

Before Orientalism – Early Modern Anglo-Ottoman Encounters
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Abstracts

Richmond Barbour

Command Performances: Early English Traders in Arabia Fælix

While King James' peace with Catholic Europe called into question Queen Elizabeth's policy of rapprochement with the Ottoman sultanate, the Levant trade, as a source of profit to both London's merchants and the crown, was too important to abandon over religious or political reasons. Nor did the creation of the East India Company (EIC), challenging the Levant Company by marine access to the Indian Ocean, much impair the latter's traffic. The two companies shared investors and tried to coordinate strategies. My talk will examine the early negotiations between English traders and Ottoman authorities in a poly-cultural contact zone of peculiar interest for its proximity to Mecca and remoteness from both London and Constantinople: Arabia Fælix. The English did not fully anticipate the severity of two impediments here: England's reputation as a nation of pirates and the problem of entering the Muslim holy land. Unlike the English, the local governors supposed the Sultan's blessing on England's traffic in the Mediterranean irrelevant in the Red Sea. Mariners on the fourth and sixth EIC voyages (1608, 1610), seeking to present themselves as legitimate traders, not pirates, were received ashore only to be taken captive and forced to perform their subjection to Ottoman authority. These experiences tested the parameters of English identity, forging new bonds between master and common mariners, and awakening English sympathies for the Arabs, likewise subject to the Turks. The unequal negotiations centered on acts of writing (the English lacking the requisite letter from the Sultan; the captive Sir Henry Middleton drafting letters against his will) and scenes of self-presentation. Constrained on land, the English retaliated with extortions that contradicted the avowed designs of their London employers. The entire process confounded English strategies in the region. Thus the eighth voyage, arriving with the Sultan's pass to open trade, found itself compelled instead to join Middleton's fleet in a blockade of the Red Sea. In the event, while the English remained forcefully self-assertive at sea, they recognized the comprehensive need for local brokers—Jewish middlemen, Indian merchants, Arab leaders, officed “renegades” of various origin—to represent their interests on land.

Richmond Barbour and Bernhard Klein

'Shakespeare Before Orientalism: Hamlet in Sierra Leone, 1607 - A Debate'

(Abstract to be circulated at a later date)

Emily Bartels

The Play of Cultures: Early Modern Drama and the Mediterranean Contact Zone

In this talk I want to consider how and why drama emerges as a unique medium for the cultivation of cross-cultural knowledge about Mediterranean and Ottoman subjects. As a form, drama pivots on the illusion that its contents are being improvised, but it simultaneously depends on a synecdochic logic, requiring that we take its parts for an implicit whole. In the matter of characters and cultures in particular, spectators must therefore confront the question of representativity and the often unaccommodating tension between the individual and the type, contingency and essence, the unfixed and the fixed. In *Othello*, for example, while the Turks, true to form, keep Venice in a “false gaze” as they advance towards Cyprus, certain Turks are unpredictably vanquished by a storm at sea; and while their literal presence

is eclipsed, “the Turk” is at once reanimated as the archetype of difference, the anathema to Venice, and absorbed into the adaptable cosmopolitan identity of a Venetian Moor. Looking at such plays as *Selimus*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Othello*, which feature the Turk as a crucial signpost of Mediterranean culture, I will examine this formal dynamic between the improvisational and the representative and address its implications on England’s Mediterranean vision, in particular, and on our critical assessments of that vision. Ultimately, using the case of the Mediterranean as the vehicle, I want to question the viability of describing cross-cultural contacts exclusively through ideologically-based frames such as Orientalism, colonialism, and postcolonialism: arguing that the dramatic form itself pressures and is pressured by politics, I will demonstrate the importance of aesthetics to early modern England’s cross-cultural negotiations.

Claudia Breger

After Orientalism? Performing Post-September 11 Culturalist Discourses in Elfriede Jelinek’s *Bambiland* and Recent Productions of Aischylos’ *Persians*

While Richard Barbour has argued that classic theories of Orientalism (Said, etc.) fall short of grasping the complexity of premodern intercultural encounters, scholars of postcolonialism and globalization have similarly questioned the usefulness of such dichotomous approaches for understanding the contemporary world of “Empire” (Hardt/Negri) or transnational ideoscapes (Appadurai and others). Overlapping with these critical interventions, performance studies have multiply underlined the undoing – and redoing – of identities in the variously mediated processes of cultural – and, specifically, aesthetic – articulation. Connecting all of these theoretical impulses, my talk probes the way in which new insights regarding the complexities of premodern traffic in power and culture can be a) transferred to, and/or b) help to conceptualize contemporary articulations and critiques of neo-Orientalist discourses and practices.

