

Representations Of The Muslim Woman On The Renaissance English Stage

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I discuss the evolving representation of Muslim women in English Renaissance drama. Unlike later Orientalist narratives, early modern texts portray Muslim women with complexity and nuance. I trace the development of these representations from medieval literature, where Muslim women are often depicted as assertive, noble figures, to early modern plays that reflect England's emerging political and economic relations with the Ottoman Empire. I argue that while Muslim women in Renaissance drama embody the wealth and power of the Islamic world, they are also shaped by patriarchal and religious anxieties. By examining key plays, I aim to shed light on how these depictions both challenged and reinforced Western ideologies of gender, power, and cultural difference.

Keywords: *Muslim women, Renaissance drama, Anglo-Ottoman relations, Tamburlaine*

Rönesans İngiliz Tiyatrosunda Müslüman Kadın Temsilleri

ÖZ

Bu çalışmada İngiliz Rönesans tiyatrosunda Müslüman kadın temsilinin geçirdiği değişimi tartışıyorum. Yakın dönemde ortaya çıkan Oryantalist anlatıların aksine, erken modern dönem metinlerinde Müslüman kadın imgesi karmaşık ve ince ayrımlara sahiptir. Bu temsillerin gelişimini Müslüman kadınları iddialı ve asil figürler olarak betimleyen orta çağ edebiyatından, İngiltere'nin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'yla bu dönemde başlayan politik ve ekonomik ilişkilerinin yansıması olan erken modern dönem oyunlarına kadar izliyorum. Rönesans oyunlarındaki Müslüman kadınların İslam dünyasının zenginliğini ve gücünü temsil etmelerinin yanı sıra ataerkil ve dini endişelere göre de şekil aldıklarını iddia ediyorum. Dönemin önemli birkaç oyununu kısaca inceleyerek bu temsillerin Batı'nın cinsiyet, iktidar ve kültürel farklılık ideolojilerine nasıl hem meydan okuyup hem destek verdiği konusuna ışık yakmayı amaçlıyorum.

Keywords: *Müslüman kadınlar, Rönesans tiyatrosu, İngiliz-Osmanlı ilişkileri, Tamburlaine.*

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Western discourse has a quite clear-cut representation for Islamic women: they are the veiled and segregated victims of a society which is oppressive to women in nature, and this oppression constitutes the fundamental grounds to justify the backwardness in Islamic societies (Kahf, 1999). However, until West eventually came up with this narrative in the eighteenth century, the image of the Muslim woman had undergone a series of transformations throughout history. Her representation has been an evolving phenomenon, whose elements are the products of specific historical moments and cultural developments; and in this evolution, Western definitions for the self and the Other, as well as for gender have played an important role.

Understanding the process that the image of the Muslim woman went through in Western literature requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines the ideological and historical discourse of the West against Islam as a rival power with European patriarchal constructions against woman as the opposite sex. The general effort given today in the academic circles is to counter the misrepresentations of Muslim women as distorted through the perspective of Orientalism in the period following the eighteenth century. In this paper I focus on relatively an untouched era, the early modern age, and survey the image of the Islamic women in a number of English stage productions. Considering it as a period in which the Western structures of self-identity and gender in the modern sense were initially formed, the Renaissance age provides a suitable medium to trace the formation of the contemporary images of Muslim women in the Western world. Moreover, inhabiting both the remnants of the medieval past and the roots of European colonialism, this era is a useful ground to analyze this process from a comparative perspective.

In today's Western outlook Islamic women are represented as secluded and victimized female figures which are irreconcilable with modern societies and the predominant academic model for readings of such representations has been Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. The relationship between the discursive knowledge and hegemonic power is the starting point of this theory and, as Said suggests, Orientalism is "a discourse created from the relationship of Western power over the Orient into the Western knowledge about the Orient" (Said, 1978, p.7). The construction of this narrative dates back to early ages of history, Said notes, though, as a discipline, Orientalism began after the middle of the eighteenth century (Said, 1978). However, as recent studies in history as well as in literature have shown, "the power relations implied in Orientalism are unsustainable" within the historical and political context before the eighteenth century; simply because the prerequisites needed to impose an imperial assurance over the East were not provided (Dimmock, 2016, p.17). From the medieval period until the end of the early modern era, the Islamic world in the East first rivaled, then, superseded Christian Europe in terms of military and economic strength. Thus, the Europeans had to postpone their colonial project until the eighteenth century,

when the events and conditions provided the material conditions for Orientalist discourse. When the world's power balances between the twelfth century and the end of the seventeenth century are considered, the Orientalist theory should be reformulated as “a discourse produced by the vulnerable, overshadowed Western world about the politically, militarily, economically and culturally stronger East” (Vitkus, 2000, p.4). Such a reformulation unavoidably has certain implications on the representations of the Muslim woman.

