process much more enjoyable.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their continued prayers and encouragement.

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INTRODUCTION

“London is about to be attacked by Osama bin Sheikspeare” (Taylor, 2004). So writes Gary Taylor on the ‘Shakespeare and Islam’ event, held in conjunction with the Islam Awareness Week at the capital’s Globe Theatre in November 2004 (Ibid). At first glance, the fact that the words ‘Shakespeare’ and ‘Islam’ are paired together seems bizarre and without basis. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) lived hundreds of years ago, whereas large-scale Muslim immigration to Britain only began in the last couple of decades. (Abbas, 2005: 9). Look deeper, however, and a connection can be found between the Bard and the Islamic religion.

Shakespeare lived in an era when England was pursuing strategic relations with the mighty Muslim powers of the day, epitomised by the luxurious Ottoman Empire (Matar, 1999: 19). This was when the lay population ached for the opportunity of a better life in the East (Ibid: 65) and when tales of those who had been taken prisoner by the menacing Muslims, or who had inexplicably converted to Islam, spread like wildfire (Maclean, 2007: 124). Hence, Shakespeare could not help but reiterate these pertinent realities, spoken of everywhere and by everyone. As Taylor notes:

Islam was an important part of Shakespeare's world, and English superstitions about Islam shaped some of his work. Shakespeare apparently read Richard Knolles's General History of the Turks (1603), which means that he knew more about Islamic history and culture than most of us. He refers to Islam - to the prophet "Mahomet," to Morocco and Barbary and Constantinople, to Moors, Turks, Ottomites, sultans, saracens, paynims, moriscos - at least 141 times, in 21 different plays (Taylor, 2004).

Perhaps this is where the Muslim Shakespeare theory originates from. According to this hypothesis, Shakespeare was not an Englishman, but an Arab Muslim whose name was Shaykh Zubayr (Ghazoul, 1998: 9; also see Taylor, 2004). The hypothesis is an intriguing one but has failed to gain any adherents from serious Shakespearean experts.

Doubtlessly, Shakespeare knew something of Islam and Muslims. But not only Shakespeare. The same is true of numerous other dramatists such as Christopher Marlowe, Robert Daborne, Phillip Massinger, Thomas Kyd and George Peele (Wann, 1915: 164-166). In total, up until the Puritan ban on staging plays in 1642, forty-seven plays were produced which dealt with Muslim characters and/or “oriental matter” (Ibid: 166).

This thesis will study the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Early Modern English Drama by considering the historical context and analysing references to the “Moors and Turks” (Vitkus, 1997: 173) in four plays, (see section 2.1. for the specific plays and why they have been chosen). The implications in modern times are then tracked.

The area is caught in a terminological minefield. The words “Other,” “race” and “Moor” are intrinsic to the study but are hotly disputed. Muslims were the Other of Christian, European civilisation, but the exact meaning of this is debatable. For some writers “the ‘other’ always constitutes the outside, the person who is different ... a group of people who are distinguished from the norm” (Mountz, 2009: 328). The process of differentiation is essential, as paradoxically, the Other “threatens too close to home” (Bartels, 1990: 450). However, for postmodern thinkers, the term is utilised as

recognition of diversity (See Mountz, 2009: 330). It is safe to suggest that in the Early Modern world, Muslims were viewed between the first two negative definitions; being too far from and dangerously near to Europe.

'Race' is doubly "contentious" (Loomba and Burton, 2007: 1). It is unclear in both today's present and yesterday's past. Experts acknowledge "that race is not a natural category but a social construct," (Ibid) yet throughout history it has been employed 'biologically' to unite and separate humans (Ibid). This leads to the question of whether or not it is anachronistic to project the concept of 'race' back into Renaissance plays. Michael Neill summarises the issue succinctly; "To talk about race ... is to fall into anachronism; yet not to talk about it is to ignore something fundamental" (1998: 362). What is certain is that 'race' had a plethora of connotations, ranging from "family, class, or lineage" (Loomba and Burton, 2007: 2) to "skin colour and religion" (Ibid, 13). It is precisely because of such fluidity in meaning that 'race' in Early Modern drama should be studied.

An example is the identity of the 'Moor.' Early Modern texts show that the word was used to describe those with black skin and indeed any other skin colour, leading to conjunctions such as Black Moors, Tawny Moors and White Moors (Sanders, 2003: 11). Complications also arose with geographical origins and religious beliefs; the 'Moor' could be "African,' 'Ethiopian,' [a] 'Negro,' and even 'Indian' ... who was either black or Moslem [sic], neither, or both" (Bartels, 1990: 434). For most audiences, despite the rich complexity, the word 'Moor' conjured up an image of "both religious and colour difference" (Loomba, 2002: 46), an individual who most probably was a Muslim with non-White skin.

The Early Modern period has been chosen because it was a watershed moment in English history. England was moving into the Renaissance, but was not yet the undisputed colonial king and it was also when some of the greatest drama in the English language has ever been written.

Often, studies of Christian-Muslim interaction focus on specific encounters: wars, battles, treaties, meetings, religious disputations and scriptural and dogmatic comparisons of each faith. This proposal offers another way of studying the relations between the two groups. It allows a glimpse into how Muslims were viewed by English Christians in their own realm; how they were believed to be, and therefore, how they were portrayed.

Of course, one could study this area without examining literature or drama, focusing instead on ballads, pamphlets and religious sermons. Julia Schleck believes this is the better method in considering the reception of Muslims in Early Modern England (2011). She argues that plays are inferior to other non-fiction sources, especially when compared to travel accounts, because the latter were more popular and also more truthful (Ibid: 14; 20).

However there are some significant counter-points to this. Firstly, travel writers would have had a limited readership; only the literate population could access their writings. Plays were enjoyed by all sectors of society, the literate and the illiterate, the elite and the masses. Secondly, it is these same pieces of drama which have enjoyed long-lasting fame and renown. They are being read and performed today by millions of

people across the globe, including Muslims. The 'real-life' sources, whilst incredibly important, pale in comparison; they do not receive the same attention that drama does.

It is for this reason why drama has been chosen. Previous scholarship on the topic can be divided into a number of groups. The first includes works which consider the depiction of Muslims as Moors (Bartels, 1990 and 2008). Similarly, the second school scrutinises the representation of Muslims as Ottoman Turks (Dimmock, 2005a; McJannet 2006), whilst the third approach studies both types of representation, but only as far as the original historical context allows (Burton 2005; Birchwood 2007; Degenhardt 2010). Amongst the publications that attempt to provide modern, post-colonial readings, dramas are studied in isolation from each other (Loomba and Orkin 1998; Loomba 2002).

The three chapters of the thesis will aim to provide a fresh discourse and a new dimension to work with. Chapter One researches the historical backdrop to the plays and playwrights. It investigates Anglo-Islamic relations and perceptions across the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods in order to discover the main ways of thinking about Islam and Muslims, from across all societal sectors.

Chapter Two is the heart of the study. Beginning with plot summaries of *Tamburlaine Parts I and II*, *A Christian Turned Turk*, *Othello: The Noble Moor of Venice* and *The Renegado*, the discussion then moves onto a thematic, comparative analysis of all four. This will enable an understanding of how far societal perceptions found their way into these works and what purpose they served in terms of audience entertainment.

Chapter Three brings the exposition 'up to date' by exploring the precise implications the plays have for a post-9/11 society. They were written at a time when actual, physical contact with Muslims was minimal. Today, these same works are read and performed in the same land which is now home to millions of Muslims. The Chapter will illustrate how the questions that were asked then in terms of Islam and Muslims are the exact same that are being asked now.

The structure of the thesis is such that the centre (the plays) is buffered by two examinations of two historical time-frames (the original and the current). This is a good representation of why drama was chosen.

It is hoped that it will be clearly seen how the world of the dramatists was not all too different from our own. Centuries may have elapsed between then and now, but the sea of misunderstanding between Westerners and Muslims has unfortunately not receded.

CHAPTER ONE: RELATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

1.1. Introduction

Early Modern England is almost always associated with Tudor rule. Henry VIII and his six wives, Bloody Mary, the Virgin Queen, the religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants and victory over the Spanish Armada are all present in England's collective consciousness of its past. This is the story told to schoolchildren all over Britain leaving indelible impressions in their memories.

But the tale is not complete. Certain characters are missing. The omitted actors are Muslims, Turks from the Ottoman Empire and Moors from elsewhere. And these are the forgotten centuries of Christian-Muslim interaction. In popular thought the timeline of relations jumps from the Crusades to Britain as the colonial master of the Muslim world, and to modern day tensions after 9/11. Thus, Early Modern England is perceived as being contained in a European vacuum. But this is incredibly misleading and frankly, untrue. In fact, relations existed at every rung of society, from royal correspondences to piratical adventures on the seas. As David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto comment, "Diplomats, merchants, theologians, artists, poets, women and children, people from every class, pilgrims, slaves, criminals, camp followers- all had East-West connections" (1999: 2).

Subsequently, English perceptions of Muslims and the Islamic religion must be studied, beginning with the foundational images received from the Middle Ages to the diplomacy of the elite and beyond.

1.2. Foundational Images

Common perceptions of Islam and Muslims were passed down from medieval times. Elie Salem writes that Elizabethan “writings on Islam reflected more the spirit of the Middle Ages than that of the Renaissance” (1965: 43). In no other sphere was this more apparent than in how the Prophet of Islam and its holy book were represented. The life of Muhammad was still regarded as “one of slavery, theft, robbery and conceit” (Ibid: 45) and Muslims still ‘worshipped’ him as an “idol” (Chew, 1937: 395).

Remarkably, this idea of Prophet-worship amongst the monotheistic Muslims still exists in some twentieth century works. Samuel Chew in his seminal study of Anglo-Islamic relations during the Renaissance frequently uses the defunct term ‘Mohammedans’ and ironically laments that the English could not see that Muslims revered Muhammad as a prophet only (Ibid: 388). Likewise, Blanks, writing in 1999, astonishingly notes:

The Oxford English Dictionary still defines ‘Allah’ as the name of the Deity among ‘Mohammedans,’ an error that may well be the most politically incorrect in the history of modern lexicography (14).

The Qur’an was viewed with the same medieval lens; a fictitious text, created by Muhammad along with a heretical Christian and/or Jew (Salem, 1965: 47). The scholar Richard Burton went one step further, calling it “the work of the ‘devill’” (Cited in Ibid: 50) and was seriously perplexed as to how classical Muslim thinkers could accept it (Ibid).

The Protestant reformation continued with this display of anti-Islamic sentiment. Martin Luther (1483-1546) saw Islam and Catholicism as two sides of the same Satanic coin and fervently prayed for Jesus Christ to “smite both Turk and pope to the earth” (Cited in Ibid: 153-154). Here, ‘Turk’ meant ‘Muslim[s]’ in general (Rodinson, 2006: 36). John

Calvin (1509-1564) was equally vitriolic, arguing that Muslims “are leading so many people astray that they deserve to be put to death” (Cited in Slomp, 1995: 135).

The rise of the Ottomans provided further fuel for illustrations of the cruel Muslim Other. Europeans were horrified by successive Turkish victories on the continent and viewed the Ottoman Sultan as “the beast rising out of the sea described in the apocalypse” (Schwoebel, 1967: 4). For concerned Christians, the Ottomans’ increasing power was a sign of God’s anger against His flock (Chew, 1937: 106). It was for this reason that Pope Pius II (1405-1464) prayed thus:

If He is angry with us for our sins, which are many, His anger may be transferred to the impious Turks and the barbarian nations who dishonour Christ the Lord. Amen. (Cited in Schwoebel, 1967: 69).

These foundational images were, in effect portraits of an imagined Islam and of imagined Muslims, where “iconoclasm becomes idolatry, civilization becomes barbarity, monotheism becomes pagan polytheism, and so on” (Viktus, 1999: 207).

1.3. Royal Diplomacy

Despite the incredible levels of hate, the English did not shy away from Muslims, but engaged with them across various realms. Twenty years into Elizabeth’s reign (1553-1603), elite relations were forged. “The first English monarch to cooperate openly with the Muslims” (Matar, 1999: 19), she was “so fascinated by things Islamic that she requested from her ambassador in Istanbul some Turkish clothes” (Ibid: 34). Indeed, there was a genuine openness towards Muslims from Elizabeth. She regularly returned

Muslim captives from Spanish ships (Ibid: 20), and also forged warm relations with powerful Muslim rulers.

With the Ottomans, Gerald Maclean argues that Elizabeth's primary goal was to secure trading rights (2007: 46). To this effect, the post of ambassador to the Ottoman Empire was created (Ibid: 42). To guarantee English dominance in the region, the first ambassador, William Harborne, attempted to persuade the Sultan, Murad III (1546-1595) to support England against Catholic Europe (Ibid: 46-47). Elizabeth herself utilised this method to counter the threat from Spain (Rodinson, 2006: 34-35), inviting the Sultan to join an Anglo-Ottoman "alliance based solely on ideology ... strict monotheists against untrustworthy Catholics" (Ibid). Muslims had now become a partner in pure monotheism and Islam was now closer to English Protestantism than Spanish Catholicism. In 1580, the exercise seemed to work, when British traders were granted access to work within the Empire (Matar, 1998: 21).

For Maclean this religiously-backed enterprise was nothing but "a diplomatic fiction invented to ease trade" (Maclean, 2007: 47). Even if Elizabeth was just playing a political game, it is still incredible that she, the fair Protestant Queen, wanted to trade with Muslims, let alone that religion was used, or 'manipulated,' to justify it.

The relationship between England's Queen and the Ottomans' Sultan led to much suspicion, in that Elizabeth was accused of helping the Turk to invade Europe (Matar, 1999: 20; Dimmock, 2005b: 53). As Protestants saw the Turk as the twin half of the Pope, the Pope saw Elizabeth as "a confederate with the Turk" (Matar, 1999: 20). For instance, during the Ottomans' planned invasion of Poland, many placed the blame

squarely on England (Dimmock 2005b: 55-56). However, letters from the Sultan to the Queen actually show that were it not for Elizabeth, peace would not have been made with the Polish King (Ibid).

