

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

Few subjects of the English stage have proved more alluring and enduring than religious conversion. The emergence of the Elizabethan theatre marked a profound shift in the way in which conversion was presented. If medieval drama had encouraged conversion without reservation, early Elizabethan plays started to question it. Considering over forty canonical and lesser known works, this study argues that more so than any other medium, early modern drama engaged with the question of the possibility of undergoing a radical transformation in faith and presented the period's understanding of it as fundamentally unsettled. Offering the first cross-religious exploration of conversion in early modern English drama, and presenting a new reading of William Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*, Lieke Stelling reveals telling patterns in the stage's treatment of conversion and religious identity.

LIEKE STELLING is Assistant Professor in English at Utrecht University. She has published articles on early modern literature in *English Literary Renaissance* and *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, and co-edited *The Turn of The Soul: Representations of Religious Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature*, with Harald Hendrix and Todd M. Richardson (2012).

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For my parents, with love

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Note on Texts and Dates

Quotations from the Bible are taken from the Authorized Version, unless stated otherwise. Quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt and others (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008). In quotations from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, I retain original spellings, but modernize long s, u/v and i/j, except in titles. Dates of plays, inserted parenthetically after the title, sometimes appear more precise than they are. I give the years when they were most probably first performed according to *Annals of English Drama 975–1700: An Analytical Record of All Plays, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies & C.*, edited by Alfred Bennett Harbage, Samuel Schoenbaum and Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1989). I try to present exact dates when relevant to my argument.