MUSLIM WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL TEXTS

Colonial narratives are loaded with images of Islamic women as innately oppressed, veiled, secluded and silenced figures, whereas Muslim women in medieval texts are completely free from this narrative. In medieval European literature the Muslim woman is pictured as an overbearing noblewoman, who, after falling in love with the Christian prisoner of her father, converts to his faith and leaves her country. She initiates much of the action and aggressively pursue her Christian lover. This character type, referred to by Mohja Kahf as the “enamored Muslim princess,” holds high status and power in her own land but abandons it to assume a lower-rank and a less powerful role when she marries the Christian hero (2002, p.37). In medieval texts, Muslim women are not portrayed as objects of male pleasure, restricted by the prohibitions of a strict religion, as representations of the eighteenth-century would suggest. On the contrary, with their bold and assertive qualities, Muslim women in medieval texts present a subtle challenge to the Christian-patriarchal ideology. Their conversion does not simply imply a change in religion but also the containment of these qualities by forcing them into a Christian passive femininity.

Since the European ideology in Middle Ages was not in a position to delimit and distance Islam, as it did in the colonial period, these texts do not produce entirely different, inferior, exotic figures of Islamic people. Muslim women in medieval texts do not renounce their religion because Christians are more powerful, they simply see the innate truth of the Christianity, and become part of the European society. The Islamic characteristics attained to them suddenly disappear as if they had never been Muslim before. Instead of differentiating or othering, these texts normalize these women. Though there is certainly an appeal for a universal order under the leadership of Christendom, medieval Europe obviously did not yet assume a domination or cultural superiority over the Islamic world in the East.

Bramimonde in *La Chanson de Roland* (commonly dated around 1100) is one of the earliest representations of the Muslim woman in European texts. The poem portrays Bramimonde as a typical wanton queen, whose assertive Muslim qualities are curbed into Christian feminine modesty through religious conversion. Bramimonde inaugurates the stock Muslim female character that populates medieval romances and should be seen as a product of two developments in Western: the notion of Christian unity that began to take hold in Europe and the realization that Islam was becoming a growing threat to Christendom which led a hostile awareness against the Islamic world.

In the transformation of this new consciousness into a well-established narrative the Crusades played a significant role. The First Crusade was launched in 1095 by Otto the Great with the aim to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Lands from the Muslims, and to respond to the Byzantine emperor's call for help against the Seljuk Turks who were expanding into Anatolia. Though the Crusades were overall a political and economic failure, the attacks continued until the thirteenth century, and within this period the crusading emotion contributed to build the image of Islam and Islamic people as the principal threat to the Christian world. It would not be wrong to claim that if there is a unique European worldview or sense of identity that distinguishes Europeans from non-Europeans, it began to take shape and solidify in opposition to Islamic civilization. Starting around the early twelfth century, Islam took on a specifically negative connotation in Western narratives.

MUSLIM WOMEN IN EARLY MODERN TEXTS

With the beginning of European explorations and the decline of the religious ideological unity in Christendom that followed the Reformation modern nation-states started to be developed in Europe. The economic and political realities of the early modern era were not suitable for medieval projects like the Crusades. The competition between the new nation-states was growing and mercantilism became a major economic practice in which European merchants and privateers were seeking huge profits in the recently discovered America and the Mediterranean. While the Europeans' contact with the indigenous peoples of recently discovered lands of America and Australia might have given them a sense of superiority, increasing commercial and political relations with the Islamic world in the Old World certainly could not yet do so. This was the age when the distribution of power over the globe started to shape. There was political and religious rivalry among European nations, and none of them had the economic and military superiority to challenge the powers of the Muslim countries. Moreover, trade with the East was inevitable and this led an increase and variation in the economic and cultural trafficking with Islamic countries (Burton, 2005).