Similarly, warm ties were cultivated with the Moroccan sovereign, Ahmad al-Mansur (1549-1603). Yet, as Nabil Matar's article illustrates, the relationship was very different to the one with the Ottomans (2008). The correspondence shows a much more equal relationship, where the two used each other for their own ends (Ibid: 60; 73).

Lavish praise was heaped on Elizabeth by Al-Mansur. He graciously prays for "the majesty in the lands of Christ, the sultana Isabel ... may God grant her all good and continue her good health" (Cited in Ibid: 58). Sultana *Isabel* (the continental form of *Elizabeth*) was less eloquent but still returned the favour, signing each letter with, "your sister and relative according to the law of crown and scepter" (Cited in Ibid: 73).

The two needed each other as allies against their common enemy; Spain. (Ibid: 60). What followed was a three-way Early Modern diplomatic tangle between England, Spain and Morocco. Both England and Morocco offered to help the other, but were incredibly reluctant to actually give it (Ibid: 73). Al-Mansur wanted English aid in attacking Spanish colonies and for the two nations to rule over them jointly, but no assistance was given (Ibid). Elizabeth needed money to defend Spanish attacks, but this support was frequently delayed (Ibid: 64).

Faced with this unwillingness to help, Elizabeth wrote a surprising letter which conveys her ultimate confidence in dealing with Muslim rulers (Ibid: 64). There is the complaint that Al-Mansur is not fulfilling his promises to help, is refusing to release English

captives and is quite simply “ignoring the friendship between them” (Ibid). The trump card is then played; she threatens one Muslim leader with another:

We know for sure also that the Great Turk, who treats our subjects with great favour and humanity, will not appreciate your maltreatment of them in order to please the Spaniards. (Cited in Ibid).

Subsequently, their relationship fizzled out with the deaths of both in the same year (Ibid: 73). Elizabeth realised that the Ottomans were more important and more fruitful to England. Anglo-Moroccan diplomacy was a far more equal enterprise when compared to the necessary relations with the dynamic Ottoman Turks.

Another dimension present in Elizabeth’s relationship with the Moors was that of ‘race.’ In 1596, she wrote to the Mayor of London, “there are of late divers black-moores brought into this realme, of which kinde of people there aire allready here to manie” (Cited in Bartels, 2006: 305) and ordered them to be deported to Spain (Ibid). This highly charged statement seems to have fallen on deaf ears, for five years later the order was repeated; they are “infidels, having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel” (Cited in Ibid). The specific identity of these ‘black-moores’ is puzzling. They may have been Black Moors or Black Muslims, perhaps non-black Muslims or even “dark-skinned non-Muslims” (Loomba and Burton, 2007: 16). What is clear though is that Elizabeth wanted them out of England.

Emily C. Bartels claims that Elizabeth aimed to exchange these individuals with English captives in Spain (Bartels, 2006: 311-312). Whilst the argument may contain some truth, why would she also call them infidels and believe that there are too many living in the land? Bartels admits that the Queen’s words can be taken as “a race-based cultural

barrier” (Ibid: 305-306), the first of its kind for many centuries (Ibid). It is impossible to determine whether the Queen was inherently ‘racist,’ ‘race’, as above, had different meanings compared to today; nevertheless, in terms of the Anglo-Moorish relationship, skin colour tied up with religious identity was an important issue.

For the most part, the Virgin Queen was incredibly comfortable with the Islamic world. Yet, her successor, James I (1566-1625), was the total opposite. Before becoming the English King, he authored the “fiercely oppositional” (Dimmock, 2005b: 57) poem, *On Lepanto*, which celebrates the defeat of the Ottomans by European forces in 1571 (Rhodes, Richards and Marshall, 2003: 9). The conflict was “Betwixt the baptiz’d race/And circumcised Turband Turkes” (Cited in Ibid: 96). What’s more, Christians were not only fighting the Turks but Satan himself who “hast inflamed their maddest minds” (Cited in Ibid: 97).

James’ antagonistic attitude towards Muslims did not disappear after being crowned. He refused to acknowledge letters from the Ottomans (Dimmock, 2005b: 57) and was wary of meeting Muslim dignitaries for “to welcome an infidel would be unbecoming to a Christian prince” (Chew, 1937: 152). According to Matar, even when James did allow closeness, it was only to prove the superiority of Christianity, such as when he ‘healed’ the Turkish ambassador’s ill son with the sign of the Cross (1999: 34-35).

The sheer contrast between these successive monarchs, illustrates the two main ways in which England engaged with Islam. Often, individuals did not choose one extreme, but carved a contradictory path between the two, especially in their direct dealings with Muslims.

1.4. Travellers, Pirates, Captives and Converts

The English directly encountered their Muslim counterparts through travel and trade (Ibid: 65). Muslim lands promised material luxury; with lavish Turks and exotic Moors, “The fabulous was only just beyond the horizon” (Chew, 1937: 542).

Not all who journeyed to the Muslim world did so for material. Two travellers who each had their own reason for journeying and who therefore, exhibit different reactions to Islam and Muslims, will now be mentioned.

The first of these, Thomas Dallam, was an organ maker who visited Istanbul in 1599 (Maclean, 2004: 3). He was sent to present his organ as a gift to Sultan Mehmed III (1566- 1603), (Ibid). Dallam’s account of his stay in the Ottoman Empire reveals an intriguing glimpse into how the English could feel safe amongst Muslims, particularly on the cultural axis. After performing in front of the Sultan and others, “Diveres of them would take me in their armes and kis me, and wyshe that I would dwell with them” (Cited in Ibid: 27).

Mehmed wanted Dallam to delay his return to England and Henry Lello, the ambassador, encouraged him to comply with the Sultan’s request (Ibid: 45-46).

However, Dallam was apprehensive and revealed his inherent suspicions:

that was now come to pass which I ever feared, and that was that he in the end would betray me, and turne me over into the Turkes hands, whear I should Live a slavish Life, and never companie againe with Christians (Cited in Ibid: 46).

Turks may have appreciated the arts but for Dallam, they could never be fully trusted.

There was an anxiety that at any given moment, they may transform into those

malicious and sadistic masters, who “thinke the worste things they have is tow good for cristians” (Cited in Ibid: 15). In the end, Dallam delayed his journey for a few weeks but was always waiting to return home (Ibid: 48).

The second traveller, William Biddulph, a clergyman, possessed a more aggressive view of Islam and Muslims. All that his eyes saw was interpreted by his religious mentality. Biddulph had no qualms in describing the Islamic Prophet as “the Devill” (Cited in Ibid: 86) and to proclaim “how great the power of Satan is in them” (Cited in Ibid: 87). He was clearly accustomed to the polemical arguments used by Protestants against Islam and did not shy away from utilising them, more so than Thomas Dallam. Yet, his eight year stay in Muslim lands did allow him to pick up on more ‘agreeable’ aspects of the religion (Ibid: 87-90). Biddulph refers to the main practices of Islam such as the five daily prayers, fasting and giving charity, but it is likely that he saw these works as false, stemming from a ‘forged’ and ‘wicked’ faith.

There were also Anglo-Islamic encounters of a less friendly kind (Matar, 1999: 24) namely; piracy. Early Modern Piracy has been described as “another way of fighting the battle between Christianity and Islam” (Fuchs, 2000: 49).

Yet this state of affairs changed completely when King James criminalised piracy (Matar, 1999: 57-58). For the disengaged buccaneers, there was only one solution; join the Muslim ships (Ibid). Consequently, Muslim pirates, who were previously regarded as religious foes to be eliminated, were now seen as potential ‘employers.’

Fighting *for* the Muslims, English pirates “turned their weapons against their countrymen and kindred” (Ibid: 63). Clearly, the opportunity to plunder meant more than loyalty to

one's country and faith. Observers at home also noticed the trend, chief amongst them was Captain John Smith; "Now because they grew hateful to all Christian princes, they retired to Barbary" (Cited in Fuchs, 2000: 50). The danger was that these pirates would not only fight against Christians at sea, but, would also defeat Christianity itself by converting to Islam. This was not altogether a theoretical fear; many English pirates did become Muslim (Ibid; Matar, 1999: 63). The most famous piratical "renegade" (Matar, 1998: 22), was John Ward, the inspiration behind Robert Daborne's 1612 play, *A Christian Turned Turk*, and the Jack Sparrow character in the popular *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series (Zaman, 2011).

The premise that Englishmen could convert to Islam at any given moment was expressed with captives too (Matar, 1999: 72). Taken by Muslim pirates to become slaves in North Africa, these English men, women and children "experienced the Muslim world from below" (Ibid: 71). The fact that they were simply swooped up off their own coasts reiterated the absolute horror that was felt towards Islam and its followers.

As a result, captives who were freed yearned to show that despite their prolonged exposure to Islam, they were unpolluted and spiritually clean (Ibid: 72). The rest of the literate population was also incredibly eager to learn about their experiences. Putting the two together meant that accounts written by captives became an increasingly popular publication. As Matar notes, from 1577 to 1704, no fewer than twenty two texts about English captivity under Islam were written (Ibid).

For those who converted to Islam, the wrath of many an English thinker was upon them. These puzzled writers expounded many different theories as to why a Christian should

wish to become a Muslim (Matar, 1998: 22). A prominent idea was that individuals were attracted to Islamic culture, paving the way for their downfall (Ibid: 28). The Islamic world, for these thinkers, was a world of “lust” (Ibid: 40). Sin reigned supreme, with excess wealth and temptation. Poor, weak, Christian hearts could not help being sucked into the magnetism that was on offer. As Matar states, “it was the allure of an empire that changed an Englishman’s hat into a turban” (Ibid: 15). It was imperative that Christians keep away from Muslims, as Sir Thomas Shirley was keen to affirm; “conuersation with infidelles doth much corrupte” (Cited in Ibid: 28).

This is why Islam was seen to be so terrible. Not only were Muslims conquering the world, not only were they kidnapping innocent people and not only were some in society trading and pillaging with Muslims, but worse than all of this was that others actually willed their souls into damnation by “Turning Turk” (Maclean, 2007: 124). These ‘traitors’ were ever ready to give up their home, their country, and even their saviour. Islam was not only strange; it was dangerous, for the traveller, pirate, captive, convert and every other class of person. Converts are thus a common feature in many Early Modern plays with the figure becoming a new “dramatic type” (Matar, 1993: 490).

1.5. Placing Islam and Muslims

In determining the place of Islam and Muslims in Early Modern England, it must be remembered that a distinction was often made between the Moor and the Turk (Matar, 1999: 8). As noted above, one added element of perception with the former but not the latter was racial categorisation (Bartels, 2006: 306; McJannet, 2008: 254).

The fact that some Moors had non-White skin was viewed as a reflection of their nature, being “sexually overdriven and emotionally uncontrollable” (Matar, 1999: 13). Their ‘colour’ was an indicator of the ‘apparent’ darkness of their souls; a theme which will be explored in Chapter Two. Elizabeth herself used what today’s eyes would see as racially-loaded language, making it clear that there was a “derogatory association of blackness and race” (Bartels, 2006: 306) at this time.

The Turks did not conform to any clear racial markers; instead, perceptions looked to their imposing power, which is why they were the more popular type of Muslim to be depicted. Traders were more interested in the Levant than North Africa and “even captives identified with the dominant Ottoman elite” (Maclean, 2007: 117).

Consequently, the position of the Turks in English thought was “ambiguous” (Dimmock, 2005b: 57). On the one hand, they were seen to be, as the historian, Richard Knolles declared; “the present terrour of the world” (Cited in Maclean, 2004: xiii). The idea that Muslims could incite panic and fear is “a war cry that continues to haunt us today” (Ibid). On the other hand, this did not stop Elizabeth from forging close relations with the Sultans, or from English merchants trying out their luck in the new Constantinople.

Ambiguity towards the Turk was sharpened by what Maclean calls “imperial envy” (Maclean, 2007: 20). Yes, the Ottomans were “cruel and tyrannical, deviant and deceiving” (Matar, 1999: 13), but they reigned supreme over numerous lands. They were an unstoppable force which could not be controlled and the English desired this above all else; the power, the wealth and the glory (Maclean, 2004: xiv; Maclean, 2007: 20).

Although, the Turk and Moor were perceived and portrayed in different ways, observations were made about Muslims in general. One consideration was that working and living in the Muslim world could lead to a better life (Ibid: xiii). It was “an enormously attractive alternative to life in the British Isles” (Ibid). However, such opportunities came at a price, for as Thomas Dallam felt; there was a fear that Muslims were ever ready to humiliate their Christian visitors (Matar, 1998: 4).

Another worry in the minds of the English was that frequent contact with the ‘unholy’ Muslims would lead to spiritual contamination; certain writers even denounced the drinking of coffee (Matar, 1998: 111-114). Coffee was known as the “Mahometan berry” (Ibid: 111) and it was “dangerous because it prepared Englishmen for apostasy to Islam” (Ibid: 112).

Such hazards meant that people expected to be shocked whenever they read about the Islamic religion. They craved fabulously savage stories of devious and perverse doings “so that they could feel secure in their moral and political spheres” (Matar, 1999: 125).

Early Modern England saw Muslims as the ultimate adversary, yet it would be improper to state that this view held a monopoly over all others. There were also some positive and unexpected encounters. Perhaps the most remarkable is the phenomenon of English clergy using the Qur’an to prove the inferiority of Judaism and Atheism vis-a-vis Christianity (Matar, 1998: 108-109). As the Qur’an supports the belief that Jesus received divine inspiration, clergymen utilised it to show that even Muslims believed in some elements of Christ’s mission (Ibid).

