

The Representation of the Orient in Molière : Europe and the Turks in *the Bourgeois Gentleman* (1670)

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Abstract. Seventeenth-Century European representation of the Orient is deeply grounded in historical developments, particularly in the mythical encounters between East and West, the Turks and Europe. The expansion of the Ottoman Turks at the expense of European forces, especially after the middle of the fifteenth century, offered the roots of Europe's fear of the exotic Oriental "Other," i.e. the Turks. This paper examines Molière's depiction of the Turkish ceremony in *The Bourgeois Gentleman* as a reflection of renewed tensions between Crescent and Cross. All the elements of the Turkish ceremony in the play intentionally parody the Oriental Muslim, offering evidence for a generally negative attitude of French culture towards other contemporary foreign cultures. The play, thus, demonstrates that Molière's Orientalism conforms with European conventional representations, emphasizing Crusading tropes of difference between Europe and the Turks.

Any theatrical production of Molière's popular comic play, *the Bourgeois Gentleman* produced in 1670, would definitely incorporate a fanciful dramatization of the thrilling Oriental element of the play, i.e. the Turkish ceremony in Act 4. This exotic Oriental scene portrays Turkish figures, like the son of the Grand Turk (i.e. the Ottoman Sultan), the Mufti and the dervishes, in their whirling movement, lavish costumes and funny long beards. The production of the Turkish ceremony celebrates conventional images and stereotypes of the Turks in the European mind. We have watched a modern (1994) production of Molière's lighthearted Oriental burlesque which elaborates on some fascinating Oriental stereotypes that Molière would have never thought about. Among these conventional-widely popular-Oriental images are: belly dancing, smoking hookah, and placing the cross on the top of the son of the Sultan, perhaps to suggest Christian superiority over the Orient and to hint at religious tensions. *The Bourgeois Gentleman* was written to be performed before the French King, Louis XIV, and his Court. The King liked it very much, so the play soon gained public applause, and it was produced in subsequent public presentations in Paris.

Molière's play is a lighthearted criticism of false and pretended social conduct of the attempt of middle class citizens (the bourgeois) to rise above their status and belong to the higher class of the aristocrats. In the play, Jourdain, the chief character, has the dream of becoming "a man of quality," or a gentleman. For that purpose, he seeks the help of a music master, a philosophy teacher and a fence master, ironically to teach him principles of aristocratic behavior. Molière himself belongs to the middle class, the very group of people he mocks in the play, before becoming the favorite of the King's Court. The jest of the play's comedy lies in the foolish behavior and responses of Jourdain, as he vainly attempts to transform from a common "bourgeois" to a gentleman. Monsieur Jourdain's transformation is not successful, even though he wears a funny, colorful dress; he marvelously discovers that he has been speaking "prose" for forty years. His favorite friend, Dorante, "milks you like a cow,"⁽¹⁾ according to Jourdain's intelligent wife, who knows that her husband is fooled into believing in his affiliation to the aristocracy. Jourdain cannot imagine how he could refuse to lend money to someone who spoke of him in the King's presence. Because of his superficial notions about aristocracy, he would only accept a gentleman for a son-in-law, which brings us to the part that leads to the Turkish ceremony in Molière's play.

Cléonte, the rejected suitor of Jourdain's daughter, disguised as the "son of the Grand Turk," arrives to inform him that he is in love with his daughter and that he considers him a worthy gentleman. Molière's comic Orientalism begins with the procession of the Turkish ceremony and the appearance of Cléonte, in his richly adorned Turkish dress. He is surrounded by many Turks who are engaged in singing unintelligible songs, rather gibberish, and in dancing wildly. This Turkish group includes "the Mufti, four Dervishes, six Turkish dancers and six Turkish singers, together with other Turkish instrumentalists" (p. 173). In fact, this boisterous ceremony contains all elements of Molière's conventional Orientalism. In line with the common misconception, Turks are called "Mohammedans," as they invoke Prophet Mohammad, rather than God. The symbolic allusion to Islamic violence and cruelty appears when the Mufti, carrying the 'Koran' in one hand and a sword in another, turns Jourdain into a "Mohammedan." The audience is greatly amused by such a fanciful Oriental show, especially as the stupid Jourdain is extremely delighted by his conversion into a Muslim "Mamamouchi" or a Turkish knight. Moreover, the Mufti's gibberish song, though very funny, can be re-interpreted to implicitly echo serious ideological messages. The Mufti describes the "Mamamouchi" as "deffender Palestina" (p. 174), an expression repeated by all the singing Turks, perhaps recalling Crusading tropes of the historical conflict between Christian Europe and the Muslim East over the Holy Land.

