Early Modern English Drama and the Islamic World. 'In th’armor of a Pagan knight': Romance and Anachronism East of England in Book V of *The Faerie Queene* and *Tamburlaine*

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**ABSTRACT**

In Book V of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, the knight Artegaill turns Turk, donning 'th'armor of a Pagan knight' to infiltrate the court of the Souldan, allowing his fellow knight Arthur to defeat the tyrant with a mirrored shield, destroying him through an act of mimesis. Using this passage as a departure point, I argue that anachronism and mimesis, making the Muslim other a figure in a transhistorical drama and appropriating aspects of his identity for one's own self-fashioning, were central to the construction of both the Turk and the Englishman in Elizabethan literature. I explore this dynamic in *The Faerie Queene* and Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, with a glance at the historical hybrid hero Scanderbeg's role in the English literary imagination. The incorporation of Muslim figures into the romance space constructed by these texts highlights the hopes and anxieties attending cross-cultural contact and the commensurability of human beings, and the double-sided capacity of the English to become like those with whom they trafficked.
The study of the _Faerie Queene_ should be preceded by a review of the great age in which it was written. An intimate relation exists between the history of the English nation and the works of English authors. This close connection between purely external events and literary masterpieces is especially marked in a study of the Elizabethan Age. To understand the marvelous outburst of song, the incomparable drama, and the stately prose of this period, one must enter deeply into the political, social, and religious life of the times. The _Faerie Queene_ was the product of certain definite conditions which existed in England toward the close of the sixteenth century. The Faerie Queene abounds in anachronisms—for example, the y-prefix in past participles like ycladd. In his early days he was strongly influenced by Puritanism, remained a thoroughgoing Protestant all his life, and portrayed the Roman Catholic church as a demonic villain in The Faerie Queene; yet his understanding of faith and sin owes much to Catholic thinkers. He is a poet of sensuous images yet also something of an iconoclast, deeply suspicious of the power of images (material and verbal) to turn into idols. St. George and the Dragon (Paolo Ucello, 14th c.); knife being handed to Elizabeth by one of her courtiers after a hunt because “the Prince or chiefe” always makes the first cut (woodcut, from The Booke of Hunting, 1575).