Muslims were not only regarded as being better than Jews and Atheists, but there was a feeling that they were the better of Protestantism's two enemies. Most preferred Muslims over Catholics (Matar, 1999: 77). At a Christian funeral in Istanbul in 1612, the chaplain rhetorically asked, "The *Turke* permitteth Christs Gospel to be preached; the Pope condemneeth it to the racke and inquisition; who is the better man?" (Cited in Maclean, 2004: 49). Biddulph also had to admit that it was safer to travel amongst Muslims:

I hold it better for Merchants and other Christians to sojourne and to use trade and trafficke amongst Turkes then Papists; for the Turke giveth libertie of conscience to all men, and liketh well of every man that is forward and zealous in his owne religion...(Cited in Ibid: 90).

1.6. Summary

Overall, the Muslim was everything that an "Englishman and a Christian was not" (Matar, 1999: 13). There may have been trade and adventures between the two, but on the religious plane, Islam was placed in direct opposition to Christianity. The Muslim became "a photographic negative of the self-perception of an ideal Christian self-image" (Blanks and Frassetto, 1999: 3). As Christians should be pious, honest and true, Muslims were seen as sinful, deceptive and false.

This problem escalated as the English realised that despite believing in the One True God, they could not conquer the lands of Islam (Matar, 1998: 13). It was a sorry state of affairs that "Muslims were beyond colonial reach" (Matar, 1999: 12-13). Thus, Islam could only be defeated in abstract and theory. Eschatology was one field that was utilised by some where Christians prayed for the defeat of the Muslims at the end of the

world (Matar, 1998: 19). An example is contained in the following words of the writer, Gabriel Harvey (1552-1631):

Lord have mercy upon thee, o little-little Turke. Pride may exalt his hawty presumptions, and Prowesse advance his terrible bravery; but there is a God in heaven; and they cannot laugh long, that make the Devil laugh and Christe weepe (Cited in Chew, 1937: 132-133).

Conversely, dramatists used their creative license to defeat Islam on the stage (Matar, 1998: 19). Muslims and the thought of them were present everywhere; in elite diplomacy, in trade agreements and treaties, in the accounts of travellers and captives, and in the minds and anxieties of the ordinary population. The populace at this time were ripe and at the “ready to accept the most fantastic plays” (Chew, 1937: 542), where the desire to overthrow the Muslim Other could be made possible in the here and now, rather than waiting for the apocalypse.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PLAYS

2.1. Introduction

English authors have gifted the world with some of the greatest stories, texts and plays. These tales have achieved a 'classic' status as a bridge between two worlds, reflecting the traditions and concerns of their own time, and yet, intimately speaking to and illuminating the lives of modern individuals across the globe.

In the Early Modern period, dramatic licence empowered playwrights to produce alternative versions of Anglo-Islamic interactions, creating "imaginary resolutions of real anxieties" (Vitkus, 2000: 7). The plethora of plays on Islam and Muslims has "fascinated" audiences, both yesterday and today (Maclean, 2007: 125).

In 1915, Louis Wann showed how many a dramatist yielded to this prospect, discovering that between 1586 and 1611, thirty-two topical plays were produced (164). This corresponds with the period "that saw the greatest activity" (Ibid: 166-167) in Early Modern drama.

It is beyond the limits of the study to consider all thirty-two plays. Thus, only a small fraction will be analysed:

- Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine The Great Parts I and II*
- Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk*
- William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello: The Noble Moor of Venice*
- Phillip Massinger's *The Renegado*

These plays have been selected due to the wide range of features that can be discussed. For instance, Marlowe's play was performed and published under the Virgin Queen's reign, whilst the others hail from the Jacobean era. *Tamburlaine* and *Othello* were hugely popular, charting the lives of the elite sultans, warriors and generals, whilst Daborne's work on pirates and captives was considerably less admired. Shakespeare's 'Muslim' is a Moor, the others; Turkish. These distinguishing markers thus facilitate ground for a detailed evaluation.

In the following discussion, each play will be introduced, the plot will be outlined and the main topics identified, before the themes common to all are scrutinised.

2.2. *Tamburlaine The Great: Parts I and II*

Performed in 1587-1588 and published in 1590 (Cunningham, 1981: 1), Marlowe's esteemed play is based on the life of Tamerlane (1336-1405) and his wars with historical figures, such as the Ottoman emperor Bayezid I, known as Bajazeth in the play. Marlowe was "the first professional dramatist to portray an Ottoman sultan on the public stage" (McJannet, 2006: 63) and therefore enjoyed considerable success (Cunningham, 1981: 23).

Part I introduces Tamburlaine as the "terror of the world" (*Tamburlaine I*, 1.2.38), a shepherd whose speeches become deeds. He holds "the Fates bound fast in iron chains/And with my hand turn Fortune's wheel about" (Ibid, 1.2.173-174). Such stupendously monumental language is a form of cosmic ordering, where Tamburlaine's desires become actualities; "You see, my lord, what working words he hath" (Ibid, 2.3.25). He defeats the Persian king, Mycetes, double crosses his brother Cosroe, and

takes the Persian crown for himself along with Zenocrate, the kidnapped daughter of the 'Soldan' of Egypt (Act 1-2).

Bajazeth is the next to face Tamburlaine's might. Humiliated in battle, he and his wife Zabina are held captive in degrading conditions. Losing their faith in a "sleepy Mahomet" (Ibid, 3.3.269), they kill themselves. (Act 5.1).

The Egyptian Soldan is the last to be defeated but his life is spared due to Zenocrate's requests. The play ends with Tamburlaine's promise to triumph over more territory and to marry Zenocrate (Ibid).

Part II continues in a similar vein. Tamburlaine has three sons and Callapine has replaced his father, Bajazeth, as the conqueror's prisoner, managing to escape later. Orcanes, the King of Natolia, and other leaders intend to halt Tamburlaine's progress and agree to a treaty with the Christians, headed by Sigismond. Sigismond, however, breaks the treaty and the Christian forces are utterly vanquished (*Tamburlaine II* Act 2.3).

Zenocrate passes away, and Callapine becomes emperor of Turkey. The ultimate showdown between the two camps takes place. Yet again, Tamburlaine wins, but the victory is marred by him killing his eldest son for refusing to fight (Act 2-4). After sacking Babylon, the controversial scene arrives, where the Qur'an is burnt. Shortly after, 'stricken' with illness, Tamburlaine, God's own scourge, is dead (Act 5.3).

One major theme in *Tamburlaine* is that Muslims are diametrically opposed to Christians. "We all are glutted with the Christians' blood" (Ibid, 1.1.14), declares the viceroy of Byron, suggesting a thirst for killing that can only be quenched by physical

exhaustion. Tamburlaine, himself references this notion, proclaiming that he will “enlarge/Those Christian captives” (*Tamburlaine I*, 3.3.46-47) against “the cruel pirates of Argier/...Inhabited with straggling runnagates,/That make quick havoc of the Christian blood” (Ibid, 3.3.55,57-58). Many realities that the audience would have been familiar with are mentioned, namely Christians as captives, slaves and renegades, whilst the repeated use of the phrase ‘Christian blood’ insinuates Muslims as a tribe of feasting, vampiric murderers.

Tamburlaine equates his mission to conquer the world with redeeming ordinary Christians, allowing the audience to view him as a saviour and not as another Eastern despot. The captured Bajazeth realises that “Now will the Christian miscreants be glad,/Ringing with joy their superstitious bells/And making bonfires for my overthrow” (Ibid, 3.3.236-238). Indeed, as Linda McJannet notes, this is not an addition on Marlowe’s part but is based on historical precedents when “several European monarchs wrote letters of congratulation to Timur” for his exploits (2006: 65).

Bajazeth and Zabina’s deaths, offer an interesting discussion on how far Marlowe intended his audience to support Tamburlaine against the Turks. It seems highly plausible that playgoers would revel in seeing an Ottoman Sultan and his empress commit suicide; yet, McJannet believes that “By dramatizing the sultan’s sufferings Marlowe enhances not diminishes his stature” (Ibid: 73). Perhaps, two emotions were experienced; sympathy for a sovereign held in abject conditions, tempered with a relief that divine justice has been served.

Tamburlaine possesses numerous Islamic terms and phrases; 'Mahomet' as Muhammad is mentioned thirty seven times, 'Alcaron' as the Qur'an three times, and 'Mecca' as Makkah twice. Additionally, some scholars have uncovered instances of characters paraphrasing Qur'anic verses and idioms (Archer, 2013: 76) At the same time, however, another common thread is the flexibility of faith and religious identity.

For instance, Bajazeth and Zabina are presented as devout Muslims when both pray to "Mahomet" (*Tamburlaine I*, 3.1.54 and 3.3.195). Nevertheless, when facing ignominy at the hands of Tamburlaine, they renounce their worship. Bajazeth speaks of a "sleepy Mahomet" (Ibid, 3.3.269) suggesting that the Islamic deity (Muhammad, not God, according to some Early Modern ideas about Islam) is oblivious to his servants' sufferings. Zabina discards her deity; Mahomet is now "cursed" (Ibid, 3.3.270) and becomes completely non-existent, "Then is there left no Mahomet, no God" (Ibid, 5.1.239). This process "calls attention to the flimsiness of a faith based on anthropomorphism and expectation of personalized divine assistance" (Goldberg, 1993: 575).

Orcanes displays the same pious fluidity. A Muslim character, shocked by the Christians' betrayal, himself shockingly offers a "sacrifice" (*Tamburlaine II*, 2.2.45) to Jesus and petitions the Christian divinity to "witness to Thy servant's perjury!" (Ibid, 2.2.46). Unlike Mahomet, Jesus provides assistance when Sigismond's forces are routed, but Orcanes, almost comically, is unsure; "Christ or Mahomet hath been my friend" (Ibid, 2.3.11). The word "or" is humorous, illustrating how far worship in *Tamburlaine* depends on worldly success.

The protagonist is also in a state of religious flux, despite the fact that the historical Timur was a Muslim. In *Part I*, Tamburlaine calls on “Jove” (2.7.17) and “the Chiefest God” (Ibid, 4.2.8). In *Part II*, there is a complete transformation; “For I have sworn by sacred Mahomet” (1.3.109.) Here, he is presented as a Muslim (Goldberg, 1993: 583 and Burton, 2005: 79). This is not the final change in Tamburlaine’s religiosity, as similar to Bajazeth and Zabina’s ‘atheism’, he decides to burn the “Turkish Alcaron/And all the heaps of superstitious books/Found in the temples of that Mahomet/Whom I have thought a god?” (Ibid, 5.1.172-175). Tamburlaine rejects “that Mahomet” because he has killed numerous Turks but has not faced any divine retribution (Ibid, 5.1.178-181).

Contemporary academics see this as a Marlovian attack on all religions (Goldberg, 1993: 578). By choosing Islam, Marlowe was able to “scrutinise religious belief at a safe distance” (Ibid). Yet, some commentators during this time were able to see through the disguise. Robert Greene condemned the play for “daring God out of heaven with that Atheist *Tamburlan*” (cited in Cunningham, 1981: 3).

The question of whether Tamburlaine’s subsequent illness is a punishment from ‘Mahomet’ has been debated vigorously (Goldberg: 1993, 584). Matthew Dimmock believes it is a “tantalising possibility, but an unlikely one” (Dimmock, 2013: 122) considering the portrayal of a slumbering deity earlier on, whereas Dena Goldberg believes it is “blasphemy to deny it” (1993: 584) but concedes that a Christian audience would not agree (Ibid). Indeed, writers speak of a dilemma on the part of the audience; “While the unholy act implied a sympathetic identification with Islam, it also posited Mahomet’s powerlessness to rescue the book” (Degenhardt and Williamson, 2011: 1).

What can be accepted is that the major characters in *Tamburlaine* all display a fickle faith, turning and returning to various modes of belief.

2.3. A Christian Turned Turk.

A Christian Turned Turk, written by Robert Daborne, was published in 1612 (Matar, 1998: 54). Based on ballads and pamphlets (Wann, 1915: 171), it is not as highly regarded as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*; "it is a contemptible piece of work, coarse and scabrous, bombastic and noisy, ill-constructed and confused" (Chew, 1937: 532).

The drama provides an account of the life of the pirate John Ward, mentioned in Chapter One, beginning with his attack on a French vessel. However, Ward himself is duped when two crew members, Gallop and Gismund, loot the loot and escape to Tunis (Scene 1-4).

In Tunis, Benwash, a Jewish go-between 'turned Turk', his Turkish wife Agar, servant Rabshake, and Voada, the sister of the Janissaries' Captain, are all introduced (Scene 5-6). Ward arrives and is pressured into converting to Islam. At first, he is resilient, "Is this the hook your golden bait doth cover?" (*Christian*, 7.34), but succumbs when he lays eyes on Voada; "Here comes an argument that would persuade /A god turn mortal" (ibid, 7.90-91). A dumb show follows with a ritual conversion ceremony. The gravity of the action is left to speak for itself. No words are needed (Scene 8).

Another real-life pirate, Simon Dansiker, is in the process of redemption from his life of sin on the seas. Setting fire to Benwash's house and the ships in the harbour, he leaves for France, where in order to complete his repentance, the French authorities order him to capture Benwash (Scene 9; 14).

Voada's temptation of Ward complete, she promptly falls out of love with him and in love with Alizia, disguised as a boy. What follows are crimes of passion, Voada shoots Raymond, Alizia's beloved, Alizia discovers this and kills herself, Voada stabs Ward, Ward stabs her back and is arrested. Benwash kills Agar and Gallop for sleeping together and cruelly murders Rabshake. Dansiker and Ward both commit suicide, the former, honourably, revealing his plans before the authorities catch him; the latter, shamefully, cursing Muslims and ruining his renegade status. (Scene 10-11; 15-16).

The overarching message of Daborne's play is that close contact between Christians and Muslims is dangerous; it can lead to lust, sin, conversion and damnation. Gallop risks perdition by sleeping with Agar, "Those sheets have brought me low enough already" (Ibid, 10.86). The irony is paramount bearing in mind that Benwash converted from Judaism and "turned Turk-all to keep/My bed free from these Mahometan dogs" (Ibid, 6.75-76). Agar simply commits adultery with a Christian instead.

