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Mahomet and Mustapha: George I's Turkish Servants as Surrogate Targets

When George I arrived in Britain in 1714, he brought with him his two Turkish servants Mahomet and Mustapha (the spelling varies in different contemporary texts), who continued to wear their Turkish turbans while working in court as personal servants to their Hanoverian master. Though the Turk in general may have represented what many eighteenth-century Britons saw as the abomination, deception, and apostasy of Islam, however, this usually exoticised figure in British consciousness at this time has also served as a means by which contemporary political, social and cultural power could be reenacted, reinstated and re-empowered. This essay considers how Mustapha and Mahomet functioned within a specific cultural, political, economic and social eighteenth-century environment, the beginning of the Hanoverian reign in Britain. King George seems to have used his two turbaned Turkish servants as surrogate targets to evade and redirect British domestic criticism from his court.

Kenneth M. Setton argues in his book *Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom* that “thoughts of the Turk, in Britain” since the sixteenth century were attended by “popular notions of lust and betrayal.” However, “these thoughts or perceptions,” according to Setton, continued to emphasise more often than not the strong performance of Turks in war.¹ In addition, he says, these early representations of the Turks in Britain did not reflect a genuine

belief in the inferiority of the Turks as human beings, and though they deployed negative stereotypes about the Turks, such representations were clearly marked as exaggerated caricatures, and mixed with an attitude of grudging admiration: they were mostly “solace to the popular [British] mind.”² These thoughts about Turks took such forms as a symbolic “Turk’s head [which was] employed as an archery butt, and one might practice by ‘shooting at the Turke.’”³ In fact, the general anti-Muslim feeling in Britain, as Setton implies, was less antagonistic than in the case of the Spanish, the Italians, and the Austrians—Catholics—who were hated by the British Protestant upper bourgeoisie. These upper bourgeois, according to Setton, were able to restrain their hostility to Islam, and even gain no small commercial advantage for England and Holland by trading with the Turks.⁴ Thus, the image of the Muslim Other for many early modern Britons seems to have fluctuated from a traditional and stereotypical anti-Christian figure to, on occasions, an economic partner.

Setton’s discussion of the representations of Turks in early modern Britain is interesting in that he provides us with an intriguing perspective revolving around the fact that Britons did not seem to have completely considered Turks as arch-enemies of their faith, as was the case with the Catholic Italians, Spanish, and Austrians. However, I would argue that this relatively positive perception of the Muslim Other in Britain continued only toward the mid-eighteenth century, when it seems to have changed. It is only when the Turk apparently became during the first Hanoverian reign a surrogate target of criticism for various cultural, social, economic and political domestic British problems that the contemporary British perceptual paradigm shifted somewhat toward representing the Turk as a morally corrupt agent in the larger British context. In other words, it is not until George I initiates, whether consciously or not, his peculiar positioning of Mustapha and Mahomet as buffer-zones against domestic British criticism, that the Turkish figure gains more negative associations in eighteenth-century British consciousness.

However, some caution is necessary at this stage of the argument in order to point out the real position of these two Turkish servants in the court. The roles of Mahomet and Mustapha in the first Hanoverian court should not be blown out of proportion by claiming, for example, that their impact on contemporary British politics was highly significant and concrete. Therefore, it is important to point out that in this article I am only trying to underline the controversial nature of their role, and to argue that both of these Turkish valets can be considered part of a larger predictable process of deflection of criticism directed toward the court, whether from contemporary political circles, periodicals, pamphlets or otherwise. Mahomet and Mustapha, to some contemporary political observers and players, like the Tories who were considered by their opponents, the Whigs, as Jacobites, might have had no significance at all apart from being considered exotic valets wearing Turkish turbans for a German-speaking British king. As is argued below, however, Mahomet and Mustapha either fortunately or unfortunately were caught unawares, perhaps, within a contemporary machinery of eighteenth-century British political intrigue.

This shift in the perception of the Turkish figure in contemporary eighteenth-century British popular consciousness relates specifically to the impact of the new Hanoverian court on the larger British social, political and cultural context. As a case in point, George of Hanover, King of Britain (1714-1726), arguably the first real constitutional monarch in Britain, was invited by the British parliament in 1714 to sit on the throne after the death of Anne:

When George in pudding times came o'er and moderate men looked big, Sir,
My politics I changed once more and so became a Whig, Sir.⁵

The Vicar of Bray was alluding to the arrival of George I. Indeed, when he came to Britain in 1714, the “harvests were generally good, population growth was very slow, [the] political establishment was developing toward a stable configuration of the different political powers,

especially after the nation succeeded in averting a new civil war after the dethroning of James II in 1688. In fact, an increasing number of British political forces, like Whigs or Tories, came to admire and feel secure with ‘the Glorious Constitution.’”⁶

