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CROSSING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: REPRESENTATIONS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN THREE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH PLAYS

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This article focuses on three English plays, *The Renegado, or the Gentleman of Venice* (1624) by Philip Massinger, *The Tragedy of Mustapha, Son of Solyman the Magnificent* (1665) by Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, and *The Siege of Constantinople* (1675) by Henry Neville Payne, which were written at a time when the ill-defined entity generally known as "the West" today was not in the ascendant and apprehensions of the expansionist Ottoman Empire and its dependencies in North Africa played an important role in European social and political life. The plays are approached from a historicist perspective as attention focuses on anxieties aroused by the early modern European perception of Islam as an alien religion that nevertheless attracted Christians and incited them to convert. Representations of religious conversion are also analysed in terms of gender differences. In addition, each of the plays is read as a response to a particular set of social and political problems, which troubled early modern England and were re-imagined through dramatized stories of encounters between Muslims and Christians.
Keywords: Christianity, Islam, conversion, gender, drama, early modern England, Europe, Ottoman Empire.

Written at a time when the ill-defined entity, generally known as "the West" today, was not in the ascendant and apprehensions of the expansionist Ottoman Empire and its dependencies in north Africa played an important role in European social and political life, the three plays on which this essay focuses, *The Renegado, or the Gentleman of Venice* (1624) by Philip Massinger, *The Tragedy of Mustapha, Son of Solyman the Magnificent* (1665) by Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, and *The Siege of Constantinople* (1675) by Henry Neville Payne, explore issues of religious difference and dramatize actual or potential conversions. I propose a historicist reading of the plays, which will take into account the anxieties aroused by the early modern European perception of Islam as an alien religion that nevertheless attracted Christians and incited them to convert. Insofar as the plays are not set in England or the British Isles and each of them represents an assortment of foreign characters, I will also attempt to assess what Barbara Fuchs has termed "the complexity of intercultural performance" (1) on the early modern English stage.

Unlike a number of states in continental Europe, such as Austria, Poland, Hungary and Venice, England[1] was not directly threatened by the territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire but the raids of corsairs from north African ports on English, Welsh and Irish shores and piratical attacks on English ships on the high seas brought the threat of Islamic aggression quite close and created a sense of vulnerability. Things were further

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[1] I follow Daniel Vitkus in referring to "England" rather than "Britain" throughout this text. Despite "the union of the crowns" in 1603, with King James VI of Scotland becoming also James I of England, "there was no 'Britain' … until the Union [of Parliaments] occurred in 1707" (15). I also share Vitkus's critical view of "the ahistorical tendency [of] describe[ing] early modern Englishmen as imperialists before English imperialism began" (10).

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complicated by the fact that a considerable number of Barbary corsairs were "renegadoes," or former Christians, such as the notorious John Ward (ca 1553–1622), also known as Yusuf Rais. Besides, many corsairs converted for pragmatic reasons rather than out of conviction (Norton 1). Their conversions could be interpreted as expressions of a manifest desire "to join a religious civilization of power" (Matar 37). As far as early modern Europe was concerned, that civilization was represented by the Ottoman Empire, which appeared to function quite successfully as "a kind of multi-ethnic nation of converts" (Vitkus 110).

In contrast, conversions from Islam to Christianity were rare and, barring some exceptions, converts were not readily accepted by their new faith communities. For instance, in 1499 all Muslims in Castile and Aragon were ordered to convert but the converts, known as Moriscos, were expelled from Spain a little over a hundred years later (Phillips, Jr. and Phillips 103). There were celebrity converts such as the Andalusian diplomate Al-Hassan Ibn-Mohammed Al-Wezaz Al-Fasi (ca 1494 – ca 1554), who was baptized by Pope Leo X himself and acquired fame throughout Christian Europe under his given name of John Leo Africanus (in Latin, Ioannes Leo Africanus). Africanus tried to explain, in his book *The Description of Africa* (1550), why Islam was so successful in attracting Christian converts (Vitkus 110). That a convert to Christianity should have undertaken such a task would again suggest that Islam had a strong appeal for potential "renegades" and this was a source of anxiety for religious and political leaders throughout early modern Europe.

Conversion to Islam particularly appealed to Christian captives. As research of documented conversions in times of armed conflict has shown, for Christian prisoners of war conversion to Islam could be "a survival strategy to save one's life, escape captivity or avoid forced labour in the galleys" (Norton 1). On account of the prominence of the Ottoman Empire conversion to Islam was usually described by the phrase "to turn Turk" in which, as Julia Landweber has pointed out, "religion [was conflated] with [ethnic] identity to an unusual degree" (214).[2] Landweber further remarks that because of the tendency to conflate the two, the terms "Turk" and "Muslim" became largely interchangeable in the European imagination, and "turning Turk" suggested that the convert had "switched [ethnic] identities" as well as religious ones (214). On the other hand, "to turn Turk was not … to become Ottoman" insofar as the word "Ottoman" did not denote an ethnic identity but referred to members of the Empire's ruling elite (Landweber 214). The three plays under discussion are enmeshed in this context of linguistic and ethno-cultural confusion.