Lust marks Ward's downfall too. Voada offers an enticing, yet deadly proposition; "Turn Turk- I am yours" (Ibid, 7.127). Ward accepts; "the flame doth burn" (Ibid, 7. 172), referring not only to the flames of desire but the flames of Hell which apostasy leads to in the English imagination. Intriguingly, Ward rejects all other arguments including that Islam is the right religion because Muslims enjoy wealth and worldly success (See Ibid, 7. 38-40). But once he is seduced, he seems to accept this; "My name is scandalled? What is one island/Compared to the Eastern Monarchy?" (Ibid, 7. 181-182). What is disgrace in miniscule England compared to admiration in the largest empire in the world?

For Daborne, conversion leads to disfigurement and damnation (he entered the clergy later on in life [Vitkus, 2000: 24]). There is physical disfigurement when it is alluded to that Ward has undergone circumcision as part of his conversion (*Christian*, 13.52-55). Yet, it must be remembered that this 'circumcision' takes place in a dumb show and is followed up by numerous jokes from other characters at Ward's expense (Ibid, 9.3-4; 13.52-55). This puts into serious doubt the actuality of any real circumcision ritual taking place. Having said that, the fact that Daborne includes the topic indicates that even the hint of having been circumcised is dangerous enough.

National disfigurement also takes place. Once Ward turns Turk, there are more questions than answers. Is there such a thing as an "English Muslim" or is this an oxymoron, a contradiction, something alien, strange and terrifying? Interestingly, Daborne seems to offer a conclusion *before* Ward's rebellion, almost as a premonition for the audience. When selling Christian captives to Benwash, one of them remarks, "The soil that bred you, sire, doth not bring forth/Such hideous monsters that we should imagine/You can be so cruel to betray/So many innocent lives..." (Ibid, 6.245-248). The fact that Ward is a 'hideous cruel monster' full of 'betrayal' allows the audience to infer that he is more Muslim than English. Indeed, when Ward dies, his epitaph reads, "Ward sold his country, turned Turk, and died a slave" (Ibid, 16.326).

2.4. *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice.*

Regarded as "the greatest domestic tragedy in the English language" (Sanders, 2003: 9), *Othello* was first performed in 1604 and published in 1622 (Ibid: 1). Adapted hundreds of times, from Hollywood to Bollywood and beyond (BBC, 2006), it exerts a

pull on writers and audiences that “has never been less than remarkable” (Sanders, 2003: 17).

The drama opens with Iago and Roderigo outside Brabantio’s house. Waking him, they reveal that his daughter, Desdemona, has eloped with General Othello, an “old black ram” (*Othello*, 1.1.89). Enraged, Brabantio hurries to the Senate, unable to understand how Desdemona could “fall in love with what she feared to look on?” (Ibid, 1.3.98). The Senate is also searching for Othello due to an impending Turkish threat against Cyprus. Once there, Desdemona stands by her husband; she loves him for all the exotic adventures he has experienced (Ibid, 1.3.287-288).

Accepting their testimony, the Duke announces that Othello is “more fair than black” (Ibid, 1.3.286) and sends the couple to Cyprus, where the Turks are destroyed in a storm. Iago, the two-faced, “walking encyclopaedia of gutter thoughts” (Howard, 2003: 424), jealous that Othello chose Michael Cassio as his lieutenant, decides to hatch an intricate plan which utterly destroys the lives of all those involved (Ibid, 2.1-2.3).

He encourages Cassio to get drunk, leading to a brawl with Roderigo. Othello arrives and dismisses Cassio; “Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that/Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?” (*Othello*, 2.3.151-152).

Iago then convinces Othello that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair. He persuades his wife Emilia to steal from Desdemona a handkerchief gifted to her by Othello. Iago plants it in Cassio’s lodgings and Othello therefore receives “ocular proof” (Ibid, 3.3.361). Two instances of husbands killing their wives follow; Othello strangles Desdemona in her bed and Emilia, ascertaining that it was Iago’s plan all along, is

stabbed by him. Once Othello realises what has happened, he takes his own life too. The play ends with the horrific sight of three dead bodies on the stage (Ibid, 3.3-5.2).

Othello does not contain any mention of 'Mahomet' or the 'Alcaron' as in *Tamburlaine*. Yet, Shakespeare speaks of similar issues in more subtle ways. For instance, the question of identity and self-definition, especially when it comes to non-Europeans and non-Christians is paramount, particularly when the boundary between them is blurred.

Othello is "noble" (Ibid, 3.4.22) and "valiant" (Ibid, 1.3.47, yet he is also described by his differences from Venetians and not by how far he has assimilated into society. Often, this involves the use of racial language, such as "thick lips" (Ibid, 1.1.67), a "sooty bosom" (Ibid, 1.2.70) and his skin colour as being black like the "devil" (Ibid, 2.1.16). The only specific piece of identification in the play is the word 'Moor' but, as outlined in the introduction, complications with the term make it deeply uncertain as to which exact country/nation Othello comes from and indeed, the history of his religious leanings (Viktus, 1997: 162).

Even Desdemona is unsure. She speaks of "the sun where he was born" (*Othello*, 3.4.26-27) without giving or knowing any extra particulars regarding her husband's birth place. In terms of religion, Shakespeare quite clearly portrays Othello as an upstanding Christian, concerned with abiding by the principles of "Christian shame" (Ibid, 2.3.153) but the mystery is whether he has always been so. Is Othello the Moor a born Christian or a convert? If the latter, was he once a Muslim? For instance, Iago mentions that Othello could possibly "renounce his baptism" (Ibid, 2.3.310) indicating that Othello perhaps did subscribe to an alternative creed. The genius of Shakespeare is that no

concrete answers are given one way or the other. Instead, it is left up to the audience to interpret what they see and hear on stage. Thus a reasonable argument can be made that due to the “deepening conflation of blackness with Islam” (Loomba and Burton, 2007: 13) in this period, some, maybe even most members of the audience would have seen Othello as someone with a strong Muslim past.

Consequently, some scholars suggest that Othello is a Muslim convert to Christianity based on the historical figure known as Leo Africanus (1494-1554) (Bartels, 1990: 434). Born in Granada as a Muslim, he travelled across Africa and was educated in Rome, where he was baptised by the Pope and re-named John Leo (Ibid: 436). In *A Geographical Historie of Africa* (1600), Africanus gives accounts of various tribes in the continent and it is clear that Shakespeare was inspired by his description of the Moors.

Africanus writes:

No nation in the world is so subject unto jealousy; for they will rather lose their lives, than put up any disgrace in the behalf of their women... They travel over the whole world to exercise traffic... and it is accounted heinous among them for any man to utter in company, any bawdy or unseemly word (Africanus, 1600: 154).

Othello, the former Muslim turned Christian is this wandering traveller, who succumbs to doubt, suspicion, envy, murder and suicide.

The second major theme of the play is similar to *A Christian Turned Turk's* in that cross-cultural contacts are seen to be destructive, specifically when racial stereotypes are adhered to. Othello's life story is completely dependent on Iago's and Desdemona's. If Othello is taken to represent the mysterious Islamic East, the latter embody the two contradictory English reactions to this world. Desdemona is the England which

“devour[s]” (*Othello*, 1.3.174) and seeks to make its fortune in Islamic lands, whilst Iago is the England of envy, distrust and outright hatred; “I retell thee again and again, I hate the Moor” (*Othello*, 1.3.350). As Ania Loomba notes, Iago’s name itself provides further evidence of this. It is based on Spain’s patron saint, Iago or James, known as “Matamoros... the Moor-killer” (2002: 104).

Othello is made to despise his possession of Europe (Desdemona) by Europe (Iago). Through skill and guile, Iago convinces Othello to accept stereotypes against his own self. Iago declares that it is unthinkable why Desdemona would reject “proposed matches/Of her own clime, complexion and degree” (*Othello*, 3.3.231-232) when “she seemed to shake and fear your looks” (Ibid, 207). Othello consequently destroys everything around him, having been destroyed himself (Braxton, 1990: 10).

This downward spiral is coupled with the increasing ‘Turkishness’ of Othello. Shakespeare begins with a Turkish military threat only to discard it suddenly. However, the Turks still “surround the play” (Vitkus, 1997: 169), in the sense of an internal, spiritual threat. The Ottomans may have been vanquished at sea, but they occupy a presence in a far more dangerous place; in the soul of a human being. This is why Othello castigates his soldiers for brawling, questioning whether they are “turned Turks” (*Othello*, 2.3.151) and why Iago promises that he is telling the truth, “or else I am a Turk” (Ibid, 2.1.113). Being a Turk or Muslim is equated with being violent, irrational and false.

Othello’s acceptance of racial generalisations in itself causes another generalisation, when his determination to execute Desdemona is seen as being natural to those with

non-white skin. After accepting Iago's advice, Othello proclaims, "Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell" (Ibid, 3.3.448). Shakespeare toys with the notion that the evil of the Moors' is inherent with their race, is deeply rooted and can be awoken from its dormancy at any moment. 'Vengeance' is "black;" therefore, it is not white and not Christian. However, it must be remembered that Iago is primarily responsible for this deadly chain of events. As Cyndia Susan Clegg remarks, "the responsibility for Othello's fall is, for the most part, comfortably displaced onto European imperialism" as represented by Iago (Clegg, 2006: 1).

This point receives fulfilment in Othello's last words. He narrates an episode from his early life in Aleppo "Where a malignant and turbaned Turk/Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,/I took by th'throat the circumcised dog/And smote him thus" (*Othello*, 5.2.348-352). The stage direction then reads "*He stabs himself*" (Ibid). Othello turns the knife on himself at the exact moment he remembers killing the Turk. Perhaps Othello has also become a Turk (Clegg, 2009: 242). He 'Beat a Venetian' namely by murdering his wife, ruined the reputation of the state and subsequently has to smote the 'malignant and turbaned Turk" that resides within.

2.5. *The Renegado*

Performed in 1624 and published in 1630, Phillip Massinger's play is described as possessing an "accurate and realistic orientalism unmatched elsewhere in the imaginative literature of Renaissance England" (Chew, 1937: 536).

The title refers to the pirate Antonio Grimaldi, "the shame of Venice" (*Renegado*, 1.1.105) a convert to Islam who serves the Ottoman viceroy in Tunis, to whom he has

sold Paulina, a Venetian gentlewoman. Paulina's brother, Vitelli and his servant, Gazet, head to Tunis disguised as merchants in order to find her (Act 1.1).

Also in Tunis is Donusa, niece to the Sultan and betrothed to Mustapha from Aleppo. Donusa begins an affair with Vitelli after meeting him in the bazaar. Mustapha finds out and promptly informs the viceroy. Witnessing Donusa declare her love for Vitelli, the two are seized and arrested. The only solution is for Vitelli to be converted. Donusa sets out "To turn this Christian Turk, and marry him" (Ibid, 4.2.159), but ironically she is converted to Christianity. Both are sentenced to death. (Act 1.2-4.3).

Grimaldi, falling out of favour with the viceroy, is converted back to Christianity by Francisco, a priest, who plans an escape. Grimaldi steals a ship from the harbour, Paulina asks the viceroy for Donusa as her servant in return for Turning Turk, Gazet avoids becoming a eunuch and Vitelli escapes from jail. A happy ending follows, where all the characters leave Tunis for the safety of Christian Europe (Act 4.4.-5.8).

The Renegado seems to be a reversal of the plot of Daborne's play, "transforming a tragic ending into a comic one" (Degenhardt, 2009: 66). Like *A Christian Turned Turk*, the dangers of close contact between Christians and Muslims is underlined. There is the unintentional contact, as in Paulina and other innocent Christians being swooped up by Muslims armies and pirates. However the far more hazardous contact is the one which corresponds with the desires of the flesh. When Paulina lies that she will turn Turk, Gazet remarks, "Most of your tribe do so/When they begin in whore" (*Renegado*, 5.3.152-153). The same applies to Vitelli when yielding to Donusa, "Though the

Devil/Stood by and roared, I follow!” (Ibid, 2.4.134-135). Lust for the Muslim Other is a peril for Christians, resulting in physical and spiritual defilement.

The difference with Massinger is that he turns such a threat on its head, so that converters become converted. This is provided through the portrayal of Islamic arguments as being false. Vitelli, like Ward at first, resists conversion, “What strong poison/Is wrapp’d up in these sugar’d pills?” (Ibid, 4.3.73-74). He rejects Donusa’s point that “if blessings/Are donatives from heaven.../Look on our flourishing empire” (Ibid, 111-112; 115), by encouraging her to leave Islam; “The Devil, thy tutor, fills each part about thee,.../Dare you bring/Your juggling prophet/In comparison with/That most inscrutable and infinite Essence” (Ibid, 107;114-116). Donusa’s apologetics are defeated by Vitelli’s polemics.

However, Paulina’s success in resisting conversion is markedly different. She is protected not by her ability to argue, but with a relic. Even the viceroy has to admit, “The magic that she wears about her neck,/I think, defends her” (Ibid, 2.5.162-163). As such, there is a gendered variation of how Christian men and women can shield themselves from such dangers (Degenhardt, 2009: 65; 73).

Despite this dissimilarity, Massinger supplies all members of the audience with tools to help them combat Muslims and “defeat Islam” (Hayden, 2013: 351).

2.6. Theme One: Turks and Moors

Turks and Moors are fantastically exotic, but possess uncontrollable tyranny, chiefly against Christendom. *Tamburlaine*, *A Christian Turned Turk*, and *The Renegado* all illustrate Turks, in particular, as being out to devour Christians across the whole world.

Bajazeth unequivocally asserts, “our army is invincible:/As many circumcised Turks we have/And warlike bands of Christians renied/As hath the ocean or the Terrene sea” (*Tamburlaine I*, 3.1.7-10). Renegade Christians help to make up an unshakeable army, as vast as the Mediterranean Sea. This perception is swallowed whole by others as when the Governor of Jerusalem foolishly proclaims that Tamburlaine will be vanquished; “By Mahomet, he shall be tied in chains/Rowing with Christians in a brigandine” (*Tamburlaine II*, 3.5.92-93). Tamburlaine’s expected defeat is tied in with the miserable troubles experienced by Christians. Small wonder it is that the audience would have seen in him “a liberator of enslaved Christians from the scourge of Islam” (Cunningham, 1981: 54).