One may very well wonder: Why does Molière depict the Orient in such an extravagant and biased manner in a play that has no Oriental theme? Molière's representations are mostly attributed to the historical and political tensions between the

⁽¹⁾ Jean Baptiste Moliere, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*. Trans. Robert Cohen. Stage Production, (New York, 1982), p. 163. Further references to the play will use this edition and will be cited in the text.

French and the Turks, which imposed a growing interest in the Orient. As a result, the French culture developed a set of stereotypes and negative images about the Orient for an extended period of time. In fact, Molière presents a distorted version of Orientalism in his play. His pattern of his distorted Orientalism can be best described in Olivier Richon's comment on an Oriental painting, using a Classical analogy: "the Orient is processed and recycled through a Greek and Roman mould in order to become a pre-historical Antiquity, closer to the origins of 'civilization', that is, of the West."⁽²⁾

Molière's Orientalism conforms to European conventional representations, emphasizing Crusading tropes of difference. This representation of the Orient is deeply grounded on contemporary historical developments, in the mythical encounters between East and West, the Turks and Europe. I would like to throw light on the various aspects of the Turkish ceremony and, hence, argue that Molière's depiction of the Turks in *The Bourgeois Gentleman* is a reflection of renewed tensions between Crescent and Cross. The roots of the underlying fear of the exotic "Oriental Other," i.e. the Turk, can be seen in the expansion of the Ottoman Turks at the expense of European forces. Because of inherent cultural and religious differences between Europe and the Other, even for "well-informed" writers on the Orient, "the Ottoman world remained essentially alien. It was perceived as primarily militaristic, generally uncultured, increasingly corrupt and hopefully unstable."⁽³⁾ First, we need to sum up these historical tensions, as we address the short lived revival of the Ottoman Empire, the formidable threat to all Europe, during the later part of 17th century Ottoman history.

During the seventeenth century, most Europeans felt the threatening power of the ever-expanding Ottoman Empire. In various parts of the later part of this century, in particular, the Ottomans saw better days under the sincere and effective leadership of several members of the Koprulu family. The services of the Koprulus, who were to rule the state for most of this century, actually preserved the fortunes of the Empire in such hard times. Mehmed and, later his son Ahmed Koprulu, distinguished themselves in the eyes of both the Turks and the Christians, including French and English diplomats. Mehmed Koprulu was appointed Grand Vizier in 1656. His harsh but successful policy retained some of the Empire's glory in its military confrontation with Europe. During the last three years of his vigorous ministry, which ended in 1661, the Turks engaged in battles in several European regions: Transylvania, Crete, Dalmatia, Wallachia, and Moldavia. The Grand Vizier recovered for the Turks the islands of Tenedos and Lemnos and fortified the Empire's boundaries against the advancing Venetian forces.⁽⁴⁾ The French watched carefully such Oriental scene of threatening military developments in

⁽²⁾ Olivier Richon, "Representation, the Despot and Harem: Some Questions Around an Academic Orientalist Painting by Lecomte-Du-Nouy (1885)." *Essex Sociology of Literature Conference. Europe and its Others*. V.1 Ed. Francis Barker *et.al.* (1984), 2.

⁽³⁾ Christine Woodhead, "The Present Terror of the World? *Contemporary Views of the Ottoman Empire c1600*," p. 24, *History*, 72 (1987), 20-37.

