

**2019 Seminar Abstracts: Staging Muslims and Jews in Early Modern England**  
**M. Lindsay Kaplan, Georgetown University**

**Turks and Moors in Edward White's Bookshop**

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Stationer Edward White, active in London from 1577 until his death in 1612, published *Soliman and Perseda*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Tamburlaine*; no other stationer published so many plays with Muslim characters. What, if anything, can we learn by looking at the other texts, dramatic and non-dramatic, that White published and had on sale in his bookshop? Answers to this question are suggestive, not determinative. White published travel narratives that presented mixed views of Moslems, sometimes hostile, sometimes not. As the plays with Moslems also suggest, White seems to have expected customers with a taste for geographic exoticism rather than with defined anti-Moslem views. White's other playbooks also show consistency with his non-dramatic publications on such topics as female power, French religious conflict, or magic. He even seems to show a preference for plays with allegorical choruses. My remaining question: do observations such as these shed light on Early Modern attitudes toward Moslems, Early Modern publishing practices or twenty-first century critical ingenuity?

**Body Piercing and Blood-Letting:  
 Threats to the Christian Body Politic in *The Merchant of Venice***

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My paper examines Muslim and Jewish threats to the Christian body politic as represented in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. While Shylock's threatened retribution against Antonio has been extensively studied, Morocco's threat to Portia is routinely reduced to the stuff of comedy: where the Moorish prince is rendered a turbaned, self-absorbed buffoon taking his unlikely chances in the Belmont lottery. Although early modern scholars such as Matar take care to distinguish the military might associated with the Ottoman Turk from the more benign Barbary Moor, Shakespeare's Morocco nevertheless emerges as a threatening figure to Portia and her Belmont. While Morocco and Shylock never collude, never, in fact, come in contact with each other, Muslim and Jew nonetheless converge on the early modern stage to threaten the Christian body politic: Morocco through what would constitute forced marriage to Portia, and Shylock through blood justice against Antonio. Although neither succeeds in harming the play's representative Christians—this is, after all, a comedy—there nevertheless appears an imperative to overcome them. Resolution comes through erasure of the infidel. Morocco is banished from Portia's Belmont. For Shylock, the play's signature villain, erasure comes through forced conversion and economic seizure.

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**“Fairyes or Divels”: Why Oberon Belongs in Lust’s Dominion**

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The influential revenge tragedy *Lust’s Dominion, or the Lascivious Queen* (1600) comes up frequently in discussions of the depiction of Muslims on the early modern English stage. The play’s narrative of the displaced Moorish prince Eleazar, who briefly becomes the king of Spain, is remarkable for its metatheatrical investigation of how the use of blackface to portray both Moors and devils on the stage was incorporated into demonizing propaganda seeking to tie race to national boundaries. However, one of the major turning points in the play has gone virtually unremarked upon: a jarring interlude, in which Oberon leads a troupe of fairies onto the stage, where they disrupt one of the highest-tension moments in the play with a whimsical song and dance. In this essay, I demonstrate that this moment is fundamental to understanding *Lust’s Dominion*: it builds on implications developed throughout the text that ask the audience to interpret Eleazar not as a devil, as the Spanish faction that opposes him portrays him, but rather through the figure of the fairy king. The play uses this analogy to frame the nation as a heterogenous body made up of palimpsested histories of regime change, and to show how efforts to tie race to nationality attempt to mask this past.

**“Shed thou no blood”: Shylock, Antonio, Morocco**

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In the relentless trial scene of 4.1, *The Merchant of Venice* condenses the long premodern history of associations between religion, religious difference, and blood. Portia’s meticulous attention to Shylock’s potential shedding of “a drop of [Antonio’s] Christian blood” recalls for the audience foundational narratives of Jewish perfidy, particularly accounts of the crucifixion and claims of host desecration. This essay considers the re-working of such narratives, and their suggestion that “Christians needed Jews to produce miraculous blood” (Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*), into the plot of Antonio’s self-professed sadness. I focus on the symptomatic way in which Portia’s scrutiny of the bond covers over a potential humoral as well as soteriological crisis: the possibility that Antonio’s melancholy blood, and in turn his heart, are too dry or cold or congealed to be salvific. As materialist, physiological accounts of emotions and affects are made to intersect on Shakespeare’s stage with spiritual and theological ones, the play inverts a classic anti-Judaic trope, so that Shylock’s role is to not produce the redemptive blood expected by the Venetians.

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**Infidel Sisters: Jewish and Muslim Women in Early Modern Drama**

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A number of scholars have identified and studied the coordination of Jews with Muslims in medieval law, theology, natural philosophy, art history and literature; a smaller subset has considered the coincidences and divergences in representations of Jewish and Muslim women. To date, no one has compared early modern dramatic representations of Jewish and Muslim women. Scholars unfamiliar with the medieval context tend to read the two groups of women as representing entirely different faiths, ethnicities, or even races. However, these early modern depictions include a number of shared characteristics: infidel women are beautiful, wealthy, desirable to Christian men, often receptive to that desire, and willing to convert. My paper will trace the medieval articulation of this ideal to use it as a lens through which to read early modern infidel women as depicted in two plays: *The Jew of Malta* and *The Renegado*.

**Endangered Christianity:  
 Turkish Infidelity and Jewish Inconstancy in A Christian Turned Turk**

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During the early modern period, constancy was a behavioral conduct that reflected one's virtue through the measurement of diligence, loyalty, chastity, and resistance at the face of hardship. Maintenance of one's constancy was so critical in political philosophy at the time that King James listed it among the virtues that young Prince Henry should cultivate in *Basilikon Doron*. Constancy was specifically discussed in Joseph Hall's *Heaven Upon Earth* and *Characters of Vertues and Vices*. Hall praised constancy and regarded it as mainly a Christian virtue and in doing so, he implicitly found non-Christians incapable of attaining constancy. In a similar way, Robert Daborn's *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612) foregrounds the issues of constancy and links it to the Christian characters. While various scholars have addressed the issues of conversion and captivity in this play, no attention has been paid to the ways in which the play's representation of constancy intersects with race and religion. I argue that the play regards inconstancy as an indelible mark and ascribes it to the body of the Muslim/Jewish characters. This stigmatization of inconstancy in turn represents Muslims and Jews as an immutable group, in turn highlighting the superiority, constancy, and mutability of the Protestant Christians.