Following the catastrophic defeat of Ottoman and Tatar forces in the Battle of Vienna (1683) and the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), the balance of power between the Ottoman Empire and Europe's Christian states began to shift in favour of the latter. However, even that did not dispel Christian anxieties over religious conversion. Despite the fact that the Ottoman Empire was no longer regarded as the "terror of the world" (Knolles, quoted in MacLean and Matar 9), stories of conversion continued to challenge European societies' sense of the superiority of Christianity over Islam. For instance, the conversion of the political and military adventurer Claude-Alexandre de Bonneval to Islam caused quite a stir in eighteenth-century Europe and even engendered a spate of fake memoirs, which were published in Holland, Germany and England (Landweber 210, 215).

Early modern representations of religious conversion have been studied from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives, including the composite one of gender studies. Bernadette Andrea in particular has criticized an earlier interpretative tendency of concentrating on "masculinized tropes" of apostasy only and has stressed the need of "a differential gender analysis" of such representations (4). The plays under discussion indicate that *renegadism*, or *apostasy*, was the focus of a wide range of anxieties about the crossing of religious, political, social and cultural borders by women, no less than by men. Because women were conventionally perceived as morally weak, it seemed likely that they would be seduced by Oriental luxury and/or the prospect of gaining political power and influence in the Muslim East by sexual means. In point of fact, women belonging to one of the Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity, were not required to convert to Islam upon entering into relationships with Muslim men. On the other hand, conversion to Islam was essential if a concubine, especially in the harem of "the Grand Turk," wished to achieve influence and power in her adoptive milieu (Peirce, *The Imperial Harem* 163). Given this, it is no wonder that the figures of actual or potential *renegadas* or *apostatas* are central to a considerable number of European representations of encounters between Muslims and Christians from the medieval period onwards. Such figures play important roles in the plots of the three plays under consideration in this essay.

[2] Julia Landweber uses the term "national identity" which I consider to be inappropriate with respect to "Turkishness" in the early modern period.

Significantly, two of the plays, *The Renegado, or the Gentleman of Venice* and *The Tragedy of Mustapha, Son of Solyman the Magnificent* also deal with the issue of conversion from Islam to Christianity. Massinger's play presents the Ottoman princess Donusa as a willing convert to Christianity whereas Boyle's considers the possibility of two Ottoman princes, Mustapha and Zanger, giving up Islam and opting for Christianity out of love for the virtuous Queen of Buda. Such representations could be linked to a desire to compensate for what appeared to be Christian weakness in comparison with Islamic strength.

And last but by no means least, each of the plays under discussion was a response to a particular set of social and political problems at home. This suggests that dramatized stories about encounters between Muslims and Christians were used to re-imagine, explore and (possibly) resolve current dilemmas.

The Renegado, or the Gentleman of Venice: Of Actual and Potential *Apostatas*

Philip Massinger's tragicomedy *The Renegado, or the Gentleman of Venice* (henceforth referred to as *The Renegado*) was written during a political crisis triggered by the attempt of King James I to negotiate a Catholic marriage for his heir and thus re-assert his image as a *rex pacificus*, playing the role of a mediator within Europe and winning international prestige (Stroud 38). The fact that the play's Christian characters are Roman Catholics and that at the centre of the action there is a Jesuit priest, who is represented in a positive way, seems puzzling in view of the staunch Protestantism of the majority of London theatre goers at the time but may be linked to King James's ambitious European project. In addition, those aspects of the play did not cause any "public furore" because of the appeal of its "ostentatious anti-Mohametanism" to the audience and on account of "the shamelessly theatrical brio of its romantic plotting" (Neill 2).