My case study is nobel prize winner Elfriede Jelinek’s 2003 *Bambiland*. The play addresses (more or less “Orientalist”) media representations of the Iraq war through the (unusual, “postdramatic”) form of a complex monologue mixing the speech of “embedded” reporters and TV-spectators with the language of the bible and Aischylos’ *Persians*. In an attempt at intermedial comparison, I discuss Jelinek’s textual performance of culturalist discourses in relation to a) Christoph Schlingensiefel’s *Bambiland* production at the Burgtheater (which uses only a minimal portion of Jelinek’s text) and b) recent theatrical adaptations of Aischylos’ play, namely Dimiter Gotscheff’s 2006 version at the *Deutsches Theater* Berlin and the 2006/8 *Persians* of the *theatercombinat* (Geneva, Vienna, Braunschweig).

Matthew Dimmock

'Old Mahomet's Head': Performing Islam in Early Modern England

In the inventory of the stage properties used by the Lord Admiral's Men, compiled in 1599, is recorded one 'old Mahomet's head'. I want to start this paper by considering this item in detail - what was it used for? What might it mean? What is it likely to have looked like? The head of 'Mahomet' is brought on stage in Robert Daborne's 'Christian Turned Turk' (1612) and in Robert Greene's earlier 'Alphonsus of Arragon' (1587) to serve as an idol which, in the later play, speaks to acolytes and breathes forth 'flakes of fire'. I want to ask why early English dramatists repeatedly return to the notion of Muslim as idolater (and 'Mahomet' as idol), when this had been largely supplanted by the acknowledgement of Islamic monotheism in other English writings. From this point - perhaps via a short discussion of Percy's 'Mahomet and His Heaven' (1601) - I'd like to move to a consideration of the broader significance of the 'Turk' play on the English stage and the role played by Islam within it. This will consider both the theatrical conditions that generated these plays and an exploration of the extent to which

these plays represented a break with, as well the exploitation of, existing theatrical traditions. If time allows, I'd finally like to consider other 'performances' of Islam in England - particularly conversion ceremonies and other stage acts (including a gymnastic 'Turk') in this context. Ultimately, I want to explore what happened when a Muslim figure was placed on an English stage in this period. And, of course, how that might nuance our understanding/rejection of orientalism and its application.

Ralf Hertel

Ousting the Ottomans: The Double Vision of the East in *The Travels of The Three English Brothers*

In an exemplary way, the early modern play *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607) by John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins explores relationships between England and the East. Each of the Shirley brothers participates prominently in a typically English discourse of the East: while the merchant Thomas Shirley represents English economical interest in the East, his brother Anthony, travelling in the name of the Persian Sultan across Europe in order to negotiate a Christian-Muslim alliance, stands in for diplomatic efforts to bind in Eastern powers. Robert Shirley, finally, becomes a military leader of a Persian force, anticipating a hoped-for anti-Catholic military allegiance with the East. Interestingly, the Turk, so much the focus of early modern English anxiety, functions here as a prominent absence: although often on the forefront of the Shirleys' thoughts as well as of those of the Persians, he seldom enters the stage – and only to catastrophic results if he does. Indeed, much of the Shirleys' action can be understood as an attempt to circumvent the Turks and to establish anti-Turkish alliances. In my reading of this play, I propose to study the significance of this dramatic displacement of the Turk in the context of an emergent English national identity. By exploring how the theatricality of the cultural encounter is staged in the theatrical medium of drama, I will analyse how Englishness is negotiated in the context of a pre-Orientalist encounter with the East.

Wibke Joswig

Painting the 'Orient': *Before Orientalism* in the visual arts of the Early Modern Age

In my paper I would like to ask whether there is a *Before Orientalism* in Early Modern visual cultures. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the 'Orient' was present in different subjects than in the nineteenth century when orientalist painting had become a mass production for rich commissioners in England. What was suggested by 'Orient' in paintings and prints from the Early Modern Age? Which function, in contrast to the nineteenth century, did the 'Orient' have? In what kind of paintings did the 'Orient' appear? What kind of 'Orient' were created in illustrations? Moreover I would like to examine the fundamental differences in textual and visual representations of the 'oriental'. A travel account in words has far more possibilities to describe the 'East' than a travel account in pictures as it determines a single image of 'oriental'. To what extent is the construction of the 'oriental' therefore dependent on the visual medium? Do we after all have a *paragone* within orientalist discourse?

Gerald MacLean

Ottomania: How Early Modern English Culture was transformed by Encounters with the Ottoman World

This paper is part of a broader research project into the nature and range of the early-modern Anglo-Ottoman encounter in which, among other things, I aim to show that the so-called 'Clash of Civilizations' described by Samuel Huntington is a dangerous fiction—if not a self-fulfilling prophecy—that is simply not supported by a wide body of historical evidence. Rather, I would argue, ample evidence can be drawn upon to show that since the 16th century at least, English culture—and subsequently British imperial culture more generally—were deeply indebted to Ottoman civilisation. There are several answers to the question of how early modern England was influenced by encounters with the Ottoman Empire. We might think of coffee and coffee houses, horses, baths, flowers and trees, notions of religious toleration, not to mention a widespread fascination that gave rise to numerous stage plays in which the encounter itself was imaginatively projected in different forms. In various publications I have attempted to describe the dominant English attitude towards Ottoman culture during the early modern period as one of 'imperial envy:' a formation that seeks to describe this widespread fascination and these numerous cultural borrowings while at the same time taking account of the persistent religious hostility.