For Europe the most challenging Islamic power was the Ottoman Empire. From the fourteenth century onwards, Turks became a major threat first to the Byzantine Empire, and then to the entire Europe, as they captured Constantinople in 1453 and almost took Vienna in 1529, keeping the city under a long siege. During the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (1495-1566), Turks possessed one thirds of the known world, including the Christian holy lands. For many Christian moralists they were "the scourge of God" sent to punish the weak and divided Christendom. Though the Ottomans received a defeat at Lepanto in 1571, their retreat proved only temporary, as two years later they took Cyprus, which was a very strategic island on the Mediterranean trade route, and in 1578 in the Battle of Alcazar, Ottoman viceroy Abdul-Malek triumphed against troops from all over Europe. The Ottomans remained a leading world power until the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), which forced them to relinquish large territories in

eastern Europe including Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia and lose their dominant position in this part of the world. Nevertheless, in the early phase of European expansion, the West was forced to recognize the sovereignty and unity of the Islamic world. Rather than a confrontation, Christian princes were forced to make trade agreements and mutual defense pacts with the Ottomans (Chew, 1937).

England in the early modern age was an isolated nation at the edges of mercantilist Europe and was in need of a strong ally in its political and religious rivalry with Catholic Spain. Despite the longstanding crusader rhetoric that dominated the Christian outlook, the Turkish Empire appeared as a suitable strategic partner for England. At this point in history England was far from the powerful commercial and military empire that it later become and in order to develop a competitive edge “trade with Islamic countries was essential” (Matar, 1998, p. 10). Moreover, the anti-idolatrous sentiment which was common in Protestantism and Islam enabled the construction of an ideologically justified rapprochement between England and the Ottoman Empire (Burton, 2005). Queen Elizabeth I was the first English ruler to openly collaborate with the Turks. She granted liberty to her subjects to trade with Muslims, and what started as a merchant initiative in 1578 became an established policy by the end of the century. In 1580, Sultan Murad III granted England its initial capitulations, and the following year, the English founded the Levant Company, which ensured the protection of English merchants and privateers conducting trade in Ottoman territories. In fact, there was such a strong amity between the Queen and the Sultan that the Scottish king James VI was informed that “no Christian prince ever had in the Turk such a great estimation” (MacLean and Matar, 2011, p. 54). While many Englishmen maintained the conventional hostility against Islam, many others regarded the Ottoman Empire as “the greatest and best compacted that the sunne ever saw” (MacLean and Matar, 2011, p.147). They associated the Ottomans with immense wealth and luxury and perceived the Turkish lands as domains of desire and opportunity.

Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* (1587-1590) appeared in this historical context. In line with the Renaissance humanistic discourse, this play is generally considered as a celebration of man’s ambition to rise to sublime heights. Despite being a Muslim, Tamburlaine is interpreted by many scholars as a model for the European imperialist, who is at the gateway to victory straining against the traditional limits on thought, including those of religion. In addition, in the play almost all major characters are Muslim and traces of medieval conventions that represent the Muslim as the infidel enemy are virtually invisible. I claim that this lack of discrimination towards the Muslims is linked to the realpolitik of the age and Marlowe’s text’s is a reflection of the West’s pragmatic approach towards the Islamic East.

As is well known, the two-part play is centered on Tamburlaine’s opposition against the Turks and the first part depicts the events of the Battle of Ankara of 1402 in which the historical Timur first defeated then captured Ottoman Sultan

Bayezid I. The play's critics often see the character Bajazeth as a stereotypical pompous and warlike Turkish sultan, whose complete defeat and humiliation is an act of divine providence. However, recent scholars who analyze the play within the context of the developing Anglo-Ottoman relations argue that Marlowe uses these stereotypes as a front. At first, Bajazeth is depicted as a blustering Islamic sultan threatening Christendom, but as the play progresses, Tamburlaine's cruelty, arrogance, and blasphemy cause the audience to reconsider his actions and sympathize with his Turkish victims. By portraying Bajazeth as a dignified emperor enduring the brutality of a merciless foe, rather than a barbarian deserving retribution for opposing Christians, the play challenges religious animosity. In this way, it subtly builds a narrative that could legitimize England's contentious alliance with the Turks (Burton, 2005).