⁽⁴⁾ See Kenneth M. Setton, *Venice, Austria, and Turks in the Seventeenth Century*. (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1991), 189-90.

the Turkish history. Edward Creasy emphasizes the severity of the Vizier's five-year rule, especially against those who threatened public order. He estimates his victims at thirty-six thousand persons. Thanks to his short administration, the whole Empire regained strength by reviving its naval force and fortifying the Dardanelles and territories beyond the Black Sea.⁽⁵⁾

Mehmed Koprulu was succeeded by his son Ahmed, who became the real ruler of the Ottoman Empire from 1661 to 1676. As a military man, Ahmed Koprulu achieved two major political objectives for the Turks. He personally led the war with Austria against the Habsburg, aiming to secure the Turkish sovereignty over Transylvania and Northern Hungary. Although the Turks lost the decisive battle of St. Gotthard in 1664, Ahmed won a peace treaty that maintained the possession of those important territories for the Turks. Leading the Turkish fleet of nine thousand soldiers, Ahmed Koprulu in 1669 forced the Venetians defenders of Crete Island to surrender and agree to a peace that insured Ottoman dominion over the whole island in return for the restoration of Venetian trade privileges in the Levant. Thus, the industrious Vizier was able to accomplish the most significant naval achievement for the Turks in the century.⁽⁶⁾ This significant achievement gained for the Turks a general French attitude of awe and respect. Indeed, the Turks pursued successful military operations in European territories during the later part of the seventeenth century, the most memorable of which was the siege of Vienna in 1683. That event must have had an enormous effect on the attitude of the whole of Europe towards the Turk in this period.

This historical overview serves to put into perspective the background of Europe's fear, the French included of course, of the "demonic" and "devilish" powers of the Turk during the later Seventeenth century. European attitudes towards the "Other" had indeed shaped the generally negative image of the Oriental Turk as the alien Other. In his fascinating work *The Sultan's Court* (1979), Alain Grosrichard offers a careful deconstruction of Western accounts of "Oriental despotism" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, focusing particularly on portrayals of the Ottoman Empire and the supposedly enigmatic power of the despotic Sultan and his court of viziers, janissaries, mutes, dwarfs, eunuchs, his countless wives, and even his Mufti. Particularly terrifying to Europe was the military discipline of the Ottoman Janissaries. Those formidable forces, numbered in the account of the famous French traveler, Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1665) up to twenty five thousand soldiers, were directly attached to the "despotic" Sultan and remained for centuries a legendary example to Europeans.⁽⁷⁾

Religious tensions, hatred and fear of the Turk, or rather the "infidel" and

⁽⁵⁾ Edward Creasy, *History of the Ottoman Turks*. (Beirut: Khayats, 1961), 275-6.

⁽⁶⁾ Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*. V.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), 212-3; and Setton, 192-3.

⁽⁷⁾ See, Alain Grosrichard, *The Sultan's Court: European Fantasies of the East*. Trans. Liz Heron. (London and New York: Verso, 1998), 87.

“barbarian” warrior, persisted in the hearts and minds of the West. Since the beginning of the sixteenth century, France often had constant political and diplomatic contacts with the Turks. The French had always been intrigued by stories and fantasies of Turkish history, especially of Ottoman Sultans, that travel books elaborated on. Stories about the legendary amorous Turk and the Sultan’s ‘harem’ guarded by eunuchs, fascinated the French as they did the whole of Europe about the exotic “Other.” Therefore, French literary representations of the “Other” were prolific and were produced much earlier than English works. C. D. Rouillard maintains that the first French play on Turkish history is Bounin’s *La Soltane*, written as early as 1561. French interest in Oriental matters continued in the following century. In fact, the most ambitious French literary attempt to represent Turkish history before 1660 is Mle de Scudery’s multi-volume romance, *Ibrahim ou l’illustre Bassa* (1641). Two years later, Scudery’s brother, George, benefited from his sister’s account of the Turkish history in writing his tragedy of the same title. The opening of George Scudery’s tragedy, *Ibrahim*, portrays a parade of Islamic scholars, in which these religious men carry elegant editions of the “Koran.” This parade is headed by a Mufti who is mounted on a camel. Molière must have read and perhaps utilized this tragedy in his depiction of the Turkish ceremony. Rouillard also cites numerous works from seventeenth-century French court entertainments that portrayed the Turk as the pitiless, odious “Mohammedan.”⁽⁸⁾ Just like Molière’s the *Bourgeois Gentleman*, in most of these conventional portraits of the cruel Turk, the Oriental “Other” would always be subject to extensive mockery, and so a source of great amusement to the audience.