As far as romantic plotting is concerned, Massinger borrowed copiously from Cervantes, both from *The Prisons of Algiers* and *Don Quixote*, and was undoubtedly also inspired by John Fletcher's famous tragicomedy *The Island Princess* (ca 1620) in which the heroine Quisara embraces Christianity out of admiration for the fortitude and other exceptional virtues of her Portuguese lover Armusia. Besides, *The Renegado* is considered to have introduced the eroticized captivity narrative to the English stage (Neill 1). Unlike *The Prisons of Algiers* and the tale of Zoraida/Maria and her Spanish lover in *Don Quixote*, which deal with Algiers, Massinger's play is set in Tunis, the other infamous piratical nest on the Barbary coast. Despite the English dramatist's reliance on Cervantes, the play's Christian characters are not Spanish (Fuchs 134), with the possible exception of Father Francisco, but Venetians, and therefore "stand-ins" for the English.[3] The only character who is explicitly identified as English is the eunuch Carazie, a slave of Princess Donusa. His fate could be interpreted as a warning stressing the danger of castration as the worst possible consequence of conversion to Islam for a Christian man. Dennis Britton has drawn attention to the conflation of circumcision with castration in early modern English plays about religious conversion (73). In his view, the conflation "registers religious concerns about the body as a visible and accessible repository of religious faith" (73).

Despite the play's title, Massinger places the emphasis on the Venetian gentleman Vitelli, who goes to Tunis disguised as "a poor mechanic pedlar" (3. 3. 78) to rescue his sister Paulina, rather than on Grimaldi, the renegado and corsair, who kidnapped her for the harem of Asambeg, the Viceroy of the Ottoman dependency. Fuchs has commented on the important role that trade plays in the tragicomedy, especially trade as "traffic in women" (135). Such a view is borne out by the opening scene of the play in which Vitelli's servant Gazet[4] sets up their tent at the market in Tunis and comments on one of their "wares": the portraits of European women that they have brought over for potential Muslim buyers:

> … this is mistress to the great Duke of Florence,
> That niece to old King Pippin, and a third
> An Austrian princess by her Roman lip –
> Howe'er my conscience tells me they're figures
> Of bawds and common courtesans of Venice. (1. 1. 10–15)

Further on Gazet claims that cheating local "Turks" into buying the portraits of fake celebrities should be seen as "a meritorious work" (1. 1.23), that is, an activity conducive to the salvation of one's soul. Vitelli disapproves

[3] On English – and British – identification with Venice as a commercial maritime power, see Linda Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707–1837*, 62–64.

[4] As Fuchs reminds us, a "gazet" was a Venetian coin of small value (135).

of his dishonest approach to trading at this point but later on, in an attempt to impress Princess Donusa, he himself extols the quality of the paintings and the beauty of the women that they represent:

> Here's a picture, madam,
> The masterpiece of Michelangelo,
> Our great Italian workman; here's another
> So perfect at all parts …
> … They are indeed
> The rarest beauties of the Christian world
> And nowhere to be equalled. (1. 3. 130–138)

Donusa is indeed impressed with his eloquence ("how movingly could this fellow treat upon/ A worthy subject, that finds such discourse/To grace a trifle" [1.3. 127–129]). For her, the Venetian's facility with words contrasts favourably with the unprepossessing behaviour of her Ottoman suitor, the warlike Pasha Mustapha of Aleppo. In order to impress Vitelli in her turn and also prove to him that she can compete with "the rarest beauties of the Christian world," she unveils, thus transforming her own beauty into a commodity and entering into a quasi-commercial contest with the Christian women portrayed in the pictures. Predictably, Vitelli is smitten by her beauty, forgets the warning that has been issued by the Jesuit Francisco, that he should beware of "Turkish dames," who have been made exceptionally lustful by "the restraint of [their] freedom" (1.3. 10–11), and eventually yields to temptation. Donusa thus emerges as a successful "vendor" of her own charms.

Interestingly, in taking the initiative in her relationship with Vitelli Donusa acts very much like the English ladies that Carazie has told her about earlier, at her own request (1.2.25 – 1.2. 49). Like them, Donusa "knows nothing, but her will" (1.2.49). Her desire to be like Christian women could be interpreted as the outward manifestation of a subconscious recognition of the superiority of the Christian world. Further on, Donusa accepts that superiority quite consciously as she is persuaded by Vitelli's arguments to renounce Islam and embrace Christianity (4.3.139 – 155). Vitelli is triumphant and calls her "blest one" (5.3. 138). However, from the perspective of Asambeg, Viceroy of Tunis and chief representative of Muslim patriarchy in the absence of his master the Sultan, her conversion to Christianity is an act of *apostasy*. He calls her an "*apostata*" and pronounces her death sentence (4.3. 159).

