



Writ in the Margins Podcast

Created by the students in REN670: Dramaturgy in the Shakespeare and Performance graduate program at Mary Baldwin University

Produced by Prof. Molly E. Seremet (she/her/hers)

Episode Guide

Season 2, Episode 7

The Island Princess: Orientalism and (Barbie's) Island Princess

Hosts: Genevieve Henderson, Fawzia Istrabadi, Christopher Niesner

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Episode Resources

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Episode Transcript

GENEVIEVE: Welcome to this episode of *Writ in the Margins*. My name is Genevieve K. Henderson.

CHRISTOPHER: I am Christopher Niesner.

FAWZIA: and I am Fawzia Istrabadi.

GENEVIEVE: And today, we are going to talk about Islamophobia in *Barbie as the Island Princess*.

FAWZIA AND CHRISTOPHER: Wait Genevieve that's not

GENEVIEVE: I know, I know, we have a lot to get into, but first I think we should give people a little plot summary. So *Barbie as the Island Princess* starts with this girl named Ro, who lives on an Island with a Peacock and a Red Panda—

CHRISTOPHER: Genevieve we're here to talk about John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*

GENEVIEVE: Umm... I don't think there's a John Fletcher in *Barbie as the Island Princess*.

FAWZIA: No, no, Shakespeare's contemporary John Fletcher. He wrote a play called *The Island Princess*, the Princess is named Quisara. There's a lot of Islamophobia and themes of colonization and forced conversion

GENEVIEVE: This sounds way less fun than *Barbie as the Island Princess*.

CHRISTOPHER: Well yeah but

GENEVIEVE: *Barbie as the Island Princess* has a Prince Antonio- Which we'll get to later, Christopher is doing his thesis on Antonios'-

CHRISTOPHER: I'm gonna stop you right there, Fawzia, can we do this instead?

GENEVIEVE: Yeah, and Ro saves him from some crocodiles—

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FAWZIA: I mean I would *much* rather do a podcast on *Barbie as the Island Princess*. Tika hiding Antonio's note to Rosella? A betrayal more devastating than Brutus stabbing Caesar.

GENEVIEVE: I mean, the plot is the same though, right? Like they just changed a few names.

CHRISTOPHER: Well...

FAWZIA: I mean...

GENEVIEVE: I mean, there's still an elephant, right?

FAWZIA: You tell her, I can't.

CHRISTOPHER: "deep sigh* No.

GENEVIEVE: NO???

CHRISTOPHER and FAWZIA: No.

GENEVIEVE: Why did I even sign up for dramaturgy?

CHRISTOPHER: It's required.

GENEVIEVE: Oh, that's right.

FAWZIA: Genevieve, don't you have your BA in this?

GENEVIEVE: *In Barbie as the Island Princess*? I wish.

FAWZIA: No, dramaturgy.

GENEVIEVE: Yeah, my undergrad's theatre major didn't offer a "*Barbie as the Island Princess*" concentration, so I went with dramaturgy.

CHRISTOPHER: Honestly, that's a shame.

FAWZIA: Guys we're getting so off topic

GENEVIEVE: Okay, what is this other *island princess* even about? I can't find it on Netflix.

FAWZIA & CHRISTOPHER: *muttering about how its not on netflix because it's never really produced

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and why would anyone produce it anyway*

GENEVIEVE: *sings* I NEED TO KNOW THESE ANSWERS¹

FAWZIA: I mean we could just switch topics, if I can rant about Tika the elephant sneaking into Rosella's room

CHRISTOPHER: Well in John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*, the elephant in the room is Islamophobia.

GENEVIEVE: Christopher, that's so bad.

FAWZIA: IDK I thought it was funny.

GENEVIEVE: Okay, fine, but can someone please tell me what this play is about?

FAWZIA: Oh God, okay, Christopher you start

CHRISTOPHER: SO, there's a princess named Quisara. Her brother is the King of Tidor and he's been imprisoned by the Governor of Ter-nate, who's Portuguese. Quisara says she'll reward anyone who can rescue her brother from prison with her hand in marriage. The Governor, who wants the princess for himself, is in attendance and will "compete" for her hand.

FAWZIA: There's also a captain Ruy Dias who shares an emotional connection with our island Princess as her lover.

CHRISTOPHER: But wait! There is one more in attendance, Armusia. A person who has no connection with the princess but is the champion of the princess' quest.

FAWZIA: Right! He outsmarts the Governor's plot to return the king himself and win Quisara's hand in marriage. Beating both the Governor and... Ruy Dias, who stayed behind to continue to play to the Princess' affections.