Indeed, Tamburlaine provides a vicarious opportunity to poke fun at the Turks, “Tush, Turks are full of brags/And menace more than they can well perform.../Alas, poor Turk, his fortune is too weak” (*Tamburlaine I*, 3.3.3-4, 6). Tamburlaine boasts that the Turks’ only power is in boasting; their *potential* threat is more dangerous than their *actual* exploits, because ‘fortune’ is not on their side.

This latent danger is risky enough for Vitelli to warn Gazet, “Temper your tongue, and meddle not with the Turks/Their manners, nor religion” (*Renegado*, 1.1.47-48). Trafficking with the Turks is a messy business, requiring self-restraint in terms of speech and cultural curiosity. Restraint is needed, because the Turkish elite are presented as having none, principally when it comes to the opposite sex. Vitelli imagines his sister, Paulina, being “Mewed up in his seraglio” (Ibid, 129) and Donusa readily admits that “Our jealous Turks,/Never permit their fair wives to be seen,/But at

the public bagnios, or the mosques,/And even then, veiled and guarded” (Ibid, 1.2.18-21).

In *Othello*, Turkish characters are absent, alluded to off-stage. Instead, the ‘Muslim’ as a Black Moor is represented. A major distinction with illustrations of the Turk is the use of racial insults; “a black African provoked curiosity... [and] contempt was the prevailing response” (Vaughan and Vaughan, 1997: 27). An association was made between dark skin colour and evil actions; a Moor in another play is described as “Black in his looke, and bloudie in his deeds” (Cited in Ibid, 30).

Black individuals were seen to harbour wild, animal-like instincts. Othello the “old black ram” (*Othello*, 1.1.89) is also a “Barbary horse” (Ibid, 111-112), and Iago pronounces that Brabantio’s descendants will “neigh” (Ibid, 112) because of their ‘unnatural’ blood. This ‘species’ is strange because of its practices too. Brabantio firmly believes that Desdemona has fallen for Othello because he has “enchanted her” (Ibid, 1.2.63) and with “foul charms/Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals” (Ibid, 73-74). The idea of Others as a practitioner of ‘charms’ is reiterated by Othello himself, when he informs Desdemona that the handkerchief, gifted by an Egyptian “charmer” (Ibid, 53) has “magic in the web of it” (Ibid, 3.4.65). An image of Moorish witchcraft is re-affirmed to the audience, in keeping with the context of the play in that “the 1590s saw the highest incidence of witchcraft accusations in Elizabeth’s reign” (Levin, 2003: 99).

Brabantio’s accusation is that Othello has altered Desdemona’s persona with supernatural tools. The audience can infer that Othello is also changeable but in a more psychological manner. It is Iago who conveys this, “These Moors are changeable

in their wills.../...The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts/shall be to him shortly as acerb as the coloquintida” (*Othello*, 1.3.336-338). It has been noted how quickly Othello does change, when calling upon his internal ‘black’ revenge. This is the absolute stereotype of the Moor, who changes direction as easily as the wind does.

Othello’s transformation from “Valiant” (*Ibid*, 1.3.47) to a “blacker Devil” (*Ibid*, 5.1.132) mirrors the deadly concoction of lust, jealousy and violence suffered by the Turks. In killing Desdemona, “the only time Shakespeare required a woman to be deliberately and gradually killed on stage” (Brown, 2011: 110), Othello recalls the lethal passions of the Ottomans, reinforcing the idea that all Muslims possess this, whether Turk or Moor. Othello may be a Christian, but cannot escape his Moorish identity which would have been viewed as being extremely close to a Muslim identity by the audience (Clegg, 2006: 11).

However, it must be remembered that Shakespeare deliberately complicates this, as it is Iago who is totally blameworthy. This play emphasizes the distinction between appearance and reality. As Norman Sanders writes:

Iago is perceived by everyone as “honest” which in his case actually means “dishonest”; Desdemona appears to Othello to be “unchaste” but is in truth “honest.” Physically Othello is black like the devil, yet it is beneath the white skin of Iago that the real devil lurks. (2003, 29).

Iago and his side-kick Roderigo cannot fathom how far Othello has been accepted into civil society. To be the Moor of Venice is to be “a principle of wild disorder lodged in the very heart of metropolitan civilization” (Neill, 1998: 363). Iago’s bigoted ‘murder’ of

Othello is precisely why the play is “controversial” (Bartels, 2008, 159) because it forces the audience to accept Othello as “the tragic hero” (Ibid).

The question of sympathy for the Muslim Other is raised in *Tamburlaine* too. Perhaps a tear can be shed for how Bajazeth and Zabina end their lives. The former, resolute, promising to “beat thy brains out of thy conquered head,” (*Tamburlaine I*, 5.1.287) whilst the latter hallucinating; “Tamburlaine, Tamburlaine!/Let the soldiers be buried. Hell, death, Tamburlaine,/hell! Make ready my coach, my chair, my jewels, I come,/I come, I come!” (Ibid, 316-319). Linda McJannet notes that their deaths “inspire pity from no less a witness than Zenocrate” (2006: 79), who petitions both Jove and Mahomet to “Pardon my love, O pardon his contempt” (*Tamburlaine I*, 5.1.365). Zenocrate’s cries are intended to make a sympathetic impact on the audience, twinned with relief that the Ottoman foe has been subdued.

Empathy may also exist with regard to Orcanes, “the most pious character in all of Marlowe” (Goldberg, 1993: 585). It is Orcanes’ prayer to Christ which is significant. It is wholly unexpected for him to call upon the Christian deity for assistance (*Tamburlaine II*, 2.2.39-46). Marlowe thus “gives prominence with which the non-Christian expresses religious feeling” (1981: 18), and the audience are witnesses to this. Marlowe plays on their wishes; the Turks must be defeated but what if a Turk prays to Jesus for victory?

The concept of sympathy is compensated by the frequent occurrence of suicide amongst Muslim characters. Bajazeth, Zabina, and Ward all end their lives in despair. Othello can also be included if he is taken as a formerly Muslim persona, whilst Asambeg (the viceroy in Massinger’s play) uncharacteristically decides to follow the

monastic path after Paulina deserts him (*Renegado*, 5.8.36-39). The contrast is heightened with Christian characters who display the utmost resolve to withstand terrible fates (Desdemona, Paulina and Vitelli) or who change before it is too late (Grimaldi and Dansiker). The idea is that Muslims are worldly-orientated and do not perceive the superiority of spiritual success as Christians do.

2.7. Theme Two: The Islamic Religion

References to Mahomet and the Alcaron abound in *Tamburlaine*, and also appear in *A Christian Turned Turk* and *The Renegado*. Remarkably, the word “Islam” is not to be found. Instead, dramatists represent Islam through a range of curious particulars.

These include the idea of the crescent moon as the symbol of Islam. Both Bajazeth and Orcanes speak of the Ottoman army in terms of a “moon” (*Tamburlaine I*, 3.1.11, *Tamburlaine II*, 3.1.66) which is “semicircled” (*Tamburlaine I*, 3.1.12, *Tamburlaine II*, 3.1.66) and resembles “horns” (*Tamburlaine I*, 3.1.12, *Tamburlaine II*, 3.1.67). John Calvin likened these to the horns of the devil or anti-Christ (Slomp, 1995: 134). Innocent facts can quickly become aggressive polemic.

In *The Renegado*, Mustapha points out the dedication “pilgrims pay at Mecca, when they visit/The tomb of our great prophet” (1.2.760-61). Quite clearly, Massinger knew something of the Hajj pilgrimage, but it is Madina that houses the Prophet’s tomb, not ‘Mecca.’ Gazet is another character who comically provides more observations of Islamic life, “The swine’s pox overtake you! There’s a curse/For a Turk that eats no hog’s flesh” (Ibid, 1.3.161-162) and recounts how non-Muslims must not wear green, “that forbidden colour” for fear of being beaten (Ibid, 1.1.56).

'Mahomet' was "readily accepted as an idol" (Dimmock, 2013: 109) which is why Muslims were castigated as pagans. (Vitkus, 1997: 161). Sigismond's advisers label Muslims as "heathenish," "pagans" and "infidels" (*Tamburlaine II*, 2.2.6, 13). Muslims also placate their 'deity' as when Callapine reveals that he will "sacrifice/Mountains of breathless men to Mahomet" (Ibid, 3.5.54-55).

In selling Vitelli's merchandise, Gazet too "Will swear by Mahomet and Termagant" (*Renegado*, 1.1.9). The latter was imagined as another Muslim god (*OED*: 2014), continuing the pagan association. The imagery is extended in Daborne's play. Ward submits to Voada "by thy god, by the great Mahomet" (*Christian*, 7.114) and when undergoing his conversion, there is the mysterious stage direction; "*Enter two bearing half-moons, one with a Mahomet's head following*" (Ibid, 8. s.d.). If the half-moon is an emblem of Islam, presumably so is 'Mahomet's head' in terms of its idolatry. According to Daniel J. Vitkus, this "grotesque, oversized, angry-eyed, turbaned head" (2000: 236) was a common prop for theatre groups.

In depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a pagan idol, dramatists relied on premises that were part of Christian thought since the Middle Ages (Dimmock, 2013: 17). Other legends are also utilised. For instance, Vitelli convinces Donusa of the truthfulness of Christianity by casting doubt on the truthfulness of Muhammad; "He taught a pigeon to feed in his ear,/Then made his credulous followers believe/It was an angel, that instructed him/In the framing of his Alcoran" (*Renegado*, 4.3.128-131). The origins of Islam are represented as being corrupt, the Qur'an was revealed not through the archangel Gabriel, but through the fraudulent use of a pigeon. Shakespeare also refers

to this in *Henry VI Part 1*, although the bird is a dove, the message is still evident (Dimmock, 2013: 7).

Another account is concerned with how Muhammad was laid to rest. Orcanes takes his oath “By sacred Mahomet.../Whose glorious body, when he left the world/Closed in a coffin, mounted up in the air/And hung on stately Mecca’s temple roof” (*Tamburlaine II*, 1.1.137,139-141). The “floating sarcophagus” (Tolan, 2008: 28) stems from twelfth century Germany (Ibid: 20). The fact that these medieval legends are to be found in public culture centuries later, reveals their lasting nature.

If the Prophet was seen as false, then the Qur’an must have been too. Although it was regarded as a counterfeit scripture, most of the vitriol concerning it was reserved for its supposed author. Subsequently, there are examples of characters who quote the Qur’an without any condemnatory remarks.

One of the most obvious cases is Orcanes’ description of hell, where he speaks of the “baneful tree of hell,/That Zoacum, that fruit of bitterness,/... with apples like the heads of damned fiends” (*Tamburlaine II*, 2.3.19-20,23). This is based almost word for word on Chapter 37 of the Qur’an:

Is that better entertainment or the tree of Zaqqum? For we have truly made it a trial for the wrong-doers. For it is a tree that springs out of the bottom of Hell-fire: The shoots of its fruit stalks are like the heads of devils (Qur’an 37:62-65, Yusuf Ali).

J.S. Cunningham argues that Marlowe quotes the Qur’an indirectly, through Phillipus Lonicerus (1981: 246), but this does not automatically mean that Marlowe did not know that Zoacum is mentioned in the Islamic holy book.

Orcanes' speech in the preceding scene contains another reference. He describes God as "he that sits on high and never sleeps/Nor in one place is circumscribable/But everywhere fills every continent/...in his endless power and purity" (*Tamburlaine II*, 2.2.49-51,53). The belief in a majestic, omnipotent, and altogether ungraspable God resonates with one of the most famous verses in the Qur'an; *Ayat-al Kursi*:

No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there that can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (Qur'an 2:225, Yusuf Ali).

Knowledge of Qur'anic laws is also in evidence. When prosecuting Donusa, Mustapha declares "The crime committed,/Our Alcoran calls death" (*Renegado*, 3.5.98-99). Donusa's crime is that of fornication, the punishment for which is being flogged 100 times, not death. Although inaccurate, Massinger displays some acquaintance with the general nature of Islamic sexual regulation. Alternatively, the punishment could have been exaggerated to increase its dramatic value.

Othello has so far been absent from the discussion. There is not a single reference to any term which might be recognised as overtly 'Islamic.' Yet, Cyndia Susan Clegg believes that the play should be read "from an informed Islamic perspective" (2009: 230). When Othello kills Desdemona, Clegg believes that he has turned Turk out of obedience to Qur'anic injunctions (Ibid: 234). The typical punishment for adultery, according to William Biddulph's observations is death (Ibid, 228), and Othello takes it upon himself to carry out the chastisement, "certain of but sorry for the justice he must

perform” (Clegg, 2009: 241). This calls to mind Othello’s statement, “Yet she must die, else she’ll betray more men” (*Othello*, 5.2.6).

Clegg argues that Othello’s suicide is also Islamically dictated, (Clegg, 2009: 239), even though suicide is viewed as a sin in mainstream Islamic societies. After realising that the charges against his wife are non-existent, “Othello must, as Islamic law demands, curse himself” (Ibid). Clegg bases this on the verse, “Those who slander chaste women ... are cursed in this life and the hereafter” (Qur’an, 24:23, Yusuf Ali).

The representation of the Qur’an is therefore, quite objective compared to the portrayals of Prophet Muhammad. However, one single scene which proves the opposite is Tamburlaine’s monumental decision to set it on fire. Tamburlaine completely rejects its “superstitious” nature (*Tamburlaine II*, 5.1.173). This is the first instance of any major criticism of the Qur’an in the four plays. Most scholars believe that rather than attacking Islam only, Marlowe, an Atheist, (Cunningham, 1981: 4) uses the Qur’an to represent all holy books and all religions (Ibid: 22; Goldberg, 1993: 574; 578).