In this paper I shall concentrate on the various and multiple impact of Ottoman textiles, especially silk, carpets and clothing styles, and suggest how they helped transform the English from an unimportant, insular people into a nation with imperial ambitions.

Sabine Lucia Müller

Anglo-Ottoman diplomatic performances

European diplomats were not pleased by the Anglo-Ottoman alliance made manifest in Elizabeth I's 1581 authorization of the newly formed Turkey Company's royal charter. Accused of supporting the Ottoman war with Europe [Venice] due to their importing tin and lead into the Levant, the first English merchants and diplomats in the Ottoman Empire were subjected to close scrutiny at home and abroad.

However, English attempts at having a stake in "the common market of all the world" (Sir Thomas Smith, 1549; Vitkus in Sebek/ Deng, 32), if causing discomfort to other European powers which held, or tried to hold, interests in this region, did in no way always prove comfortable to English merchants and ambassadors themselves. Establishing and fostering diplomatic relations within the 'theatrical' setup (Knolles) of Ottoman political self-presentation was difficult enough in itself. Apart from the necessity of knowing how and when to stage entrances and exits, diplomatic relations also required much waiting in the wings. Accordingly, in studying diplomatic performances as portrayed by ambassadors and travel writers, we need to be aware that a lot of activity takes place offstage or behind the scenes before any actual encounters ensue –if they do so at all.

The performative character of diplomacy (MacLean) renders it both a crucial and contingent process that is not exempt from failure and possibly disastrous consequences. This paper, by looking at select Anglo-Ottoman diplomatic encounters, focuses on the range of possibilities evident in these specific forms of early modern cultural contact. It takes particular note of the creation and citation of available registers and the spaces opened up by diplomatic negotiation.

Clemens Risi

Claudio Monteverdi's *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* (1624 or 1625): A Christian-Muslim encounter in music?

In 1624 or 1625, Claudio Monteverdi wrote his *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, a setting of stanzas from Torquato Tasso's *La Gerusalemme liberata*, for a performance at the apartments of his Venetian patron Girolamo Mocenigo in the Palazzo Dandolo (now the Hotel Danieli), later published as one of the "opusculi in genere rappresentativo" (little theatrical works) in his eighth book of madrigals (1638). In the preface to this madrigal book, Monteverdi explicitly discusses his new way of expressing affections in music in the so called "stile concitato" (a musical style intended to convey the emotions and sounds of war). The story for which he invented it is the famous episode of the Christian crusader Tancredi who encounters an armoured enemy outside the walls of Jerusalem, engages and defeats this foe in a mortal battle, only to discover that the enemy is the Muslim woman Clorinda whom Tancredi secretly loves. Clorinda asks Tancredi for baptism and dies. In my paper, I would like to raise the question how this encounter (with all its religious, political - and above all - emotional energies) is presented and negotiated in Monteverdi's music and the performance of his "opusculo in genere rappresentativo". It is not by chance - I would argue - that Monteverdi chose this particular encounter to demonstrate the very new means of expressing emotions through music that had been invented only some years before with the advent of the new genre opera around 1600.

Susanne Scholz

English Women in Oriental Dress: Displaying Turkishness in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters* and Daniel Defoe's *Roxana*

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Turkish portraits are well-known: they depict her in robes which pretend to be authentic Turkish dress; in fact they are, as Marcia Pointon has shown, fantasy garbs fashioning her, for a European gaze, as an alluring oriental (thus contributing to the 18th century 'myth' of Montagu). In a similar vein, Roxana's dance in a Turkish dress highlights – by mapping onto the 'sight' of her body exotic alterity and femininity, commodification and spectacle of the orient – cultural anxieties hinging on Britain's fragile status vis-à-vis the powerful empires of the East. While these appear as early instances of the well-known tableaux of the 'oriental other' in Said's sense, the use of dress in Lady Mary's *Turkish embassy letters* frequently destabilises preconceived notions of European (scopic) subject and Turkish object of the gaze.

In this paper I want to show how issues of visual and narrative authority intersect in both the *Turkish embassy letters* and *Roxana*, how agency and control of the image these women present to the world is poised against their objectification as a spectacle, and how the cultural cross-dressing that is performed by both women at the same time emphasises and (temporarily) resolves male British anxieties.