GENEVIEVE: Ooo what happens next?

CHRISTOPHER: Well, this is met with disdain from our princess. She rejects Armusia, on the basis that she can not marry a man that she has never met, and because she has affections for Ruy Dias.

GENEVIEVE: *gasp* the scandal!

CHRISTOPHER: I KNOW! But it gets even crazier

FAWZIA: Yes. So Armusia continues to pine for Quisara, and tensions grow between Ruy Dias and Armusia.

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Which leaves them to duel for Quisaras affections.

CHRISTOPHER: In an intense duel between the two, Armusia comes out the victor, wounding but not killing Ruy Dias.

FAWZIA: Enter the Governor dressed as a “moor priest”

GENEVIEVE: That sounds problematic

CHRISTOPHER: Oh honey, it only gets worse from here.

FAWZIA: This guy comes in dressed as a “moor priest” to convince the King that the pairing between Armusia and Quisara is ill fit, due to the differences in their religion.

GENEVIEVE: Wow, this play sounds... kinda gross. Did you know there’s a song in *Barbie as the Island Princess* about cheese?

FAWZIA: Hey, Genevieve, how about this: you record this podcast about John Fletcher’s *The Island Princess*, and we can record an episode about the Barbie one later.

GENEVIEVE: I will hold you to that.

FAWZIA: Good! So to wrap up this summary, Quisara asks that Armusia change his religion to adapt to hers as a compromise for her to love him.

CHRISTOPHER: To which he does a total 180 and completely damns her religion and her people that follow it.

FAWZIA: Which turns the tables and makes Quisara realize that she is actually in love with Amusia and she can't live without him. In the end, Quisaras feelings of love for Armusia overcomes her and she accepts to change her religion to match that of Armusia... To which they “live happily ever after”.

CHRISTOPHER: Do you feel like you understand the plot now?

GENEVIEVE: I must be honest, friends, I have read this play. I am prepared for this podcast episode.

CHRISTOPHER: Wait what

FAWZIA: Okay, good.

GENEVIEVE: I was just doing a bit.

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CHRISTOPHER: Classic Genevieve.

GENEVIEVE: So now that we've summed up this thing let's talk about powerful women in the post-Elizabethan world

CHRISTOPHER: But first, let's take a closer look at the text

[Dramatic Reading 1: Fawzia as Quisara]

'Though I be A Princess, and by that Prerogative stand free From the poor malice of opinion, And no ways bound to render up my actions, Because no power above me can examine me; Yet my dear brother being still a prisoner, And many wand'ring eyes upon my ways, Being left alone a Seamark, it behooves me To use a little caution, and be circumspect.

CHRISTOPHER: It's not the worst start in the world

FAWZIA: No we love a woman in power

GENEVIEVE: If only it were literally any other play

CHRISTOPHER: It is really interesting what a strong willed character Quisara is though

FAWZIA: Oh definitely, you can see the influence of the Elizabethan age in this play even though it's Jacobean. Europe has just come out of this era that was ruled by women.

GENEVIEVE: But also would a play where a powerful princess gives up her power for a man way beneath her station have been written during Elizabeth's time?

FAWZIA: Oh definitely, not that misogyny went away because of Elizabeth's rule, but it's how you get characters like Beatrice being written. But because of how many queens you had in Europe during that time, and a man is now back on the throne in England there's a level of "well it's back to the natural order of things"

CHRISTOPHER: And this play is a man "asserting his dominance" over a woman in power. A man that at the start of the play, has no power of his own other than the fact that he is a man. I wonder if this play would have been written differently if a queen still ruled over England?

FAWZIA: RIP Arbella Stuart we could've had it all

GENEVIEVE: There's still the Islamophobia thing

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FAWZIA: Yeah I know

GENEVIEVE: Should we get that over with?

FAWZIA: Yeah let's do it

[Dramatic Reading 2: *Fawzia as Quisara, Genevieve as Armusia*]

Quisara: I'll tell you then, change your religion, And be of one belief with me. Armusia How?

Quisara: Mark, Worship our Gods, renounce that faith you are bred in; 'Tis easily done, I'll teach ye suddenly; And humbly on your knees —

Armusia: Ha? I'll be hanged first.

Quisara: Offer as we do.

Armusia: To the Devil Lady?

Offer to him I hate?

That I should give this vantage to mine enemy;

The enemy to my peace, forsake my faith.

Quisara: Come, come, I know ye love me.

Armusia: Love ye this way?

This most destroying way? sure you but jest Lady.

Quisara: My love and life are one way.