The word *"apostata"* is also used by Vitelli in an impassioned speech about the plight of his kidnapped sister Paulina:

> … Can I know my sister
> Mewed up in his [i. e. Asambeg's] seraglio and in danger
> Not alone to lose her honour but her soul –
> ……
> …. To be patient now
> Were in another name to play the pander
> To the Viceroy's loose embraces and cry 'aim!',
> While he by force or flattery compels her
> To yield her fair name up to his foul lust
> And after turn *apostata* to the faith
> That she was bred in. [my emphasis] (1. 1. 129–138)

The Oxford English Dictionary informs us that the Latin feminine form "*apostata*" was more common than the "properly" English "apostate" until the middle of the seventeenth century.[5] In the context of Massinger's play, female apostasy is a source of anxiety to both Christian and Muslim male characters. The view of women as unstable and liable to stray from the patriarchal precepts of their upbringing was one of the clichéd perceptions of femininity at the time. To prevent Paulina from acting as a "typical" woman and becoming sexually and theologically ensnared by her Muslim master Asambeg, the Jesuit Francisco has given her a holy relic, whose power, however, is not absolute:

> … a relic that I gave her, which has power –
> If we may credit holy men's traditions –
> To keep the owner free from violence.
> This on her breast she wears, and *does preserve*
> *The virtue of it by her daily prayers*.

[5] Both Michael Neill (98) and Bernadette Andrea (134) draw attention to this usage.

So, *if she fall not by her own consent –*
Which it were sin to think – I fear no force. [my emphasis] (1. 1.148–153)

A belief in miraculous relics must have been anathema to good Protestants at the time, and the play's Jesuit apparently had to introduce less objectionable elements into his speech out of deference to the audience. As the citation above indicates, the relic can protect Paulina *only* if she prays daily. Moreover, it cannot prevent her sexual and religious fall if she decides, *of her own free will*, to give herself to Asambeg and convert to Islam. The relic proves effective in Paulina's case because, unlike Donusa, who emerges as a "renegade woman" in the broad sense in which Eric Dursteler uses the phrase (2) and transgresses the religious, political and gender boundaries of her native culture, the Venetian obeys her own culture's patriarchal authority as vested in the Jesuit Francisco.

Paulina appears to deviate from her pattern of exemplary behaviour only during her *feigned* compliance with Asambeg's desires. Instructed by Francisco to do so, she declares:

I now will run as fiercely to your arms
As e'er longing woman did, borne high
On the swift wings of appetite.
……
Nay, more – for there shall be no odds betwixt us –
I will turn Turk. [my emphasis] (5.3. 147–152)

Paulina's only condition prior to her sexual union with the Viceroy and her conversion to Islam is that he should postpone the execution of Vitelli and Donusa for twelve hours. She claims that she needs the delay in order to gloat over the former Sultana's reversal of fortune:

That I may
Have time to triumph o'er this wretched woman;
I'll be myself her guardian; I will feast
Adorned in her choice and richest jewels.
……
Thou shalt not go in liberty to thy grave:
For one night a Sultana is my slave. (5.3. 164–173)

Paulina's behaviour conforms to the stereotype of the "courtesan-turned-queen" (Ballaster 61), best exemplified by Roxolana (Hürrem Sultan), the (in)famous wife of Süleyman I (1494–1566), known in the West as "the Magnificent," whose story was used by many Western writers to demonstrate the deplorable effects of female power.[6] The stereotype was also part of the Western repertoire of derogatory characteristics of Oriental despotism. The power delegated by the Oriental despot to his favourite concubine was assumed to mirror his own unrestrained and arbitrary power. Roxolana will receive more attention in my reading of Boyle's *The Tragedy of Mustapha* in which she is a major character.

In the context of *The Renegado*, a number of characters are shocked by Paulina's enactment of the stereotype of the courtesan-turned-queen: the servants Carazie and Manto are nostalgic for the time when they served "our sweet-conditioned princess, fair Donusa" (5.2. 60) and even Mustapha, who was jilted by Donusa, calls Paulina "a terrible little tyranness" (5.3. 174). However, they are powerless against her because she is supported by the local despot, the Viceroy, who declares that "[h]er will shall be a law" (5. 3.176).

Paulina is merely acting and yet, for a time, she fools some of the characters into believing that she has changed into a ruthless "tyranness" intent upon "know[ing] nothing, but her will" (1.2.49). Her metamorphosis, even though it is a ruse to enable the repentant renegado Grimaldi and his fellow sailors to engineer the escape of the Christian characters and the newly converted Donusa to Italy, points to a general distrust of women which is at the core of the play. Women are evidently not to be trusted since a virtuous Paulina can impersonate a wicked Roxolana with such virtuosity. On the other hand, the ruse works: the Christian characters leave Tunis, thus thwarting the sexual and political designs of Asambeg and Mustapha. The play compensates for the weakness of a fragmented Christian Europe by presenting the fiasco of two Ottoman grandees. In terms of English domestic politics, the story of the once proud Princess Donusa, who is

[6] For an overview of literary and other representations of Roxolana or Hürrem Sultan, see Yermolenko (22–55).

prepared to accept the position of an obedient Christian wife, might have been intended as a didactic fable for the "taming" of the foreign Catholic princess that the heir to the throne was expected to marry.