The Muslim woman within this picture is not represented as a function of religious or civilizational difference. She is simply portrayed as a woman who is restrained by her traditional feminine role. Zenocrate, Zabina, the virgins of Damascus, and the Turkish captain's wife Olympia are not discriminated with the complex combination of their Islamic identity and female gender. Their portrayals lack the sexual overtones often linked with Islamic femininity. Also, there is not any narrative strategy in the play that combines Christian-Muslim relations with heterosexual romance between characters of enemy religions. The Muslim woman is not presented as an object of European men's desire for conquest or possession. Rather, she is depicted as a formidable Eastern empress, complementing the grandiose of her male counterpart. She is proudful and uses assertive language when she needs to. Although she is articulate and exercises varying degrees of imperial authority, these qualities do not render her a danger to the patriarchal social order. At this early stage of Anglo-Ottoman interactions, the distinctions between Christian and Muslim women are not clear. Both are depicted with similar attributes and roles in the empire-building game, which is controlled by universal patriarchal norms.

The idea that *Tamburlaine* is indifferent to a division between Christian and Muslim women is supported by the fact that the play's feminist critics rarely identify Zenocrate and Zabina as Muslim. Instead of noting any Christian-Muslim separation, they mostly interpret these women as typical representations of contemporary gender norms, fulfilling their designated roles as objects within the play's imperialist scheme. For instance, Charles Brooks suggests that "beautiful women are treasures to be won" by the men in *Tamburlaine*, and by acting nobly and virtuously, women can achieve "the highest prize possible" (Brooks, 1957, p.3). Similarly, Simon Shepherd views the women in *Tamburlaine* not as individual characters, but as means to highlight male virtue, arguing that in the play "women are treated as a treasure in a world where men fight and negotiate" (Shepherd, 1986, p.179). Like their Christian counterparts, Muslim women in *Tamburlaine* are trophies and accessories to men in their "glorious enterprise," which was lifted by the Renaissance ideology and in which the Europeans were

more in a position to admire and envy the Muslims than overpowering them. Marlowe's Islamic female characters disrupt the pattern of representing Muslim women with emphasis on passion, assertiveness, lust, and moral corruption as indicators of their supposed false religion. The play does not differentiate Muslim women as embodiments of negative femininity compared to idealized Christian women. Instead, both Zenocrate and Zabina are presented positively: they are noble and virtuous Eastern empresses who elevate their husbands' imperial status and gain respect through their deeds.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Mediterranean was a region of rapidly shifting international alliances and constant territorial changes. Commercial agreements and mutual defense treaties formed between Christians and Muslims. Piracy was widespread, with multi-ethnic crews battling each other and preying on the vulnerable. Turkish privateers dominated the trade routes, posing a threat to Europe's expanding sea markets. Many Christian sailors converted to Islam, or "took the turban," to gain the freedom and protection offered by Barbary ports and North Africa. Despite church sermons and royal proclamations, Christian sailors and soldiers were increasingly "turning Turk," becoming renegade pirates or joining the Ottoman army. The growing number of English seamen under Ottoman influence in the Mediterranean, coupled with the issue of religious conversions, became a source of great concern after 1603, when James I succeeded to the English throne (Senior, 1976).

With the turn of the seventeenth century, rising anxieties against the Islamic wealth and power produced seriously distorted representations of Islam in the popular culture. The threat and fear that the Ottoman Empire imposed upon the Christian world led demonized images of the Islam in the name of anti-Islamic propaganda. Christian moralists argued that the appeal of converting to Islam was largely due to the increased sexual freedom permitted under Islamic rule (Burton, 2005). The Muslim prophet was seen as a blasphemer and a heretic that seduced people, while his religion advocating aggressive violence and sexual excessiveness. Muslim sultans were depicted as oppressive rulers that exercised tyrannical authority over their subjects. Lust, suspicion, murderous conspiracy, sudden cruelty and vengeance were their stereotypical characteristics. The demonization of Islam in these texts focused on the devastating and pervasive power of this culture.

As seen in the example of *Tamburlaine*, the Renaissance humanist discursive approach displays a genuine indiscriminate approach in representing Muslim and Christian women. However, the efforts to demonize the Islamic culture in the seventeenth century revives the negative image of the Muslim woman which clearly contributes to her depiction in later colonial literature. Western patriarchal discourse has always contrasted the "good" woman who embodies the idealized version of femininity and the "bad" woman who represents everything deemed unfeminine. Many Muslim female characters in early modern English

drama, including Lancelot's whorish Moor in *The Merchant of Venice* or the witch Sycorax in *The Tempest*, are represented as the embodiments of this "bad" woman. These representations enmesh the racist rhetoric with a sexist discourse. The idea that Islam is a sexually licentious religion and the notion that women in general always pose sexual danger, bring about misogynistic images for the Muslim woman on the Renaissance stage. We should also add that the concept of harem or "seraglio" enters into the European lexicon for the first time in this period, producing an exaggerated image as a site of hidden sin designed for sexual indulgence.