Religious tensions between Crescent and Cross can also be seen in literary representations of prominent Islamic figures, such as the Mufti, who plays an important role in the Turkish ceremony of Molière’s play. Rouillard reports a very offensive French depiction of Prophet Mohammad himself in the “Ballet du Grand Turc et Peuples d’Asie” in 1626. This ballet has five parts, one of which presented the Prophet, bearded and turbaned, marching with a pen in hand, and the huge “Koran,” borne on the back of two persons in front of him. Such representations, Rouillard suggests, might have inspired Molière with the idea of the Mufti turning Jourdain into a Mohammedan “Mamamouchi” with the “Koran” expounded on his back. Molière might have also been inspired by other French court entertainments, like “Ballet de la Felicite” which celebrated the birth of Louis XIV, in which he displayed various French court men dressed as the Turkish Sultan and his retinue. In their depiction of the European coalition, they brandish their scimitars, which is exactly what the Turkish dervishes and dancers do in Molière’s Turkish ceremony. Moreover, it is very interesting to know that also fifteen French tragedies written on subjects, such as Sultans’ cruelty, jealousy, folly and voluptuousness, were produced in 1670 alone.⁽⁹⁾

⁽⁸⁾ C. D. Rouillard, “The Background of the Turkish Ceremony in Molière’s *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.” *University of Toronto Quarterly*. 39.1 (Oct, 1969), 36.

⁽⁹⁾ See C. D. Rouillard, *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature*. (Paris, 1941), 37-39.

Molière indeed had been adherent to a long-standing French tradition, which might have turned into a rather legendary interest in the Orient. As we have seen, the year 1670 in particular, is significantly productive in terms of both Western literary representations of the Turks and military encounters between Crescent and Cross. By 1670, the Turks had already conquered Crete and regained their reputation as a formidable naval power. For Molière's comic play of the same year, the background of its production is very important. In fact, political and diplomatic relations with the Orient had shaped the play's composition. The intriguing story begins, according to Ali Behdad, when Suliman Aga, a Turkish delegate, visited Paris for the purpose of developing the deteriorating commercial and diplomatic relations between France and the ever-expanding Ottoman Empire. The French King, Louis XIV, was excited to meet Suliman and desired to impress his guest by displaying his court men in the most elaborate and fashionable garments. The King himself was adorned in the most lavish jewelry, putting on an exotic crown with splendid feathers. However, all this was not enough to impress the Oriental guest who, to the contrary, mocked the King's expectations and deflated his arrogance. Suliman Aga actually claimed that the Sultan's horse was, once, more elaborately adorned than Louis XIV himself. This would have absolutely caused the King's indignation, and later his desire for "divertissement Oriental."⁽¹⁰⁾

Rouillard provides more interesting details, especially about the reason for Suliman's insulting comments about the King's appearance. In his version of the story, the French Court's indignation was primarily caused by Suliman's refusal to deliver the Sultan's letter to anyone except the King himself. The Oriental guest was annoyed when Louis XIV declined to rise as he received the letter. Unimpressed by the Court's excessive costumes, he suggested that the precious stones on the King's costumes were smaller and less attractive than those placed on the Sultan's horse. Such remarks scandalized the whole Court. A year later, the King decided to avenge himself on the vanity of the Turkish delegate by ordering a play to be written to burlesque the incident for the entertainment of the Court.⁽¹¹⁾ This background justifies Molière's insertion of the Turkish element in a play that has nothing to do with the Orient. It is very interesting, nonetheless, to note that the King did not have to resort to a military reaction, but rather to a literary one. Thus, his response to such an Oriental offense was directed towards the theater, not the battlefield. This background, however, reflects the kind of tension that shaped the relations between France and the Oriental Turks, at least on political and diplomatic levels.

The Turkish ceremony, hence, forms the essential ingredient of this comic performance. In the play, Covielle, the servant of Cléonte orchestrates the different stages of the Turkish ceremony in such a way that Monsieur Jourdain's transformation into a "Mamamouchi" becomes a theatrical performance, by itself. Wolfgang Matzat

⁽¹⁰⁾ Ali Behdad, "The Oriental Encounter: The Politics of Turquerie in Molière." *Le Esprit Createar*. 32.3 (Fall, 1992), 37-39.