The Tragedy of Mustapha: The (Im)Possibility of Converting "Infidels"

The Tragedy of Mustapha, Son of Solyman the Magnificent (henceforth referred to as *Mustapha*) by Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery, is one of a number of Western plays presenting the story of Sultan Süleyman's eldest son Mustafa (Mustapha in the play), who was executed at his own father's command. It is also one of several seventeenth-century plays portraying the Sultan's wife Roxolana (Hürrem) in a leading role (see Hayden 71). The play builds upon a passage from Richard Knolles's *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (1603), which denigrates Roxolana's excessive ambition and her undue influence over the Sultan, which supposedly led to the young prince's execution (Orr 72).[7] It has been suggested that Boyle may have also borrowed from Madeleine de Scudéry's 1641 novel *Ibrahim ou l'illustre bassa* (Hayden 75). In that case he must have used the French original because Henry Cogan's English translation, titled *Ibrahim, or the Illustrious Bassa*, only came out in1674, that is, some nine years after his play had been released.

The stories of Mustafa and Roxolana aroused a lot of interest in the West. According to Galina I. Yermolenko, this interest "reflected the West's fear of and fascination with the Ottoman Empire, [while also] feeding into the stereotypical images of the 'cruel Turk' and the 'lascivious Turk' that Europe conjured up" (27). In addition, Boyle's play was written and performed during the Restoration period, and was also a reaction to contemporary problems at the court of Charles II, more specifically, his relations with his mistresses and their presumed influence over his political decisions, and the chaos generated by corrupt ministers of state (Hayden 72–77). As Ros Ballaster and Judy A. Hayden have demonstrated, it was not difficult for Boyle and other Restoration playwrights to associate Charles II with "the Grand Turk" on account of his "sexual promiscuity and love of luxurious display" (Ballaster 64). However, Hayden, also warns against the facile identification of Roxolana with the King's mistresses. The Sultana's portrayal in Boyle's play was not intended as "a caricature or personation" of those women (74).

On the whole, the play's connection to sixteenth-century Ottoman and European history is tenuous. The action of *Mustapha* is set against the background of the fall of the Hungarian capital of Buda to the Ottomans (1541) and a dynastic crisis in Hungary due to the death of King John I Szápolyai and the minority of his son John Sigismund (Molnár 88–89). In the play, Solyman is accompanied by his wife Roxolana and his sons Mustapha (Mustafa) and Zanger (Cihangir) during his Hungarian campaign. The historical Hürrem Sultan did not accompany her husband on any of his military campaigns. She was "isolated from war" in accordance with Ottoman custom (Peirce, *Empress* 261) and, especially in later life, acted as Süleyman's "most trusted family correspondent" whenever he was away from his capital (Peirce, *Empress* 208). Nor was the Sultan accompanied by his sons Mustafa and Cihangir; as the latter was born in 1531 (Peirce, *Empress* 72), he must have been only about ten years old at the time of the Hungarian campaign. In addition, because of ill health, Cihangir was not in a position to compete for the Ottoman throne with any of his brothers (Peirce, *Empress* 141). The list of historical inaccuracies could be extended. As may be surmised, Boyle was unfamiliar with life and social customs in the Ottoman Empire. Besides, a faithful reproduction of mid-sixteenth-century Ottoman history was not among his priorities. His aim was to adapt extant stories about the Ottoman Sultan Solyman "the Magnificent," his ambitious favourite Roxolana and his sons to the ideological format of Restoration heroic drama. Besides, what may be described as his *revision* of historical events could also be linked to his concern with contemporary developments at the court of Charles II.

Boyle's adherence to the conventions of heroic drama would explain the behaviour of the two Ottoman princes, Mustapha and Zanger, who are portrayed as "civil … subjects" (Orr 75) in *Mustapha*. Intent upon changing the existing social order, the young princes make a pact to do away with the Ottoman practice of fratricide according to which the heir to the throne was justified in putting all of his brothers and half-brothers to death in order to prevent civil strife (see Finkel 204). This murderous custom was seen by western Europeans as a distinctive feature of Ottoman despotism and as one of the defining differences between the Empire of "the Turk" and their own states.

[7] For a contemporary historical interpretation of the life and death of Mustafa, see Peirce, *Empress* (269–279).