Armusia: Love alone then, and mine another way, I'll love diseases first,

Quisara: Are not our powers eternal so their comforts? As great and full of hopes as yours?

Armusia Their comforts like themselves, cold senseless outsides; You make 'em sick, as we are, peevish, mad, Subject to age; and how can they cure us, That are not able to refine themselves?

Quisara The Sun and Moon we worship, those are heavenly, And their bright influences we believe.

Armusia Away fool, I adore the Maker of that Sun and Moon, Shall I fall from this faith to please a

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woman? I looked You should have brought me your chief god ye worship, He that you offer human blood and life to, And where I meet your mammet Gods, I'll swing 'em Thus o'er my head, and kick 'em into puddles, Nay I will out of vengeance search your Temples, And with those hearts that serve my God, demolish Your shambles of wild worships.

CHRISTOPHER:...so where do we wanna start with that?

GENEVIEVE: You can't see it everyone, but I'm handing Fawzia her soap box

FAWZIA: How much am I allowed to just pull quotes from my thesis festival presentation?

CHRISTOPHER: Just copy and paste

FAWZIA: Excellent... let's talk about Orientalism. To make sure we are all on the same page, I offer this quote from the late great Edward Said to explain

GENEVIEVE: Spark Notes version

FAWZIA: Genevieve do you want to try to sum up Orientalism in your own words

GENEVIEVE:....you get one direct quote

CHRISTOPHER: But no Joe Biden's memes

FAWZIA: ...fine. NOW AS I WAS SAYING I offer this quote from the late great Edward Said to explain Orientalism. "Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the west. He is never concerned with the Orient, except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. The principal product of this exteriority is, of course, Representation." To be more clear- you've probably all seen Disney's *Aladdin*, that's Orientalism in a nutshell.

GENEVIEVE: But Fawzia, what does that have to do with John Fletcher's *The Island Princess*?

FAWZIA: I'm so glad you asked Genevieve! Oh God where do I start?

CHRISTOPHER: The exotification of a woman of color?

GENEVIEVE: The Infantilizing of a man of color in a position of power?

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CHRISTOPHER: The fact that the only anti-colonization speech comes from the villain of the play?

GENEVIEVE: The fact that this might be the world's earliest example of 'A Muslim woman takes her hijab off for a white man' trope?

CHRISTOPHER & GENEVIEVE: "Enter the Governor dressed as A Moor Priest"?

FAWZIA: Yeah let's start with that one. So basically, this play is a fantastically awful example of the Elizabethan's misconception around Islam. Islam was, and to some extent still is, viewed as this backwards, barbaric religion. Frankly, I don't have the emotional capacity to explore more than that as a Muslim, you all know, you've seen *Aladdin*. But for ONE, we don't have "Priests" in Islam, we have Imams.

CHRISTOPHER: I'm assuming we're not calling what the governor dresses up as an imam tho

FAWZIA: No we are not my friend, we will continue to use "moor priest" because it's Gross as Hell but I don't want to attach actual genuine Islamic things to this play. For two, Quisara says the following: that Armusia "Worship our Gods" and "The sun and the moon we worship". Like...we know that there were rules on the Early Modern stage about depictions of religion

GENEVIEVE: Which is how you get all the references to the Greek and Roman gods throughout Shakespeare

FAWZIA: Exactly, but Fletcher is clearly skirting the issue by having Armusia make clear Christian references without making explicitly Christian statements

CHRISTOPHER: Right! In response to Quisara's "The Sun and the Moon we worship" he says "I adore the *Maker* of the sun and the moon

FAWZIA: YEP! That's maybe my "favorite" misconception about Islam. This idea that God in Islam and God in Christianity are different. They are the same. Because Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are all Abrahamic religions. I personally like to call them The Abrahamic Trilogy Judaism is the first installment, then Christianity, and then Islam is the third. It's just always been very funny to me that people act like Islam is this "exotic" or "outlandish" religion when it actually has a lot in common with Christianity.

GENEVIEVE: OH?

FAWZIA: Yep! Another thing that people like to really gloss over is that Jesus is still a *really* important figure in Islam.

GENEVIEVE & CHRISTOPHER: Wait really?

FAWZIA: Yep! He's one of the most important prophets in Islam, and he's still the Messiah. The biggest difference is of course that he's not considered the son of God.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh so is Mary not a Virgin in Islam?

FAWZIA: Oh no she very much is, Jesus' conception is still miraculous and Mary is still a virgin, but he's not the

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son of God. His only parent is Mary.

GENEVIEVE: That's neat

FAWZIA: Another thing about Mary in Islam, she's mentioned more times in the Qu'ran than she is in the Bible.