⁽¹¹⁾ See Rouillard, "The Background of the Turkish Ceremony in ..." 43-45.

notes in Covielle's announcement of the "Mamamouchi" ceremony all the ingredients of an integrated play, or rather a metaphoric drama. The ceremony displays music, dance and festive costumes. Moreover, for Covielle, this little "farce" has all the actors and the costumes ready for the action.⁽¹²⁾ In every performance of the play, therefore, the Turkish ceremony celebrates cultural Oriental color, which is of much interest to the French audience. The ceremony also reiterates stereotypical representations of the Orient and elements of mockery, evident of contemporary political tensions. The disappointment and agitation of the King had led him to seek the help of experienced French travelers, like Chevalier d'Arvieux, and Court artists to produce this Court entertainment with an Oriental theme. Molière, the famous French traveler d'Arvieux, and Court artists worked together to produce authentic Oriental costumes, like Turkish turbans and robes, to please the King and to make the play appear as a fairly realistic Oriental entertainment. According to S. V. Dock, Molière and Court artists benefited greatly from the valuable suggestions of d'Arvieux, the traveler with considerable experience of the Orient, in general, and of the Turkish costumes and customs, in particular. The French traveler supervised the design of the Turkish robes and turbans, especially of the Turkish night or "Mamamouchi". The individual possessions of Molière contained a description of the "Mamamouchi" dress which consisted of a scarf, breeches of Indian cloth, a long Turkish gown, a turban and a green saber. In one of the early productions of the play in 1671, stage directions indicated that the costume of the son of the Grand Turk, or Cléonte in disguise, consisted of a long Turkish robe, richly decorated with gold and silver, and a lavish Turkish gown, an appearance that ideally fit the Sultan's son.⁽¹³⁾ Such emphasis on Oriental cultural color, represented in extravagant Turkish costumes, would definitely cause much gratification and even pleasure for the offended King. Ridiculing the Turkish customs would, in turn, serve to invoke much amusement and laughter for the French audience.

Later producers of the ceremony have attempted to elaborate on the Turkish costumes, to make the Oriental burlesque much more lavish. Dock provides more information about the production of the ceremony in which the Mufti is accompanied by four dervishes and twelve other Turks. As the Mufti confers the title of "Mamamouchi" on Jourdain, he sings about while giving him a turban and scimitar, with the dervishes dancing around Jourdain. In a 1682 production of the ceremony, the Mufti's costume is quite luxurious; his turban is excessively large and decorated with four rows of lit candles. The dervishes also had large turbans with similar decorations.⁽¹⁴⁾ David Whitton describes the theatrical Turkish ceremony as a ten-minute sublime ridicule, focusing on the appearance of Cléonte, dressed as "the son of the Grand Turk," and accompanied by music and dancing dervishes in outlandish costumes. He indicates that the original ballet opened with the ceremonial chanting and dancing of the dervishes,

⁽¹²⁾ See Wolfgang Matzat, "Modes of Theatricality in Molière's Comedies (*Don Juan* and *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*)." 183-186. In: Hanna Scolnicov/ Peter Holland (Hg.): *Reading Play: Interpretation and Reception*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 175-191.

⁽¹³⁾ S.V. Dock, *Costumes and Fashions in the plays of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin Molière: A Seventeenth Century Perspective*. (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1992), 240-243.

⁽¹⁴⁾ See Dock, *Costumes and Fashions* ... 244.

with the Mufti invoking Prophet Mohammad. After some dramatic exchange, the Mufti would launch into a mad dance, chanting “hou la ba,” (supposedly in Turkish), encircling the frightened Jourdain. According to the 1682 edition, the action consists of pounding the Koran on Jourdain’s back, the Mufti’s songs, and the brandishing of the dervishes’ sabers around Jourdain. At the end, the Mufti invokes Jourdain as the proclaimed “Mamamouchi.”⁽¹⁵⁾

Oriental costumes, therefore, have become an integral part of the Turkish ceremony in *the Bourgeois Gentleman*. Oriental costumes have also manifested the notion of ideological and cultural difference between the French and the “Others.” They present the more important and rather thrilling aspect of this Oriental burlesque. However, the ceremony also incorporates other cultural and religious aspects of the Turkish life. In fact, any production of the ceremony may include further ridicule of the Oriental language and religious rituals. The Mufti is eager to turn Jourdain into a “Mohammedan,” that is a Muslim. Religious transformation is vigorously enacted while the Mufti holds the “Koran”; and the dervishes brandish their sabers. Such reference to religious intolerance immediately recalls conventional Oriental despotism, which the Turks have often been associated with in French and English drama about the Orient. There is much comedy at the expense of the Mufti, who represents the highest religious authority in the Islamic, Turkish government. The Mufti had always enjoyed a very respectable status among all Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the French must have been familiar with such important figure. Any dramatic representation of the “Mufti” would have been immensely entertaining and popular.