Roxolana is also portrayed in conformity with the conventions of heroic drama. Boyle followed a precedent established by Sir William Davenant, author of the heroic opera *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), in depicting her as "a powerful queen capable of noble acts" (Yermolenko 36), while at the same time drawing attention to her "unfeminine" ambition and determination to use her sexual power in order to bend the Sultan to her own will. In *Mustapha*, she is contrasted with the virtuous Queen of Buda, who embodies "a fruitful, submissive and proper maternity" (Orr 76). Roxolana's "unfeminine" qualities are part of the stereotype of the Oriental woman whose nature has presumably been corrupted by the false religion of Islam. Interestingly, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Western playwrights writing about Roxolana/Hürrem did not represent the Ottoman "empress" as an *apostata* from the Christian faith. Boyle follows the general tendency.

Information about Hürrem Sultan's eastern European Christian origins was not lacking: there were dispatches, reports and travel notes by Western diplomates, bankers and merchants, who were resident in the Ottoman Empire in and around 1536, the year of her legal marriage to Süleyman. A frequently quoted passage about their wedding, which comes from the dispatch of the Istanbul representative of the Genoese Bank of St. George, explicitly states that she came from Russia:

> This week there has occurred in this city a most extraordinary event, one absolutely unprecedented in the history of the Sultans. The Grand Signior Suleiman [sic] has taken to himself as his Empress *a slave woman from Russia* [my emphasis]…. There is great talk about the marriage and none can say what it means. (quoted in Peirce, *Empress* 3)

In fact, "Roxolana," the name by which Hürrem became best known in western Europe, "derives from a Polish term meaning 'Ruthenian maiden'" (Ballaster 61). Recent research has shed light on the Sultana's past as a formerly Christian woman from western Ukraine, which was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time (see Ballaster 61). Abducted by Crimean Tatars during a raid, she was sold at a slave market in Istanbul and purchased for the Sultan's harem (see Yermolenko 2). She next became Süleyman's favourite concubine, converted to Islam, gave birth to five sons, thus ensuring the perpetuation of the Ottoman dynasty, and gained influence over the Sultan to the extent of persuading him to manumit and marry her.

Given the period's preoccupation with religious conversion, one might expect Western dramatists to have cast Roxolana in the role of an *apostata*. In Knolles's *Generall Historie*, attention is drawn to her "pretence" at religion as she endowed charitable foundations, mosques and hospitals in order to lure the Sultan into marrying her (see Hayden 72). This could have been made part of a representation of the Sultana as a traitor to the religion of her birth and a hypocritical opportunist in her new faith community. On the other hand, the erasure of Roxolana's apostasy by Boyle and other Western dramatists is understandable. The historical Hürrem Sultan was a remarkably successful *apostata*. In the words of the otherwise censorious historian Knolles, she rose from the "condition [of] a Captive [to become] [the] Commandresse of him that all commanded" (quoted in Yermolenko 28). Representing an *apostata*'s triumph on the early modern stage would have been fraught with tremendous ideological difficulties: the idea that "humankind [was] sorted into fixed and separate religious categories" (Katznelson and Rubin 1) was dominant at the time. Among other things, such a representation would have implied that people could change their religion out of self-interest and prosper in a new community of faith. "Malleability and multivalence" might have characterized early modern religious identities, especially in border zones such as the Mediterranean (see Dursteler 115), but such categories were definitely not acceptable at the level of official religious ideology.

Being a major character in a heroic drama, Boyle's Roxolana is torn between conflicting feelings: protective love for her son Zanger, who is in danger of becoming the victim of the cruel Ottoman law of primogeniture, and admiration for Mustapha, the Sultan's eldest son and heir presumptive to the imperial throne. Roxolana recognizes Mustapha's fine qualities but cannot leave Zanger to "Empires cruelty" (4.5.658), and therefore becomes involved in a plot against the eldest prince, engineered by the vizier Rustan. Rustan is portrayed as a scheming hypocrite determined to increase his own power through the crisis at the royal court. As already pointed out, exposure of the treachery and selfishness of corrupt ministers of state was one of Boyle's aims in the play.

The plot of *Mustapha* is further complicated by the story of the Queen of Buda who is not merely Roxolana's Christian foil but also a sexually desirable woman of whom both Mustapha and Zanger become enamoured. Their love for the Queen is the only rift in their fraternal relationship as well as a test of their

honour. As the object of the Ottoman princes' love, the Queen becomes a potential target for conversion to Islam. However, it is also suggested to her by her own scheming counsellor, the Cardinal, that she should derive political advantages from the Ottoman princes' passion and rivalry. The whole of Christendom could in fact benefit from their love for her:

