



# ‘Strange Habits’

## Clothes, Climes, and the Environment in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries

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### **Investing/Disinvesting Islam on the Early Modern Stage**

As demonstrated by the various sumptuary laws and regulations on clothing, clothes were complex and rather problematic markers of identity in early modern England, with ramifications plunging deep into the spheres of the social, the political, and even the religious. This complexity shows most prominently on the public stage, where characters’ identities and allegiances were accessed upon entry by the outward means of specific costumes and props marking national, racial, and religious belongings.

Taking my cue from the works of Peter Stallybrass and Denis Britton on costume and the performance of transcultural identities on the early modern stage, I will focus in this presentation on some of the key costumes and props associated with Islam in the plays of the period, such as the Turkish crown, robe, and scimitar snatched from the Great Turk in *John of Bordeaux* (c. 1592), the turban decorated with a half-moon, the robe, and the sword donned by the converting English pirate in *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612), or the veil cast by the Ottoman sultan Soliman on the Christian heroine Perseda in *Soliman and Perseda* (c. 1589) as he tries to subject her to his power. Exploring the Islamic symbolism of these identity markers, I will also address the implications of their circulation and reappearance on the public stage in non-Islamic contexts, which at times complicates the cultural and religious statuses of some classically inherited oriental figures, such as the pre-Islamic heroines studied by Chloë Houston.