Much laughter is significantly aroused by the combination of authentic Turkish language and a great deal of gibberish that the Mufti, dervishes and dancers use. For example, the funny word “Mamamouchi” has no meaning, neither in Arabic nor in Turkish. Molière skillfully amuses his audience, mocking the Oriental language, when he underscores Jourdain’s confusion as regards the language barrier. Covielle’s role as a careless and inaccurate translator of the gibberish that the “son of the Grand Turk” says to Jourdain, is hilarious to the French audience, regardless of any knowledge of Turkish they might have had. Jourdain, however, trusts his translator and is even fascinated by the beautiful compliments of his ‘Turkish highness.’ In his use of Oriental language and gibberish in the ceremony, Molière relied on a number of verbal imitations that he either borrowed from various French sources, or made up himself. His use of the expression “Bel men” echoes the Turkish: “Bilmem,” which means “I don’t know.” To provoke laughter, however, Molière hastily incorporated such nonsensical expressions as “oqui boraf,” which sounds, at least to the gullible Jourdain, like an authentic Turkish expression. Rouillard comments on a scene in one of the editions of the play, in which kneeling Turks attach to their salutations, or “salams” in Arabic, the invocation “Alli...Allah,” echoing the words of the call to prayer in Islam, “Allahu Akbar” or “God is Great.” He also notes some little use of authentic Turkish. The Turkish dancers chant: “loc,” meaning “no,” when they answer the Mufti’s question about Jourdain’s

⁽¹⁵⁾ David Whitton, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. (Paris: Grant and Culture Ltd, 1992), 61-63.

religious background, being either a Pagan or Puritan.⁽¹⁶⁾ The whirling Turks also reply to the Mufti's question: "is he a good Turk?" or "is he a good Muslim?" by saying: "hey vallah," literally meaning "I affirm it by Allah." Molière manages successfully to combine the little authentic Turkish he gathers from various French sources with other nonsensical expressions of his own imagination, to create a hilarious Oriental show, using Oriental language and culture.

Some critics have tried to account for Molière's Oriental words, such as the humorous term "Mamamouchi". Several sources have been suggested for the term which Covielle first uses to convince the gullible Jourdain about the nobility of his daughter's suitor. "Mamamouchi" could be a burlesque echo of the title of the Turkish envoy led by Suliman Aga, who was probably called 'Mustafaraga.' Another opinion attempts to establish possible Arabic origins for "Mamamouchi", perhaps in the ironic reconstruction of the expression as 'ma menu shi,' which means in an Arabic (Syrian and Lebanese) dialect: 'good for nothing' or 'nothing good comes out from it.'⁽¹⁷⁾ Some critics hold the opinion that even the name of the play's ridiculous hero, Jourdain, is linked with the Arabic name, Jourdan. In her study of the contribution of French travel literature to Molière's Oriental burlesque, Mary Hossain believes that among the essential suggestions that d'Arvieux offered to Molière was the name, Jourdain. d'Arvieux learned the name through his travels to Arab countries and provinces, like Jordan, or probably through his visit to river Jordan. Hossain adds that the chanting of the dervishes in the "Mamamouchi" ceremony: 'Hu la ba ba la,' (act 4, p. 174) is actually associated for d'Arvieux with Muslim concern for Palestine.⁽¹⁸⁾ This interpretation is probably true given the context, in which these words are chanted in the ceremony. As he invokes Prophet Mohammed, the Mufti inquires about Jourdain's religion and sings in pidgin-French: 'Per defender Palestina Mahametta' (act 4, p. 174). He immediately replies by singing: 'Hu la ba ba la chou ba la ba' in what looks like a cheerful dance. At any rate, Molière certainly made the best use of all the sources of information about Oriental culture and language available to him. Thus, he shapes the Orient in the most absurd and ludicrous mold for the entertainment of the French Court.