In a number of seventeenth century plays including Robert Daborne's *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612), John Fletcher's *The Knight of Malta* (1619) and *The Island Princess* (1621), and Philip Massinger's *Renegado* (1623), conversion to Islam is portrayed as a direct consequence of an inter-religious heterosexual desire. In these representations Muslim women are depicted mostly as lustful and wanton women who hide behind the veil of chastity. They evoke open sexuality and female assertiveness, aggressively pursuing their Christian lovers to bring on their conversion and ruin in the end. Voada in *A Christian Turned Turk* is a typical example of this negative model. She is a beautiful but evil Muslim temptress, alluring Ward, the Christian private, to undergo the conversion rite to win her love. In order to show the consequences of apostasy, Daborne punishes his protagonist Ward with a tragic end. After the treachery of his Muslim beloved and the loss of his ship and men, the Christian hero commits suicide on the stage, cursing the Ottomans and warning the potential renegades against the evils of Islam. However, as Nabil Matar points out, this is Daborne's "wishful thinking," as the ending of the play is purely fictional (1993, p. 499). At the time the play was acted on the London theatres, the actual Ward was living in prosperity in the Muslim lands and kept on his piratical operations until old age. Daborne's story is important in respect that it "shows the apprehension which prevailed in the English imagination about the practice of Christians converting to Islam and continuing to prosper" (Matar, 1993, p. 485).

Donusa, the Ottoman princess in *The Renegado* is another example of the willful Islamic temptress type. She falls in love with the Venetian gentleman Vitelli, who has come to Tunis to save his abducted sister, and seduces him with her power, beauty, and wealth. However, when Donusa tries to convert Vitelli, unlike Ward who in Daborne's play almost immediately gives into the allures of the Muslim woman, the Christian hero exhibits strong resilience. Despite the threat of death in the hands of the Turks, he not only denounces Islam and resists conversion, but also enables Donusa to convert to his faith and elope with him back to Venice. In this respect Donusa can be seen as a true descendant of the medieval representations of the enamored Muslim princess, who is essentially good, yet corrupted due to her false religion. She is a convertible pagan who can be assimilated to become a part of the European world.

Similarly, in *The Island Princess*, the attention of the play is focused on Quisara, princess of Tidore, who is wooed not only by native suitors, including the villainous Governor of Ternata, but also by two Portuguese adventurers, Ruy Dias and Armusia. Quisara is a powerful and a subtle princess, who is able to play men against one another to achieve her ends. Offering her love in return, she demands her suitors to free her brother, a trope that recalls the heroic action as proof of desire and worth, found in medieval romances. Quisara's desirability is underlined many times in the text, as she is a metaphor for the riches and the beauties of her land in a manner familiar in colonial representations. Still, conversion threat posed on the Christian hero, a theme absent in Oriental narratives, dominates the play. While both Portuguese suitors try to convert Quisara into a Christian, they themselves face the threat of conversion as a result of the conspiracies of the evil Governor. Like the earlier two plays mentioned, *The Island Princess* evokes the perils awaiting the European adventurers who may succumb to the seductive powers of exotic lands and their women. Once again resistance to the threat of apostasy is shown to be the key in winning the heart and the soul of the Muslim woman, whose voluntary conversion marks Christianity's definitive victory.

Early modern dramatic works also feature completely evil Muslim female characters who relentlessly strive to dismantle Christianity. Philippa in Thomas Rawlins' *Rebellion* (1639) exemplifies this negative stereotype of the Muslim woman to the edge. In the play, Rawlins does not depict General Raymond as the typical black Machiavellian villain. He is neither especially cruel nor particularly cunning. Instead, these traits are assigned to his formidable wife, Philippa. She matches her husband in military skill and political resolve, with more lines than Raymond and taking revenge by killing both his murderer and her white counterpart. Philippa stands out as a compelling character, offering a rare portrayal of a black Lady Macbeth figure, spurring her husband's ambition.