> But you may favour both, and may disguise
> Or shew your Love as int'rest shall advise….
> They their Religion did by Conquest make;
> And will no Rules but from their Conqu'rors take.
> If they, till taught, can never truth discern
> They must be conquer'd to be made to learn:
> And since no Pow'r but Love can them subdue,
> Madam, they must be overcome by you,
> But she who will o'ercome in Love's fair field
> Must by her yielding make her Lover yield. (3.4. 289–299)

The Cardinal's speech is casuistical in the extreme but implicit in it is the idea that the Ottoman princes could be taught to "discern [the] truth" of Christianity through their love for the Hungarian Queen. However, the Queen is too noble and too pure to accede to his Machiavellian plan. "Must I this way convert an Infidel?" (3.4. 301), she asks, and the question is largely rhetorical. Apart from having moral reservations about the Cardinal's plan, she doubts the ability of the two "infidels" to "soar to our Religions height" (3.4. 305). For the Queen Christendom is above all a religious civilization of *spiritual* power into which the two princes could not be integrated on account of their early conditioning by a warrior culture based on conquest and cruelty to the defeated. The military character of Islam is emphasized in one of the early episodes of the play:

> Rustan: In lazie peace let Christian monarchs rust,
> Who think no War, but what is defensive, just.
> Our valiant Prophet did by Slaughter rise:
> Conquest a part of our Religion is. (1.1.23–26)

Despite significant differences, *Mustapha* resembles Massinger's play in stressing the moral superiority of virtuous Christians over Muslims. As the play draws to a close, the Empire of "the Turk" descends into chaos: Mustapha is murdered at his own father's command, Zanger commits suicide, the janissaries rebel, Rustan and another treacherous vizier are slaughtered, Roxolana confesses her part in the plot and is banished by the Sultan, who no longer takes pleasure in the government of his huge empire because "Love, the Ornament of Pow'r" (5.9. 795) is gone. The reformation of the state, conceived by the young princes, is more remote than ever. On the other hand, the virtuous Queen returns to Buda with her infant son, bearing with her Roxolana's good wishes:

> Go, Madam, go, and hasten to your Throne!
> Live to find Zanger's Friendship in your Son.
> Be with much pow'r more happy then I prov'd,
> Live to be fear'd, and yet continue lov'd. (5. 8. 118–122)

In the play, the Queen of Buda is decidedly privileged over Roxolana who, contrary to historical veracity, is punished by Solyman for her plotting and excessive ambition. It is possible to read this as a "patriarchal fantasy" (Jowitt 69) of curbing female power as well as a moral lesson for King Charles II, who attended the premiere of *Mustapha* (see Hayden 81). For a monarch, the recipe against chaos in the state was evidently the renunciation of the kind of love that refused to be merely "the *Ornament* of Pow'r [my emphasis]" (5.9. 795) and strove for control over it. Apart from attempting to teach a lesson from which Charles II apparently did not profit, the play leaves us with a view of the Empire of "the Turk" as an entity totally different from Christendom. For all their civility, Mustapha and Zanger, the noblest representatives of the Ottoman polity, are not deemed capable of "soar[ing] to our Religions height" (3.4. 305).

The Siege of Constantinople: The *Apostata*'s Punishment

The Siege of Constantinople (1675) by Henry Neville Payne similarly reinterprets a story from Knolles's *Historie*. The story is that of "the fair Greek Irene," first loved and then killed by Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror,

who resorted to such a desperate measure in order to convince his army, and especially the janissary corps, that "their emperor had [not] abandoned his valour in a couch of luxury" (Orr 80). Knolles presents Irene's beheading by the Sultan in vivid detail:

> [W]ith one of his hands catching the fair Greek by the hair of her head, and drawing his Falchion with the other, at one blow [he] struck off her head, to the great terror of them all; and having so done, said unto them: *Now by this judge whether your Emperor is able to bridle his affections or not.* And within a while after, meaning to bridle the rest of his choler, caused great preparation to be made for the *Peloponnesus* and the besieging of *Belgrade*. (quoted in Orr 80)

This episode proved to be a lasting source of fascination for English playwrights: it was dramatized three times between 1658 and 1675 (Orr 80), and about half a century later Samuel Johnson revived it in his only play *Irene* (1726–1749).