This may be true. Marlowe is avoiding censure by not criticising Christianity directly, but the question that must be asked concerns his choosing the Qur’an over all other books. The fact that the Islamic scripture is used certainly provides an insight into how Islam was regarded at the time. “By defining such practices as Turkish, Marlowe both enables the audience to view them critically and makes it possible for his play to be performed” (Goldberg, 1993: 574).

2.8. Theme Three: Turned Turks and Christian Converts

Early Modern life was an era of options, epitomised by different allegiances, and ways of life. *Gazet* reflects this, “Live I in England, Spain, France, Rome, Geneva:/I’m of that country’s faith” (*Renegado*, 1.1.36-37). Here, sincere religiosity is subservient to cultural assimilation.

Amongst the choices that were possible, turning Turk, or converting to Islam was the most controversial; it is a key component in each of the plays. Not only did the term describe an actuality; but it was “also used pejoratively to connote an absolute turn for the worse” (Bartels, 2003: 154). These turns occurred through outbreaks of violence or as “a sensual, sexual transgression” (Vitkus, 1997: 154).

Turning Turk pejoratively and actually has been discussed with *Othello*. The former, when killing Desdemona in her bed, and the latter, as Clegg argues, with the act being Islamically-sanctioned. The audience can infer that Tamburlaine is an actual turned Turk in *Part II*, when he swears by “sacred Mahomet;” (1.3.109) yet the sincerity of this is called into question with the extreme gravity of his Qur’an-burning frenzy (5.1. 172-175). The deduction is that Tamburlaine was not a particularly good Muslim in the first place and it may be that he only converted to placate his beloved Zenocrate who is very much a Muslim character (*Tamburlaine I*, 5.1.364). But the protagonist does display the ‘evil’ psyche of a Muslim in two sets of horrific murders. He massacres four guiltless virgins sent as a peace-offering, as a pre-cursor to his forthcoming transformation, “on Damascus’ walls/Have hoisted up their slaughtered carcasses (*Tamburlaine I*, 5.1.131-132). After his ‘conversion,’ he then unrepentantly murders his own son, Calyphas, “this

effeminate brat" (*Tamburlaine II*, 4.1.162). Such terrible events reflect stories of the Ottoman Emperors, in particular Selim I (1465-1520) who killed his father and brothers to secure the throne (Chew, 1937: 491).

In *The Renegado*, the two types of turning are both present in Antonio Grimaldi. He betrayed his Christian upbringing by becoming a Muslim "After his impious scorn done in St. Mark's" (1.1.110) and is now leading a life of "All sensual pleasures" (1.3.51).

Playwrights develop the theme by reciprocating the inner transformation, with a change in the outer, physical appearance. The alteration is thus "rendered visible" (Neill, 1998: 365) as is the case with Vitelli. After sleeping with Donusa and thereby coming dangerously close to the Islamic religion, he appears to Gazet and Francisco "strangely metamorphosed" (*Renegado*, 2.6.20) wearing a "rich suit" (ibid, 8). Vitelli's liaison has embellished his clothes and wealth, "but it also suggests the potential for deeper and more permanent effects" (Degenhardt, 2009: 69). Ward too, after his conversion, changes his exterior, "Now wears the habit of a free-born Turk" (*Christian*, 9.18). The message is that these characters have truly 'gone native' in their deeds; crossing over to the side of barbarism.

Physical change is not limited solely to clothing. Circumcision is included by both Daborne and Massinger. Humorously, the implied 'threat' of circumcision is constantly made but never actually materialises. The suggestion is that Ward has managed to avoid the procedure (ibid, 9.3-4) whilst, Gazet, after declaring that he subscribes to the faith of the country in which he resides, categorically rejects turning Turk, because of the risk of circumcision; "Nor dare I barter that commodity" (*Renegado*, 1.1.42). After

learning that Carazie is a eunuch and is Donusa's "bedfellow" (Ibid, 3.4.48), Gazet yearns to become one too and Carazie encourages him, "It is but parting with/A precious stone or two" (Ibid, 51-52). Gazet does not understand the real meaning of this and only narrowly escapes at the last minute (Ibid, 4.1.155-156).

As Jane Hwang Degenhardt notes, there was a "comical collapsing of the distinction between circumcision and castration with respect to Islamic conversion" (2006: 92) in order to provide "anxious humour" (2009: 68). Conversion, circumcision and castration are all fused together to create an image of spectacularly sinful deviancy.

Converting to Islam was viewed as a strangely hazardous thing to do. Early Modern dramatists aggravate this by showing how almost all of these new Turks converted out of lust. In other words, it is sexual greed that underpins the turning Turk phenomenon (Vitkus, 1997: 157). Voadas's temptation of Ward hinges on one simple statement, "Turn Turk-I am yours" (*Christian*, 7.1.93), an offer he cannot refuse. Lust is also responsible for Benwash's conversion, albeit he converts not out of desire, but to protect his bed from the desires of the Turks (Ibid, 6.74-76). Vitelli almost converts because of Donusa's efforts, the implication is that Tamburlaine already has, and Othello acts like a Turk to extinguish Desdemona's supposed passion for Cassio. All these characters "reflect the complexity of early modern fears of the Ottoman, whose erotic life must have seemed, on the surface at least, titillating" (Hayden, 2013: 350).

Conversion is therefore intimately connected to the notion of female seducers and the power they hold over male Christians. Protagonists endanger their souls by falling in love with Muslim women. For instance, it is telling that Tamburlaine rejects Islam and

burns the Islamic scriptures *after* Zenocrate's death (*Tamburlaine II*, 5.1.172-175).

Muslim women are further presented as overtly lustful. Francisco warns Vitelli:

these Turkish dames,/ (Like English mastiffs, that increase their fierceness/By being chained up), from the restraint of freedom,/If lust once fire their blood from a fair object, /Will run a course the fiends themselves would shake at/To enjoy their wanton ends (*Renegado*, 1.3.8-13).

The illustration is that Muslim females are physically appealing but spiritually immoral. Voada and Agar are presented as incredibly beautiful on the surface, but their deeds are terribly vulgar. Voada seduces Ward but then wishes to sleep with Alizia (*Christian*, 13.10) and Agar commits adultery despite Benwash's religious sacrifice for her (*Ibid*, 10.86). The inference is that although the Islamic world may be blessed with unlimited glamour and beauty, it cannot match the spiritual heights of Christendom.

Yet, this sentiment is played on by Shakespeare. Iago informs the audience that "To win the Moor, were't to renounce his baptism,/All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,/His soul is so enfeathered to her love" (*Othello*, 2.3.310-312). The allegation is that Othello has converted to Christianity out of a longing for Desdemona. Indeed, Othello wishes the murder to be done quickly, "I'll not expostulate/with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again" (*Ibid*, 4.1.192-193). The word "again" suggests that Desdemona possesses a grasping influence over her husband, an influence which "unprovide[d]" his mind, perhaps in leaving Islam to become a Christian. As Nabil Matar writes, his religious change "may have been viewed with suspicion by the Jacobean audience suggesting thereby that the Moor's conversion was not motivated by faith but by sexual desire" (Matar, 1998: 129-130).

If this quote is taken to its full extent, then Shakespeare is the only playwright to have a Christian woman seducing a non-Christian man. However, the overarching message is clear, the sometimes fatal role that women have in turning men from one faith to the other.

Consequently, the belief was that turned Turks were not very good Christians in the first place. In a 1664 play, characters discuss a convert, "I speak but as I've heard.../That sort of Christian makes an excellent Turk" (Cited in *Ibid*, 47). Essentially, bad Christians, like Ward, make good Muslims. It could be argued that the reverse was also seen as true; bad Muslims make good Christians. Therefore, Donusa converts to Christianity *after* her Islamic sin of rejecting 'Mahomet' (*Renegado*, 4.3.158).

Renegades were appalling Christians in an added sense of Faustian proportions. Like Marlowe's doomed theologian, the renegade was perceived as having sold their soul to the devil himself, albeit in his Islamic guise (Matar, 1998: 54). According to Matar, the convert "was vilified to Satanic magnitudes and English writers either reconverted or executed him" (*Ibid*: 71). They were not allowed to prosper on stage; Grimaldi had to turn back to Christianity (*Renegado*, 4.1.88-89), whilst Othello and Ward had to die in despair (*Othello*, 5.2.352, *Christian*, 16.320-321).

Dramatists concentrated on punishing those who turned to Islam, however, there are instances of individuals that make the 'right' decision and become members of the Church. Chief above these is Massinger's play, the only one in the study which provides a 'happy' ending for the majority of the characters. Grimaldi repents, Vitelli resists,

Donusa converts, Paulina tricks and the Christians escape from the clutches of the Muslims (*Renegado*, 4.1-5.8).

Othello, on the other hand, twists and turns from one faith to the next and back again. It is first suggested that he is a Muslim turned Christian and then becomes a Muslim again in his 'just' smothering of Desdemona. The ambiguity is amplified in his suicide speech, the question being whether or not he converts back to Christianity. He refers to himself as a "malignant and turbaned Turk" (Othello, 5.2. 349) and as "the circumcised dog" (Ibid, 351), echoing the exact words used in King James' poem (Chapter 1.3; Vitkus, 1997: 149). In executing himself, it may be that Othello desires to purge his interior of any contact with Islam and Muslims, and his death becomes martyrdom for the Christian cause.

2.9. Summary

The plays studied provide connections between Christian and Muslim characters. There are military battles, piracy, trade, religious polemics, Christians falling in love with Muslims and Muslims falling in love with Christians, Christians turning Turk and Muslims converting for Christ, marriages, murders, suicides and curses. Almost every aspect of Early Modern life is depicted.

Thus, it cannot be said that representations are one-dimensional. Turks and Moors are not stock villains; Muslim characters have feelings and very real dilemmas. Furthermore, these are dramas about individual lives, making it difficult to extend to society at large. Iago is intolerant of Othello; this does not mean that every single member of the audience would have seen every single Moor in exactly the same way.

Yet, Iago relies on stereotypes that were available across society, remarks and abuses that the audience would doubtlessly have recognised. In the same manner, each drama possesses common motifs, leading to the conclusion that there were certain commonly-held ways of thinking regarding the Muslim Other. Some of these motifs, in particular, the worry of turning Turk are still present in contemporary society and it is the post 9/11 reception of these plays that the study now moves to.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

3.1. Introduction

In 1575, Thomas Newton in his English translation of *A notable historie of the Saracens*, penned the following words regarding Muslims:

They were (indeed) at the very far off from our clime & Region, and therefore the lesse to be feared, but now they are even at our doors and ready to come into our Houses (Cited in Moran, 2011: 23).

In Newton's day, there were a marginal number of Muslims in the houses of the English and it is possible that some of these were the 'Black-moores' alluded to in Queen Elizabeth's letters (Chapter 1.3). Primarily speaking, however, it was the English who were ready to go into Muslim houses for trade, commerce and for the possibility of a better life.

Yet, fast-forward to the present day and Newton's 'fears' have been realised. Today, *Muslims* are travelling to the West for trade, commerce and for the possibility of a better life (Maclean and Matar, 2011: 15). The tides of migration have now been reversed. Those who were residents of some of the most dazzling empires have "returned to the continent as lowly immigrants, determined to eke out a living" (Majid, 2009: 1). It is estimated that five percent of the European Union's population identify themselves as Muslim, (Cesari, 2010: 10) whilst the 2011 Census revealed that there are 2.7 million Muslims living in the United Kingdom, making them "the second largest religious group" after Christians (*Office for National Statistics*, 2012).

Muslims thus possess a visible presence not only in Britain, but across Europe and the whole Western world. In Britain, the new Moors and Turks, the contemporary Othellos, are mostly South Asian Muslims from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh (Abbas, 2005: 9). The specific ethnic groups have changed from the Early Modern era, but certain issues still exist. As Anne Sofie Roald writes:

In Britain, for instance, the Indian and Pakistani communities dominate the official Islamic setting, thus the British tend to regard Islam in terms of the idiosyncrasies of these particular communities' practice (2004: 61).

It is in this sense that Phillip Lewis, in *Islamic Britain*, confidently asserts that "Islamabad was Bradford" (1994: 1). After centuries of hostility and uneasy treaties, "the long-regarded 'other' must now be appreciated as part of the fabric of western societies, a neighbor and a fellow citizen" (Esposito, 2002: vii). It is possible to speak of English/British Muslims, not as a terrifying oxymoron or of renegades, but of ordinary Muslims born, working, and living in England/Britain, thinking and dreaming in the English language and making Shakespeare's "blessed plot" (*Richard II*, 2.1.50) their home and abode.

For some thinkers, Muslim immigration to the West is beset by challenges. Ronald Vogt and Wayne Cristaudo believe that Muslims "do not feel particularly connected to Europe's Christian or secular liberal values and heritage" (2014: 6). If this is true, then it is absolutely startling how far contemporary Muslim attitudes to the West reflect Early Modern English observations of Islam. Just as Muslims were awed and feared centuries ago, in modern times, Muslims have to balance the wish for a prosperous life with the fear of becoming 'secular.'

Consequently, the relationship between Britain, its Muslim residents and the four plays is highly significant. Two of the dramas, *Tamburlaine* and *Othello* have stood the test of time; whereas, *The Renegado* and *A Christian Turned Turk* have faded into relative oblivion. All four, however, speak of subjects that still occupy the minds of the public, namely, the place of Islam and Muslim in Britain, cross-cultural meetings, portrayals of Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an, and conversion to Islam. The following discussion will attempt to view these plays in a contemporary light across a range of themes.

3.2. Britain's Muslims and 9/11

The history of Muslim immigration is directly connected to Britain's colonial past (Smith, 2002: 4). It was believed that after achieving independence, countries would develop of their own accord but "When that did not happen, members of those societies often looked to their former colonizers to be their new economic hosts" (Ibid). This was reciprocated by Britain's desire to find workers for "certain industrial sectors" (Abbas, 2005: 9) and the employment gap was filled by a large number of Muslims from the Indian subcontinent (Ibid).