Zanthia in *The Knight of Malta* is another representative of vigorous Islamic femininity who militantly attempts to destroy Christianity. Serving the virtuous lady Oriana, this black Moorish woman is the assistant to the play's villain Mountferrat. Yet, with her aggressive sexuality and murderous designs, she embodies the ultimate evil force in the play. Zanthia's blackness is the mark of her inconvertibility to a Christian bride. Aware of the fact that she is not valued in the play's sexual economy Zanthia aims for the destruction of the entire Christian community on the island of Malta. Zanthia's blackness and evil are set against the whiteness and virtue of another Muslim woman, Lucinda, the Turkish virgin of noble origin whom the knights of Malta have captured in the recent Ottoman siege. Lucinda is pure, beautiful and passive and upholds the established values with respect to both Christian/Muslim and male/female hierarchies. Lucinda inaugurates the prototype of the Muslim damsels of the later ages, who are loved, honored and rescued by romantic Christian heroes.

The image of the Muslim woman in early modern plays should be seen also in relation to the actual conditions of the women in the English society. The

process of secularization that resulted from the Reformation and the counter-Reformation, humanism, the emergence of the middle class with its new sexual division of labor, and the new definitions of individualism and domesticity led to significant changes in the position of women. Many women clearly stepped out of their traditionally restricted spheres and contributed to the English society both economically and culturally, and this partial liberation was frequently seen to be threatening by men. The patriarchal system was resistant to granting women any form of independence. Instead, to maintain prevailing gender hierarchies, women were constantly reminded of their subordinate status and expected to submit to male authority.²

Liberty of women reveals to be an important question that is raised up in the early modern plays and Muslim female characters appear to be functional in overcoming the challenge posed by actual women to English masculinity. Islamic women in these plays not only do epitomize all that is unfeminine and unnatural, with the restraint of freedom that they are subjected to, they embody a telling contrast to the assumed privileges of the English women. Though they are portrayed as evil and sexually assertive, Muslim women are shown to be subservient to Muslim male authority and to its severe and unrelenting oppression, which almost enslaves them within harems. Donusa in *The Renegado*, for instance, is depicted as a harem woman and covers her face with a veil when she is outside the palace walls. In a conversation with eunuch Carazie, who was born in England, Donusa enquires about the treatment of women in the English society and is appalled by their audacious and liberal behaviors as described by her servant. Thus, the portrayal of the Muslim woman as helpless in the face of male tyranny not only reinforces the perceived backwardness of Islamic culture, but also serves as a reminder to Christian women of the relative freedom they enjoyed, tempering their desire for greater rights. The figure of the Muslim woman serves as highly adaptable dramatic material for early modern English playwrights, offering them a platform to explore their anxieties about both the Islamic empire abroad and Christian women at home. By merging these two seemingly distinct threats into the portrayal of the Muslim woman, playwrights effectively diminish the unsettling aspects of each for their English audiences.

CONCLUSION

Bold pagan princesses of the medieval legacy, lustful and wanton temptresses of the Ottoman world, helpless damsels enslaved in harems: the representations of the Muslim women varied in Renaissance English drama. In contrast to the portrayal of Muslim women in colonial literature, where they symbolize inferiority, the Islamic femininity in these texts reflects the superior power of Islamic civilization.

² For the position of the Englishwomen in early modern age see: Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2006); Kate Aughterson, *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity in England*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1983); Elaine Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (1987).

Muslim female characters in the period's drama are portrayed as enticing and wealthy, however unlike their colonial counterparts, they do not represent the availability of their lands. Instead, they embody the Islamic might as well as the religious and military threat that the Ottoman Empire posed to Europe in the early modern age. Muslim women in late Elizabethan plays are often depicted as noble and queenly companions to powerful Eastern rulers. This portrayal can be associated with the growing alliance between England and the Ottoman Empire, which led to more flexible ideologies regarding Islam. However, the resurgence of the sexually charged representations of the Muslim woman at the turn of the seventeenth century should be understood in the context of increased Muslim-Christian interactions in the Mediterranean, and the perceived threat to Christian identity due to the increasing numbers of Christian renegades who converted to Islam.

These contradicting portrayals which oscillate between admiration and demonization, emphasize the complexities of early modern English attitudes toward Islam. Muslim women on the Renaissance stage served as vehicles for negotiating anxieties about power, gender, and identity on both domestic and international levels. By representing Islamic women as embodiments of both allure and threat, these plays reflect a Europe grappling with its place in an increasingly interconnected and competitive world. The foregoing analysis with respect to Islamic femininity reveals how gendered images were used to articulate fears of cultural dissolution while simultaneously imagining new, pragmatic alliances. Thus, the representation of Muslim women in Renaissance drama not only provides insight into the history of Anglo-Islamic relations but also emphasizes the persistent interaction of power, gender, and cultural difference in forming narratives about the "Other."

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