The fate of Irene was seen to illustrate some of the worst aspects of Oriental despotism, such as the despot's absolute power, his freedom from the constraints of established laws, the fact that he could take the life of any subject with impunity, and what Bridget Orr has described as "his paradoxical dependence on the janissaries, utterly subjugated and yet rebellious" (80). The Sultan's need to conciliate the janissaries exemplifies a psychological trait which Montesquieu would later on include in his hypothetical portrait of the "ideal" despot: "the despot, whose whole power rests upon the fear he inspires, is himself unceasingly subject to fear" (Grosrichard 36), in this case, fear of rebellion and the cessation of his power. However, in terms of the political context of the Restoration, the story could also be construed as demonstrating "the self-possession needful in a monarch [and] [the ruler's] ability to sacrifice desire in the face of political necessity" (Orr 80). Such an interpretation turned the Sultan into a foil of the licentious Charles II, who was apparently unable to bridle his passions and act as a responsible political agent. Irene herself could be represented either as the victim of a cruel conqueror or as a *renegada*, who largely deserved her fate.

Payne's play dramatizes the siege of Constantinople and the last Byzantine Emperor's futile attempts to save the city. The ruler's efforts are undermined by avaricious citizens, disloyal mercenaries and, above all, false counsellors like the wicked Chancellor, who secretly conspires with the enemy in the hope of being made Grand Vizier by the Ottoman Sultan. The Emperor's brother Thomazo is represented as a true patriot, who fights heroically in the final battle against the invading Ottoman army, despite having been traduced to the Emperor by his enemies. The relationship between Thomazo and the Emperor was evidently intended as a commentary on the mid-Restoration political crisis caused by the Whigs' desire to exclude King Charles's Roman Catholic brother James from the royal succession. Within that context, the Chancellor emerges as a figure standing for unscrupulous Whig politicians such as the Earl of Shaftesbury (see Orr 83).

In the play, the Chancellor is represented as an arch-schemer, totally corrupted by selfish ambition and an obsessive desire for power. To please his new master the Sultan, he offers to prostitute the virtuous Irene to him. However, it is his own daughter Calista, who willingly takes Irene's place and becomes the Sultan's concubine. Like her father, Calista is motivated by ambition and a strong desire for power. Having become Mehmed's favourite, she glories in her new position and attempts to poison Irene whom she views as a potential rival. Calista is repeatedly referred to as "Medea" on account of her cruelty and possibly because, like the sorceress of Ancient Greek myth and drama, she is a traitor to her own people. She represents apostasy at its worst, and the audience was apparently expected to feel that her beheading by the Sultan was thoroughly deserved.

Sultan Mehmed is an unseen presence in the play. He is represented as a worthy enemy, who punishes transgression and rewards virtue. Impressed with Thomazo's courage and patriotic loyalty, he rewards him with Irene's hand and makes him prince of the Morea.[8] The wicked Chancellor, on the other hand, shares his daughter's fate and is executed. Despite the tragic fall of one of the iconic sites of Christendom and the death of the last Emperor of Constantinople, the Ottomans are not demonized by Payne. They are represented as successful empire builders, and their Sultan is just in his dealings with honourable enemies.

Overall, *The Siege of Constantinople* repeats the ideological manoeuvre with which we are familiar from the other two plays: deserving Christian characters win moral victories against a political background marked by overwhelming Ottoman might. Significantly, in this particular case, the merits of the positive Christian

[8] The Morea was the name by which Peloponnese was known in the late Middle Ages and the Ottoman era.

characters are recognized by the Ottoman Sultan himself and this may be interpreted as a sign of his own moral worth. The play thus seems to anticipate what Larry Wolff has defined as "the dramatic principle of the generous Turk" (393). In a commentary on early eighteenth-century European opera, he remarks that such "generosity had to come as a surprise at the end of the opera, for it was the presumption of [Turkish] cruelty that drove the dramatic… tensions of the work" (394). The element of surprise plays a major role in our perception of Payne's plot, too. As with the later operas, discussed by Wolff, the generosity of "the Grand Turk" was intended as "an indirect tribute to … the principle of monarchical authority" (Wolff 395) at home rather than in the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

The three plays portray clashes between hostile powers and explore the temptation of opting for the "strong side" through religious conversion, as well as the threat that renegadism posed to early modern Christian cultures in Europe. Writing about conversion in the period under discussion, Vitkus remarks that it can be construed as "a concept that includes the religious conversion of individuals" but may also refer to "a collective cultural and economic transformation that English society was undergoing" as it was "adopting new procedures and identities" (167). As far as the public stage was concerned, the process of transformation promoted greater openness to other cultures. As dramatized stories of diverse foreign characters were adapted to the English context and attempts were made to solve current political problems by following foreign examples, identities were increasingly (albeit imperceptibly) destabilized and traditional religious and moral values were rendered problematic. Examples of what may be described as an early modern European – and English – tendency to relativism were found in *Mustapha* and *The Siege of Constantinople* in particular. As we saw, both plays favoured the tentative recognition of the moral worth of some of the Ottoman characters but rejected any form of cultural or religious union, thus demonstrating the limits of the early modern trend to relativism.

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