Although Molière employs the Turkish language as a comic tool and indicator of cultural difference between East and West, he might also have another thematic purpose in mind. We may laugh when we watch how Jourdain, though meant to appear as frivolous, is highly impressed by the Turkish jargon of the disguised Cléonte! We have to remember, however, that in his quest to leave his own social class, Jourdain resorts to the Oriental language. Jourdain attempts to learn and speak a kind of language that may lead him to be classified with the nobles. Helen Harrison maintains that Jourdain, by speaking Turkish, wishes to win the esteem of the nobles, whom he attempts to emulate.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Rouillard, "the Background," 49.

⁽¹⁷⁾ For example, see Rouillard, "The Background," 45-48.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Mary Hossain, "The Chevalier d'Arvieux and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*." *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*. 12 (1990): 76-88.

In this way, Jourdain ‘strives to master the discourse of the elite,’ or rather Turkish, the language linked to nobility.⁽¹⁹⁾ Hence, “Mamamouchi” becomes a noble title for Jourdain, even though his wife cannot make anything out of the term and describes him as the greatest fool of all. Molière’s comic exploit of the Turkish jargon, however, undercuts any positive associations between the Turkish and nobility. Molière’s systematic manipulation of the Oriental language indeed pleased both the commoners and the nobles among the French audience. In addition, the way Molière’s characters use confused linguistic utterances in their exchanges clearly has the effect of degrading both Turkish and Arabic. We find that the religious and cultural aspects of the ceremony effectively contributed to the remarkable success of the play’s first performance. The evidence is provided by Rouillard who reports that the ‘Comedie ballet,’ as it was named, was performed three times in the same week of October 1670 at Chambard, and again at Saint-Germain-en-Lay in November. Its performance delighted the public when released for public performance at Molière’s Palais Royal Theater.⁽²⁰⁾ And only one year later, *the Bourgeois Gentleman* became a London hit when Edward Ravenscroft, the English dramatist, parodied the play in 1672, after the play’s first performance. Ravenscroft’s play accurately retained the comic, or rather the hilarious, atmosphere by incorporating the Turkish ceremony. Therefore, Edward Ravenscroft’s comic representation of the Turks in his farce, *The Citizen Turn’d Gentleman* (1672), obviously cribbed from Molière, has nothing fresh to contribute to Molière’s satiric treatment of the Oriental Turk. Ravenscroft is faithful to Molière, whether in ridiculing the sounds and words of the Turkish language, or in portraying the funny character of the “Mamamouchi”.⁽²¹⁾

We have to discuss yet one more important factor underlying Molière’s distorted Orientalism. In Molière’s time, the general French attitude towards other cultures and ethnic backgrounds was not at all favorable. Ali Behdad adds that during the reign of Louis XIV France was extremely aggressive in its treatment of foreigners. The French thought that their presence would affect national unity. Behdad cites two examples: the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the cruel treatment of foreigners in French colonies.⁽²²⁾ One dimension of the French obsession with the notion of national unity is reflected in theatrical representation of foreigners on stage, especially those with whom the French had been in relentless rivalry for a long time. The representation of the Oriental Turk serves as a mask for uncontrollable fears and concerns of menacing Ottoman power. Nevertheless, while the French audience yearns for portrayals of the exotic “Other,” they are unable to conceal their fear of that immensely powerful Ottoman Empire. Molière’s depiction of the Turks’ language, religion, and costumes, in superficial mimicry, is one way through which the audience

⁽¹⁹⁾ Hellen Harrison, “Politics and Patronage in *the Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.” *PFSC* XX, 38 (1993), 75.

⁽²⁰⁾ See Rouillard, “the Background,” 34.

⁽²¹⁾ See Edward Ravenscroft, *The Citizen Turned Gentleman*. London, 1672. In particular act 4, scene 1 and act 5 scene 1.

⁽²²⁾ Ali Behdad, “The Oriental Encounter: the Politics of Turquerie in Moliere,” 41.

can master their fears of that threatening “Oriental Other.” These fears, no doubt, are mixed with an overwhelming interest in the exotic, that inherent quality which the Orient has often possessed.