CHRISTOPHER: Well dang. We learn something new everyday!

FAWZIA: Mary's considered the example for women in Islam as she is in Christianity. But it's also really interesting to me that Quisara, a Muslim Princess, starts this play as a strong woman because in Islam women are very much seen as equal to men. Muhammad advocated for women's education, woman can own property in their own right, when a woman is married she has sole control over her dower, and she gets to keep it in the event of a divorce. Women also, per aha sharia law, are entitled to keep their family name upon marriage. They also aren't supposed to be forced into marriages they don't want. A woman has the right to reject a marriage she doesn't want and that will put a stop to any arrangements. Also fun fact the first university was founded by a Muslim woman.

CHRISTOPHER: Yasss Women having agency over their own lives. Iconic.

GENEVIEVE: I feel like with that standard Quisara doesn't start off that bad

FAWZIA: Yeah and not that I think John Fletcher knew *any* of this, and like we talked about earlier I think the humbling of this strong Princess to a submissive wife has to do with having a King back on the throne, but with that knowledge it's also interesting that when she's a staunch Muslim she's a strong woman who's not afraid to speak her mind, but then when she converts she's "learned" and basically doesn't speak for the rest of the play.

GENEVIEVE: Should we look at that fun section?

CHRISTOPHER: If we must

[Dramatic Reading 3- Genevieve as Armusia, Fawzia as Quisara]

Armusia Whether will she? What do you infer by this fair argument Lady?

Quisara: Your faith, and your religion must be like ye, They that can show you these, must be pure mirrors, When the streams flow clear and fair, what are fountains? I do embrace your faith sir, and your fortune; Go one, I will assist ye, I feel a sparkle here, A lively spark that kindles my affection, And tells me it will rise to flames of glory: Let 'em put on their angers, suffer nobly, Show me the way, and when I faint instruct me; And if I follow not —

Armusia: O blessed Lady, Since thou art won, let me begin my triumph, Come clap your terrors on.

Quisara: All your fell tortures. For there is nothing he shall suffer brother, I swear by new faith which is most sacred, And I will keep it so, but I will follow in, And follow to a scruple of affliction, In spite of all your Gods without prevention.

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CHRISTOPHER: Oof. that really is the OG version of “Muslim woman takes her hijab off for a man”

FAWZIA: YUP, it's Not Great

GENEVIEVE: Remember there's also the only anti-colonialist sentiments coming from the villain of the play as a way to deceive the king.

FAWZIA: Oh yeah that's

CHRISTOPHER: Really bad

GENEVIEVE: Shall we?

FAWZIA: Yeah...

[Dramatic Reading 4: Christopher as the Governor and the King]

Governor: Beware these Portugals, I say beware 'em, These smooth faced strangers, have an eye upon 'em. The cause is now the God's, hear, and believe King.

King. I do hear, but before I give rash credit, Or hang too light on belief, which is a sin father; Know I have found 'em gentle, faithful, valiant, And am in my particular, bound to 'em, I mean to some for my most strange deliverance.

Governor: O Son, the future aims of men, observe me, Above their present actions, and their glory, Are to be looked at: the stars show many turnings, If you could see, mark but with my eye's pupil; These men came hither as my vision tells me, Poor, weatherbeaten, almost lost, starved, feeble, Their vessels like themselves, most miserable; Made a long suit for traffic, and for comfort, To vent their children's toys, cure their diseases: They had their suit, they landed, and too th' rate Grew rich and powerful, sucked the fat, and freedom Of this most blessed Isle, taught her to tremble, Witness the Castle here, the Citadel, They have clapped upon the neck of your Tidore, This happy town, till that she knew these strangers, To check her when she's jolly.

GENEVIEVE: See it's just...he's not WRONG. That's exactly what HAPPENS

FAWZIA: MHM but its not a genuine advisor warning his king about foreign invaders

CHRISTOPHER: It's the Governor tricking the King into not trusting the “well meaning” Portuguese

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FAWZIA: Excuse me while I vomit

CHRISTOPHER: Surely early modern audiences saw this play and they had their fill right?

FAWZIA AND GENEVIEVE: No.

CHRISTOPHER: Hello?

GENEVIEVE: Yeah there were actually four other adaptations of this play.

CHRISTOPHER: Does that include the Barbie version?

FAWZIA: Sadly no. Although I will die on this hill that the Barbie version is the best and only version that should be produced in modern times.

GENEVIEVE: I concur.

CHRISTOPHER: Sounds accurate. But who wrote these adaptations?