Another assumption was that workers would return to their countries once their employment was completed, their presence in Britain being altogether temporary (Ibid). However, the vast majority remained and applied for their families to come to Britain too. These extended family units are now in their third and fourth generations, illustrating that British Muslim presence is "not only a reality but a permanent choice" (Ramadan, 2002: 158).

In considering the expressions of prejudice against British Muslims, Chris Allen writes of a “shift from race to religion” (2005: 55). Early hostility against Muslims was chiefly racial and ethnic, yet, over time; this has given way to a more religiously-natured bias (Ibid). Such a shift mirrors the experience of Othello. First he is destroyed through vile racism; “an old black ram/Is tugging your white ewe” (*Othello*, 1.1.89-90). Then, the criticisms become more religiously expressive; the Moor is dangerous because his baptism are questionable (Ibid, 2.3.310), he is “the blacker devil” (Ibid, 5.1.132), and he kills himself as a “circumcised dog” (Ibid, 351).

In 1996, this shift was identified by the Runnymede Trust (Vertovec, 2002: 24). In its report, “it justified the neologism Islamophobia” (Ibid) by referring to seven distinct features of anti-Muslim prejudice; namely, that Muslims are viewed as strange, intimidating, and as a monopoly, Islam is utilised in political and martial spheres, Muslim criticism of the West is void, Islamophobia includes racism vis-à-vis immigration and finally, Islamophobia is seen as a normal sentiment (Abbas, 2005: 12). What is thought-provoking is that although the report was published in the late twentieth century, it could be utilised to succinctly summarise views of Islam and Muslims in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries too.

It would be five years later when the term ‘Islamophobia’ would emerge onto the public stage again. The reactions to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the London bombings on July 7, 2005 “both re-established and newly established Muslims as chimerical, monstrous others” (Allen, 2005: 50). For instance, from 2000 to 2001, the FBI estimated that hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims in America increased by a colossal 1,600 percent (Alsultany, 2013: 161). The impetus behind such a dramatic rise

is part of the first feature of Islamophobia as recognised by the Runnymede trust; the belief that all Muslims are the same everywhere. The rapid flows of globalisation, the ever-increasing reach of mass/social media, the fact that most British Muslims are descendants of immigrants and the War on Terror have all collided together to create the global face of Islam. Intrinsic to this perception is that every Muslim is held accountable for the actions of other Muslims, even those who live thousands of miles away. This is why, according to Tahir Abbas, “for many Muslims, both in the East and the West, the ‘War on Terror’ is perceived as a war on Islam” (2005: 4).

As Tamburlaine’s waves of victories seem unending and inevitable, the list of Muslim terror groups continues to expand. What was once Al-Qaeda and the Taliban has now expanded to include Hamas, Hezbollah, Al-Shabbab, Boko Haram, and IS (also known as ISIS/ISIL), amongst others. If during the Early Modern period, it was Tamburlaine who could declare himself as “a terror to the world” (*Tamburlaine I*, 1.2.38), today, readers and audiences may see and hear in these words, an insinuation to global terrorism most often associated with the Islamic faith.

Thus, Muslims are always newsworthy and rarely in a positive manner. Anouar Majid writes:

Whether it’s Muslims erupting into violence to condemn cartoons that defame their faith and their Prophet, protesting the pope’s selective allusion to the image of Islam in the medieval period, complaining about the beheading of the prophet Mohammed in an opera, condemning the selection of a Muslim woman for Miss United Kingdom, objecting to Britain’s political leaders for their views on the niqab (the head-to-toe veil that shrouds the Muslim woman’s body), a week rarely goes by without the West being reminded about the Muslims’ strange costumes and customs (2009: 1-2).

Quite clearly, Britain did not and cannot resist speaking of Islam and Muslims. In *Othello*, the Duke of Venice persuades Shakespeare's protagonist to prepare for war against the Turks by designating them as "the general enemy Ottoman" (1.3.48). The proof of the play's continued powerful impact is that even if the word 'Ottoman' is removed, it can still be appropriated when replaced with 'Muslim' or 'Islamic.' In the Early Modern period, it was the mighty Ottomans who caused Europe to quake in fear. In current times, the belief that Britain, Europe and the West's 'general enemy' is still the Muslim Other holds an exerting pull on many individuals, thinkers and the ordinary public alike.

Of all the dramatists studied, it is Shakespeare who has been scrutinised "to attempt some sort of engagement with the events of September 11" (Gavin, 2007: 797). Most endeavours consider the issue from the standpoint of the arts, humanism and violence in general (Ibid), whilst others study Shakespeare and 9/11 with reference to *Macbeth* only (Holderness, 2014: 194-206).

An exception is Michael Galchinsky's short article (2001) in which he discusses teaching *Othello* on the day after the US attacks. Galchinsky's results are therapeutic, allowing himself and his students to begin to try and understand what has just happened and why (Ibid: 144). It is noted that the play is almost a pre-shadowing of September 11 (Ibid: 142). *Othello* is first set in Venice, "the 'world trade center' of its time and then moves to Cyprus, "the precise geographic midpoint between Venice and Constantinople, between West and East" (Ibid). Both localities thus reflect New York City and the US as a whole, defending itself against imminent Islamic attacks. *Othello*, a Moorish-Venetian General tasked with defending his new home against his old one,

appears in the mind of Iago (and indeed in the minds of Roderigo and Brabantio under Iago's influence) as "a potential fifth column" (Ibid: 143) exactly how Arab Americans appeared to some in American society after 9/11 (Ibid).

Galchinsky and his students do not comfortably pause at this juncture but delve deeper, realising that it is Iago who has a problem with Othello, not Othello with Iago. For Galchinsky, Iago is "the real fifth column" (Ibid) and not a 'one-off' individual, but part of a sub-culture of hate:

A society that could produce Iago must be deeply unstable, and because the malevolent discontent he represents comes not from outside Venice but from within, stability can't be restored simply by killing off, detaining, interning, or expelling the "foreigner" (Ibid).

The question of whether or not Iago represents certain factions of the American public is a moot one, and is not specifically addressed. What Galchinsky does do, however, is lament the fact that "as long as Moors and Christians can be manipulated to hate and distrust each other, their interaction must end in tragic suffering for all" (Ibid). The mutual animosity between the two groups is explosive and it is the innocent Desdemonas who pay for it with their lives.

The characters of Othello, Iago and Desdemona can therefore be utilised as extended metaphors for various groups of people, although, which character represents exactly which group is debatable. It makes sense to see in Othello a representation of modern British Muslims, although some authors have chosen Desdemona instead (E.g. Timol, 2011: 10). Othello has married into Venetian society, yet his origins lie elsewhere. Is he

a Moorish-Muslim or a Venetian-Christian, or both? In the same way, are Britain's Muslims, British, Muslim or both?

In this arrangement, who is Iago? Perhaps he represents the whole of the British government? Iago declares that he detests his general; "Though I do hate him as I do hell's pains,/Yet for necessity of present life,/I must show out a flag and sign of love,/Which is indeed but sign" (*Othello*, 1.1.153-156). Is the British government following Iago's hypocrisy here? Are its Muslim residents hated, 'but out of necessity,' the 'flag' of tolerance is hoisted up, 'which is indeed but sign?' Maybe this is how Muslim citizens view their government, seeing in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, a conflict against all followers of Islam (Abbas, 2005: 4).

Conversely, Iago may symbolise not the entire system of governance, but the far-right. Anwar Majid alludes to this when discussing the impossibility of the Ottoman Empire's descendant, the state of Turkey, joining the European Union. Such groups, like Iago:

... are in fact repeating an old tenet of anti-Semitism: that no matter how successfully a Jew might be integrated into European culture, he or she will always remain an outsider (2009: 58).

It is also worthwhile to consider *The Renegado* as an emblem of the possible governmental response towards Britain's Muslims. Paulina and Vitelli exhibit two different ways of protecting themselves against the Muslim characters (*Renegado*, 1.1.146-154; 4.3.106-131). Paulina is saved from Asambeg's lust *physically*, her holy necklace "defends her" (Ibid, 2.5.163), a barrier between her and the viceroy. Vitelli, on the other hand, epitomises a spiritual protection against the 'trap' of conversion (Ibid,

4.3.106-131). This spiritual assistance not only increases Vitelli's steadfastness but provides him with the power to change Muslim thinking, so that Donusa becomes a mirror image of Vitelli. If Vitelli offends Muslims by speaking against Muhammad, so does Donusa when she "spit[s] at Mahomet" (Ibid, 158). If Donusa's prior aim was to turn Vitelli Turk, the actual change that takes place is her converting to Christianity. Vitelli's spiritual protection enables him to assimilate Donusa into his faith. Likewise, the British government's handling of its Muslim citizens centres on how far they can be integrated into society.

A cursory glance at newspaper headlines reveals how Vitelli's method has become the norm for Britain and the wider Western world with its specific emphasis on Muslim assimilation. For example, a recent article looked at the issue of veiling amongst European Muslims, with a common thread being the need for "a greater effort to assimilate ethnic and religious minorities" so that they resemble the society they live in and not the society they came from (*BBC News*, 2014).

3.3. The Prophet and the Qur'an

The previous chapter illustrated how Muhammad and the Qur'an were thought of in the drama of the past. Today, the two are still misunderstood and become frequent flashpoints in interactions with Muslims. There are the same worries about who 'Mahomet' really is and what the 'Alcoran' really is about.

In Early Modern England, Islam was believed to be nothing more than a forgery, therefore, Muhammad is presented as a liar (*Renegado*, 4.3.149-155). Muslims were demonised as pagans, worshipping Mahomet; thus, he is dramatised as a powerless

deity (*Tamburlaine I*, 3.3.269-271; 5.1.178-201). Muslim characters also follow this pattern. A Governor in *A Christian Turned Turk* argues, “If any odds be, ‘tis of Mahomet’s side:/His servitors thrive best, I am sure” (7.32-33). If Muslims are worldly successful, then Mahomet must be divinely successful too.

Essentially, whatever Muslims are, is exactly who Muhammad is. This holds true in terms of the contemporary stereotype of Islam as a religion of violence, meaning that Muhammad must have been the ultimate terrorist. If in 1612, Robert Daborne’s “*Mahomet’s head*” was used to convey the complete paganism of the Islamic faith, then almost 500 years later, a different kind of ‘Mahomet’s head’ was used to ignite controversy around the world.

On September 30, 2005, a Danish newspaper published twelve cartoons, some of which depicted the Islamic Prophet (Klausen, 2009: 13). The most infamous is an image in which the Prophet’s turban is shaped like a bomb (Ibid: 21). For Muslims, it insinuated that the roots of Muslim terrorism can be traced back to Muhammad himself. The publication caused a worldwide furore; the cartoons were reprinted in France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland (Monshipouri, 2010: 47) and violent protests began in early 2006 (Klausen, 2009: 39). The contentious affair was still generating headlines in 2008, when three Muslims were arrested for attempting to murder a cartoonist and his wife and the turban-bomb image was reprinted by seventeen Danish newspapers (Ibid: 33).

Jytte Klausen makes two interesting points in his analysis of the cartoons (Ibid: 27; 48). Firstly, he argues that the publications “were instantly recognizable as typical things

Westerners have been saying about Muslims since 9/11” (Ibid: 27). Secondly, he refers to how the cartoons were justified by some in European society in terms of Europe’s secular standing (Ibid: 48). These claims suggest that anti-Muslim rhetoric is a relatively recent occurrence, intrinsic to Europe’s secularism and a reaction to the atrocities of 9/11. However, this study shows that poking fun at Islam and Muslims has a long history, pre-dating the continent’s transformation from Christendom to secular Europe and centuries before 9/11. For Muslims, the Danish cartoons are just the latest in an ancient list of abuses.

In the late 1500s, Marlowe has Tamburlaine burn the Qur’an (*Tamburlaine I*, 5.1.172-175). The issue is as potent as ever, especially when it comes to modern-day productions. The dilemma is whether this should be followed faithfully, or knowing Marlowe’s atheist leanings, should productions dare do what Marlowe could not and burn all religious scriptures, including the Bible?

These exact predicaments came to a head in 2005 with David Farr’s version of Marlowe’s drama (Hopkins, 2008: 78). In it, Tamburlaine does not burn the Islamic holy writ, but a more generalised scripture; “the works of the prophets” (Ibid). This incensed *The Times’* reviewer who believed that the decision was made as Farr “feared that it would inflame passions in the light of the London bombings” (Cited in Ibid). He continues; “It is therefore with a sense of unease that we report the tweaking of Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* in order to protect Islamic sensibilities” (Cited in Ibid). The reviewer wanted to see the Qur’an burn, because that is how it was in the play, not out of personal hostility (although for recent examples of the latter, such as the ‘International Burn a Koran Day’ see De La Torre and Hernandez, 2011: 97).

Farr, for his part, responded in *The Guardian*, categorically denying the allegation; “my decision to adapt the text was purely artistic” (2005). For him, Marlowe’s intention in Tamburlaine’s act of arson “was a giant two fingers to the entire theological system, not a piece of Christian triumphalism over the barbarous Turk” (Ibid).

This may just be a case of creativity versus faithfulness, but the fact that it is intertwined with matters of Islam, Muslims, Muhammad and the Qur’an illustrate how centuries on, there seems to be little change in the way the scripture and figure of Islam are thought of. Here it is apt to quote Minou Reeves, who in her book on the reception of Muhammad in the West, summarises her research thus; “The unchanging nature of this portrayal was as striking as it was disturbing” (2000: x).

3.4. Conversion and Gender

Early Modern English society dreaded hearing stories of those who had crossed over to the other side and turned Turk. It is a theme which is present in all four dramas, albeit in various ways. Othello and Tamburlaine are ambiguous, moving from one faith to the next and back again (and to none in the case of the latter). Captain Ward’s biography is a deterrent to those thinking of following in his footsteps, whilst Vitelli is the example to emulate in resisting the Islamic faith. Another sub-thread is that the protagonists’ experiences are directly connected to women. Islamic conversion was viewed as a trap into which Christian men can fall into, having been seduced by Muslim women.