Like most Oriental representations produced by Molière’s contemporaries, his burlesque satisfied that growing interest in the Orient. He portrays to his French audience a comforting, but a falsely superficial picture which sharply contradicts what the Turks look like in reality. Therefore, the play produces a fantastic image of the fearful, historical adversary to all Europe. The theatrical world of *the Bourgeois Gentleman*, in which the audience laughs at the ridiculous Turk, chanting, dancing and madly reveling, only subverts the serious reality of the legendary confrontation between Europe and the Turk. The play thus allows its European spectators to subdue their concerns by eliminating the real image and substituting it with a pure Oriental entertainment in an imaginative ceremony.

All the elements of the Turkish ceremony in Molière’s play add up to an extensively offensive Oriental representation. The reader could very well enjoy the work solely as a social criticism of such national problems as the conflict between the aristocracy and the bourgeois in a French context. Given this interpretation, the Turkish ceremony would have absolutely been out of place. By the same token, the play also addresses the relentless encounter of the deteriorating nobility and the emerging bourgeois, eager to obtain identity and social prestige. As we have seen, Molière’s purpose, however, was a totally different endeavor. While the Turkish ceremony appears to be only extraneous to the whole work, it actually forms the basis of Molière’s play when first planned. The only justification for the play’s Oriental representation is the French King’s desire to watch an Oriental entertainment to avenge himself the insult of his Oriental guest. This irrepressible desire is interpreted as a symbol of the thirst of the French Court and audience for distorted, dramatic Oriental representations.

Finally, the play’s distorted Orientalism does not account for its status as one of the funniest plays ever written. Much of the play’s comedy depends on the funny behavior and responses of its silly hero, rather than on the exotic language and appearance of the Turks. Molière, therefore, does not think of his Orientalism seriously. Molière, in fact, intentionally parodies the Oriental Muslim, offering evidence for a generally negative attitude of French culture towards other contemporary foreign cultures, those belonging to different ethnic backgrounds. The play’s naïve Orientalism reduces the historically formidable Turk to a collection of singers, dervishes and dancers, who utter various gibberish and nonsensical expressions, in a boisterous Turkish masquerade. Molière’s prejudiced depiction of the Muslim Turks fails, however, to remove the growing concerns and fears of the formidable “Ottoman Other.” Instead of aiming at strong diplomatic and political reconciliation, Molière’s Oriental depiction indeed broadens the cultural and ideological gaps between the French and the Turks. Thus, the European spectator of the play could have hardly missed Molière’s ironic purpose. Given that the play is meant to be merely an Oriental burlesque for the purpose

of gratifying the King, the author's insertion of the religious aspects, in particular, in the Turkish ceremony is by all means offensive. The Mufti's insistence that Jourdain "turn Turk," or "Mahometan," as a condition of becoming a "Mamamouchi", and his declaration that the new "Mamamouchi" is a "Paladina, per defender Palestina" are examples of the serious religious tensions and ancient cultural anxieties underlying Molière's *Orientalism*.

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□ (قدم للنشر في ١٤٢٤/١/٢٠ هـ ؛ قبل للنشر في ١٤٢٤/٨/١٠ هـ)

ملخص البحث . كان للصراع التاريخي بين أوروبا و المسلمين الأتراك في القرن السابع عشر - وبالذات بين فرنسا والأتراك - دور كبير في صياغة موقف الكتاب الغربيين نحو الشرق و الإسلام ، و أدى التوسع العسكري للعثمانيين في أوروبا - و خاصة منذ أواسط القرن الخامس عشر- إلى شعور عام بالخوف من الآخر الإسلامي ، و انطلاقا من هذه الخلفية التاريخية يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة تصوير الكاتب الفرنسي موليير للأتراك في مشهد الاحتفال التركي الساخر في مسرحية (الرجل البرجوازي) عام ١٦٧٠ م ، و إن دراسة جميع عناصر هذا المشهد التركي المضحك تعكس التوترات السياسية بين فرنسا و الدولة العثمانية و تؤكد موقفا سلبيا ساخرا للكاتب و ثقافته الأوروبية نحو الثقافات الأجنبية مثل ثقافة الآخر الإسلامي ، و لهذا فإن هذا العمل يشير الى أن الاستشراق عند موليير لا يختلف عن النمط التقليدي السائد لدى الكتاب الانجليز و الأوروبيين في التركيز على الأفكار المغلوطة و الصور السلبية عن الشرق و الإسلام .