FAWZIA: The Earliest adaptation was anonymous, shortly followed by an adaptation from Nahum Tate, Thomas D'urfey, and finally by Peter Anthony Motteux.

CHRISTOPHER: What made these adaptations so special?

GENEVIEVE: Well for the most part nothing. It seems the adaptations managed to do the same thing that the original did, especially in terms of promoting christianity and colonialism in England.

FAWZIA: Exactly, and for the most part they all saw the same success as the original. With the exception of the last one.

CHRISTOPHER: The last one?

GENEVIEVE: The last one.

CHRISTOPHER: Say more words.

FAWZIA: I don't know if I have the strength...

GENEVIEVE: I do!

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CHRISTOPHER: Oh great! So what was different about the last adaptation?

GENEVIEVE: The Island Princess, also known as *The Generous Portugal*

CHRISTOPHER: Oof. That already sounds problematic.

FAWZIA: Don't get me started.

GENEVIEVE: The last adaptation was the most successful version out of all the adaptations of this play. Including the original. It seems its success derived from the fact that Motteux managed to turn the script into an Opera and rode the wave of popularity that came with it.

FAWZIA: Basically, Motteux managed to turn Islamophobia and colonialism into something audiences in the early 1700s could sing along to.

CHRISTOPHER: Yikes

FAWZIA: Yikes indeed.

CHRISTOPHER: I understand a popular playwright such as Fletcher not writing the best of plays, but I find it wild that 4 other people felt so compelled to keep adapting it in such a short period of time after he wrote it.

FAWZIA: Yeah it's definitely something.

CHRISTOPHER: So what happened next?

GENEVIEVE: Well that's pretty much it. The play stopped being produced after that resurgence of popularity in the early 1700s. That is until the Royal Shakespeare Company decided to do Fletchers play in 2002.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes. All hail Queen Camilla.

FAWZIA: Excuse me?

CHRISTOPHER: erhem- nothing... I meant... WHAT?? They didnt!?!

GENEVIEVE: THEY DID!

CHRISTOPHER: CHUM CHUM *Mimicking the law and order svu sound*

GENEVIEVE: Okay, so, as I said, the Royal Shakespeare Company did a production of *The Island Princess* in

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2002, but it's actually quite difficult to find any information on that production.

FAWZIA: Yeah, there are very few reviews, and most of them are behind paywalls.

GENEVIEVE: Exactly, and look, it was 2002. I'm sure fewer things were digitized.

FAWZIA: Right, but the production isn't even listed anywhere on the RSC's website.

CHRISTOPHER: And if I look up the 2000 production of *Richard II*, also produced at the RSC, two years earlier, I get far more results.

GENEVIEVE: You do, and therefore it's difficult to blame this all on the time. We are not here to claim that this production was purposefully scrubbed from the internet, but when you put up such an Islamophobic play so shortly after 9/11--

ALL: It doesn't look great!

GENEVIEVE: Exactly, like all of my information on cast and creative team will be coming from the couple of reviews I could find, and I was hoping to confirm that information with the RSC itself.

FAWZIA: Also we all know that season selections can happen way in advance, but again the choice to do *this* Early Modern play in 2002, where basically European Christians colonize and convert a native Muslim Island...feels not coincidental to me.

CHRISTOPHER: So, you said there are some reviews: what do they say?

GENEVIEVE: Well, the most reputable publication that we could get into without paying was *The Guardian*, with a review by Michael Billington. The very first line of that review, and I am not making this up, is "Here is something rich and strange."

FAWZIA: Ha.

CHRISTOPHER: He really wrote that?

GENEVIEVE: He did. According to this review, this is the first complete production of Fletcher's *Island Princess* since 1621.

CHRISTOPHER: I wonder why.

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FAWZIA: I don't.

GENEVIEVE: He briefly explains the plot of the play, and goes on to make some critiques of the play itself, including that "Fletcher ducks many of the issues he raises" and "It is significant that the only serious critique of the colonial adventurers is put into the mouth of the play's villain."

FAWZIA: YEP

GENEVIEVE: My personal favorite is: "Fletcher's play seems like a precursor of those Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals that see the east as quaintly picturesque and ripe for exploitation."

CHRISTOPHER: Boy! gotta love the early 2000s...

GENEVIEVE: He then goes on to talk about the production itself, directed by Gregory Doran, saying that the Portuguese were viewed "as critically as the text allows."

FAWZIA: So basically what I'm hearing is, we shouldn't be producing this play and instead you, dear listener, should run to YouTube and watch Barbie as the Island Princess which is available for free in its entirety.

CHRISTOPHER & GENEVIEVE: Amen.

[Outro Music plays]