In current times, conversion to Islam is thought of in markedly different ways. Beforehand, Vitelli could ask Gazet if he will turn Turk in Tunis (*Renegado*, 1.1.42-43). Now, there is no need to travel afar; with the Muslim presence, Britons can turn Turk

from the comfort of their own homes. Estimates suggest that up to 100,000 people have done exactly that, an increase from 60,000 individuals in 2001 (Nye, 2011). The picture is the same in America too, with 30,000 converting each year (Haddad, 2006: 20).

The majority of converts, according to most researchers, are female rather than male (Jansen, 2006: x; Roald, 2004: 82). Therefore, the specific gender roles inherent in conversion narratives have been reversed. Whereas in Shakespeare's time, converts to Islam were invariably assumed to be male, today it is the opposite. This is in keeping with the feminine images used to symbolise Islam. The religion is no longer represented by the turban, the male Muslim headwear (Matar, 1993: 501) but by the *hijab*, the female Muslim headwear (Allievi, 2006: 120). For one convert, it was the decision to wear the hijab "that 'outed' me to wider society" (Mistiaen, 2013).

A stream of thought which is similar between the two worlds is that conversion is underpinned by falling in love with a Muslim. In 2013, *The Guardian* published an online feature of six female converts. Three of them had met a Muslim man before accepting the religion, with one declaring that her "interest in Islam was a symbiosis of love and intellectual ideas" (Mistiaen, 2013). The article generated 1288 comments before being closed for discussion, most of which displayed a real uncertainty of why women would convert to Islam (Ibid). One commenter wrote "it does seem that a number of these people became Muslim through marriage more than anything else" (Ibid), whilst another decries this reason for converting as "superficial" (Ibid).

The same views arose in a similar article by the *Daily Mail* in 2010. Here, two of the three women interviewed affirmed that they were in a relationship with a Muslim before

becoming Muslim themselves (Ahmed, 2010). The comments ranged from tolerance for individual decisions, to seeing all religions as misogynistic (Ibid). One user complained that female Muslim converts went against everything that the Suffragettes had fought for (Ibid).

Such sentiments exist at the scholarly level also. Stefano Allievi argues that “The greatest number of conversions to Islam is the result of something that has little to do with the search for spirituality, that is, marriage” (2006: 122). For him, conversion in a marital setting occurs “through social and psychological pressure” where the Muslim induces his partner to convert (Ibid: 123). Some female converts articulate a sense of annoyance at this, “As they feel that their decision to convert is their own, rather than that of their partners, they feel belittled by the insinuation that they cannot decide for themselves” (Roald, 2004: 98; also see Haddad, 2006: 32).

Just like their male counterparts from centuries ago, women who are in relationships with Muslims have to withstand the assumption that they will convert to their partner’s faith, not out of heartfelt religiosity but as part of “conversions of convenience” (*Daily Mail*, 2010).

Although the specific gender roles have been reversed since Shakespeare’s time, it could be possible to see in Brabantio’s reaction to Desdemona’s elopement the same worries that families have today if their children fall in love with Muslims. When Brabantio is told that Desdemona is with Othello, he cries, “With the Moor, say’st thou? Who would be a father?/How didst thou know t’was she? O she deceives me” (*Othello*, 1.1.163-164). At a basic level, Brabantio is horrified to discover that his only child has

eloped, but perhaps the real worry is that she is “With the Moor” and due to Othello’s vague origin and beliefs, may end up converting to the Islamic religion.

Another resemblance is the belief that Muslim converts have chosen to submit to the worst kind of life and are subsequently traitors to their heritage. When Ward contemplates turning Turk, he compares it to “A god turn[ed] mortal” (*Christian*, 7.91). The question is why would a deity exchange divinity for corporeality? Similarly, the query to today’s converts is why exchange freedom for oppression? Anne Sofie Roald notes:

In my discussions with female converts, I have found that the notion of being a ‘traitor’ is linked mainly to the wearing of the headscarf, as the headscarf has become the archetypal symbol of male suppression of women (2004: 237).

The epitaph of the doomed English captain affirms that he bartered with and became an enemy to his country (*Christian*, 16.326). Antonio Grimaldi, after his blasphemous deeds is described as “the shame of Venice, and the scorn/Of all good men” (*Renegado*, 1.1.105-106). Othello’s final words recount how he “Beat a Venetian and traduced the state” (*Othello*, 5.1.350). Western converts to Islam can identify with these representations, being popularly perceived as followers of a system which opposes everything and anything that the West stands for.

3.5. Muslim Access

The world is a global village. Ideas, objects, and systems produced in one part of the world are appropriated and amended by others as their own. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the works of William Shakespeare. At first, he was utilised “to reinforce

cultural and racial hierarchies” (Loomba and Orkin, 1998: 1), but those who Shakespeare was used against have “answered back in Shakespearean accents” (Ibid). Shakespeare the coloniser is now Shakespeare the colonised.

British Muslims have taken up this challenge, their efforts culminating in the ‘Shakespeare and Islam’ Week in November 2004. Martin Lings, a Muslim convert and Shakespearean scholar, presented his views, arguing that the plays “depict a struggle between the dawning modernist world and the traditional, mystical value system” (Thorpe, 2004). Similarly, Riyaz Timol aims to show the commonality between Shakespeare’s words and sayings from Muhammad and the Qur’an (2011). He sees an affinity between Qur’anic statements on the deceptive nature of the world and lines from *The Tempest*, “Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,/And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,/Leave not a rack behind” (Timol, 2011: 7).

The real puzzle is whether it is possible to see positive images of Islam in specific plays. Certainly, some plays of Shakespeare are more popular with Muslims than others. The reception of *Othello* being a good example of this (Ghazoul, 1998); “the hero is a Moor and therefore an ‘Arab’ ... an Arab in Europe, necessarily evoking all the complex confrontations of Self/Other in a context of power struggle” (Ibid: 1). Overall, however, most see *Othello* as a negative portrayal of Moors/Arabs/Muslims (Ibid: 2). Equally, it is claimed that “the playwright’s characterisations of Muslims are uniformly damning. They could all have been written by Berlusconi or Bush” (Taylor, 2004).

Such a statement seems unfair given the multi-faceted nature of Shakespeare’s representations of Muslims, at least as far as *Othello* is concerned. It seems premature

to swiftly dismiss the play and the protagonist as a wholly negative portrayal. On the surface, Othello is a Moor, who enraged by violent jealousy, murders his guiltless wife. Yet, to accept this wholeheartedly and without looking at Iago is itself an exercise Iago would have been proud of.

For Timol, Muslim access of Shakespeare's works is natural. Muslims "should claim his genius as their own. Putting the Shaykh into Shakespeare is to recognise the legacy he bequeaths us all" (2011: 13).

3.6. Summary

Early Modern England and contemporary Britain are two different worlds. Otherwise, there would not be 2.7 million Muslims living in the Isles, nor would there be Muslim members of parliament, mosques, Islamic faith schools, provision of halal meat or the right to worship freely. Therefore, it is wrong to say that the position of Muslims in English thought has not evolved. However, the two worlds are also incredibly similar. Moral panics and frenzied debates still exist on the place of Islam in modern, secular and liberal societies. The same images and assumptions present in the plays are used to categorise twenty-first century Muslims. British Muslims, the inheritors of two competing traditions and value systems, are indeed attempting to produce a synthesis between the two, but the brevity of the section on Muslim Access shows there is still much work to be done.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the history of humanity, religions have been accessed by billions of people searching for meaning and purpose. Each religion possesses rich origins, assured beliefs and practices, and a specific world-view, helping its followers to achieve fulfilment and content.

Religions also provide another type of guidance, in terms of alternative accounts and the people who abide by them; what they are like, why they exist and most importantly, why they are wrong. This has been the case throughout 1400 years of Christian-Muslim interaction. In the very beginnings of Islamic history, the Qur'an concerned itself with righting the perceived wrongs of Christian tenets. Christian thinkers concerned themselves with explaining the rise of Islam whilst preserving the superiority of Christianity. Both groups have utilised their respective faiths as a magnifying glass with which they can observe and represent each other, seeking out inaccuracies without being tainted by them.

The thesis' aim was to investigate this phenomenon in a more indirect manner, moving away from doctrinal tracts and sermons to plays and dramas. It wanted to explore how portraying Islam and Muslims was a form of public entertainment. Essentially, the three chapters reveal just how far the Islamic religion and Muslim peoples permeated and still permeate into English/British society.

Chapter One illustrates how almost all social classes in England were affected by Turks and Moors. There was not just a single, elite attachment to the world of Islam, but many

in which the lay also participated. England possessed a contradictory way of seeing Islam and Muslims. Queen Elizabeth loved the clothing prevalent in the Ottoman Empire, but lambasted the Black Moors for being infidels and wished to deport them (Matar, 1999: 34; Bartels, 2006: 305).

One of the favourite destinations the English flocked to were Muslim-owned lands, but this was tempered by the principle of keeping a safe distance, of not engaging in too much conversation with the natives; “Temper your tongue and meddle not with the Turks (*Renegado*, 1.1.47). The Qur’an was nationally regarded as a wicked forgery, but members of the clergy utilised its acceptance of Jesus to convince other non-believers of Christ’s standing (Matar, 1998: 108-109). Muslims were vilified as strange believers in a strange religion, but they were also simultaneously regarded as better than Catholics (Matar, 1999: 77).

Evidently, England was caught between respect and fear. Englishmen and women looked on the Islamic world with an envious eye, or perhaps, a ‘greedy ear;’ “She’d come again, and with a greedy ear/Devour up my discourse” (*Othello*, 1.3.148-149). England wished that it could have what the Muslims had. However, this degree of respect also contained total fear; fear of being taken captive, of turning Turk, of England becoming the latest victim of the Ottoman’s invincible conquests. Such an inferiority complex was complicated by the fact that it was actually linked with a superiority complex, regarding spirituality. On the spiritual plane, Muslims simply could not challenge the English, for though the latter were inferior in terms of progress and wealth, they believed they were assuredly superior by having God on their side.

This is what makes the four plays so exciting. In exploring the portrayal of Islam and Muslims, the findings are two-fold. Muslims in Early Modern English drama are both terrifying and beautiful.

Negative illustrations are to be expected. Thus, in both parts of *Tamburlaine*, the Turks are presented as being completely drenched with Christian blood. In *A Christian Turned Turk*, the message is if Muslims cannot kill a Christian physically, they will do spiritually by pressuring them to convert. Furthermore, Voada and Aga, two Muslim women, are characterised as licentious seducers who are unbelievably willing to commit terribly shameful acts. Similarly, Massinger emphasizes the power of Muslim women to almost cause Christian men to be ensnared as well as the unparalleled sexual exploits of elite Ottoman males. *Othello*, too contains some harmful pictures, particularly of the Moor's uncontrollable rage which can only be satisfied through brutality. Whether intended by Shakespeare or not, the audience may have seen in this 'Black Muslim' two layers of evil, through both skin colour and faith; violence upon violence and sin upon sin.

These representations are not shocking given the historical context. Instead, they would have confirmed to the audience that Muslims are wholly non-English and non-Christian. It is no surprise that in each and every one of the plays, the faults of Muslims are the direct cause of the sufferings of Christians.

Having said that, this did not stop dramatists from including far more positive aspects. *Tamburlaine's* irrepressible exploits towards the end of *Part II* almost force the audience to question his actions. Maybe he goes too far in burning the Qur'an? Maybe he deserves to fall sick and die? *Orcanes* also forces the audience to adapt their

conventional thinking and accept him as a pious individual who abides by agreements and calls on Christ despite remaining a Muslim.

Othello too pulls on heart-strings. There is a sense of absolute sincere sympathy for the Moor. An alien who seeks to make a new home in Venice, Othello integrates but arouses suspicion and jealousy amongst some parts of the indigenous population. The latter seek to destroy this new insider by calling attention to the most basic of differences and it is hard not to shed a tear for this most tragic hero.

Despite being definitely less subtle, *The Renegado* still manages to represent Muslims as real human beings with real emotions. It is possible to feel some empathy for Mustapha and Asambeg. Daborne's play is the only exception. It is impossible to feel any connection with the Crossman or Voada or Agar.

Three out of the four dramas include more positively objective portrayals and this is unexpected and therefore what must be remembered. In Early Modern England, it was perfectly acceptable to diminish the religious other, it was expected and wanted, but, to have elements of sympathy with Muslims is wholly remarkable. It means that despite the relative hate and vitriol, English Christians were able to view their Muslim counterparts favourably.

Chapter Three demonstrates how this is important given the issues that Britain is facing today. The questions that preoccupied Early Modern minds are even more important now given that Islam is visibly recognisable with almost three million British Muslims. Debates still continue and predicaments still remain on whether Muslims can really be British, how violent Muslims seem to be and why ordinary Britons convert to the faith.

The fact that plays spoke of these issues centuries ago is thrilling, in that it allows British Muslims to provide their own readings.

Another point is that despite the positive representations of Muslims and even of the Qur'an, one major obsession which has unfortunately not changed, and shows no sign of abating, at least on the popular level, is the vilification of the Prophet Muhammad. Europeans have consistently and constantly mocked the Islamic Prophet, because in doing so, an attack is made on an ultimate difference, as Islam is the only world religion which believes in Muhammad. As Minou Reeves states, "defame its founder and you could forget the rest" (2000: 3). With British Muslim access and genuine scholarly efforts to study Muhamamd now increasing, perhaps this will also change.

There is something about Christianity and Islam which means that their followers cannot resist speaking of each other. Forty-seven plays were written about Islam and Muslims (Wann, 1915: 166). If there was nothing but hatred between the two, these plays would never have existed.

Christian engagement with Islam has not ended. It began centuries ago and will continue for many centuries in the future. The history of Christianity is thus intimately connected to the history of Islam and vice-versa. Both forces have often collided together, seeing in each other its ultimate adversary. Yet, both have proved that they cannot willingly escape from the other, possibly because the other's image is so close to its own reflection. These are after all two religiously monotheistic traditions with competing claims for God's favour in this world and the next.

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