However, this optimistic image of the British scene upon George’s arrival did not continue. The new king tended to be indifferent towards politics, and, being unable or unwilling to learn to speak English properly, gradually withdrew from direct involvement in it. In fact, the languages used in court became mainly German and French, with little English. In addition, this lack of proficiency in English seems to have distanced the new king from his English courtiers and the public in general. In other words, the prominence of French and German as the languages of communication with the new king seems to have become part of a public-relations buffer-zone, where the King could be approached only by his own old Hanoverian courtiers and perhaps some English courtiers and politicians who spoke French or German. Robert Walpole’s deficiency in French, for example, seems to have created a degree of alienation between the monarch and the future prime minister. George I was more engaged with his role as Hanoverian Elector, which he continued to maintain all through his reign as King of Great Britain. In addition, there is also another side of the story of the new king’s position in Britain.⁷ In fact, many contemporary Britons did not really accept him as the legitimate heir. Called by many of his new subjects “King Log” and “that corpulent oaf,” and facing an accelerating hostility from his new people, George I increasingly left Sir Robert Walpole in full control of the political arena, “undisputed.”⁸

George of Hanover naturally attracted the hatred of James the Pretender’s supporters in Britain. In his “Protest of King James III and VIII against the claims of the House of Hanover” (29 August 1714), an open letter addressed to the people, James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1766) or “the Old Pretender” (elder son of the deposed James II) describes George as a “stranger,” a prince “who is a foreigner,” whose only support in Britain comes from other

“thousands of strangers, refugees in England, for more than thirty years.”⁹ James argued that George of Hanover had no real support in England except that offered by other intruding foreigners like himself, such as the Protestant Huguenot refugees.¹⁰

In fact, far from being welcomed as a stability factor in the political environment, the new German and court-French speaking monarch, his courtiers, the numerous German administrators he brought with him to Britain, and his royal household,¹¹ were accused of immorality and corruption; indeed, there were repeated calls for rebellion.¹² The new king, to make matters worse, kept two former German mistresses as well as the two turbaned Turkish *valets de chambre*.¹³ It seems that the actions of these two royal servants infringed on the rights of British courtiers who claimed a traditional right to wait on the king, and considered Mahomet and Mustapha as barriers preventing their access to him. However, I will argue that George I seems to have realised the importance of manipulating the image of Turks in contemporary British consciousness to his own advantage. And though one can also argue that the king seems to have been insensible of or unconcerned about public reaction to his Turkish servants, nonetheless one cannot deny the importance of his use of those servants as buffer-zones to deflate, evade, and regulate public criticism of his court. Mustapha and Mahomet’s contradictory representation in court (faithful servants and regulators of the King’s sexual life), as discussed later, disguises the real ideological struggle between a British public continuously distrustful of its governments and a German king who neither spoke English properly nor was interested in nation-building.

There is some haziness in eighteenth-century contemporary and even present-day sources about the dates of Mahomet’s and Mustapha’s recruitment to George’s household. In fact, none seem to agree about how the King acquired his Turkish servants, or even whether they continued to be considered by him as only pages, or personal attendants, or whether they had

more active roles in the British public arena. Ragnhild Hatton in *George I Elector and King*, for example, explains that,

as personal attendants on George[, the] two Turks, Mehmet and Mustafa, held long-established positions though they were, and *remained* [my emphasis], body servants without political influence. Contrary to popular legend neither had been captured by George during his Hungarian campaigns: English historiography would seem to have confused them with a young Turkish boy who George did capture and send home to his mother.¹⁴

I agree that the role of Mehmet and Mustapha remained as body servants “without political influence;” however, ironically this lack of political influence does not seem to have convinced contemporary politicians, who criticised the court for various reasons. For many Jacobites for example, Mahomet and Mustapha were part of a usurping household which replaced the legitimate Stuart monarchy, and both valets would have played a significant role in Jacobite lore as targets of abuse in the new German court. Many Britons, especially those who continued to support the dethroned house of Stuart would not have hesitated to associate them with the reported corruption of the first Hanoverian court. Whether or not Mustapha or Mahomet in fact realised the extent of their *paradoxical* position in the minds of those opposed to the court, their peculiar position as private valets to the King made them susceptible to being suspected of corruption.

Both Mahomet and Mustapha seem to have come into George’s service after 1685 while he was still in Hanover. According to John Walters, Mahomet and Mustapha “had allegedly saved George’s life in 1685 in the siege of Vienna and then entered into his service in Hanover. Belying his name, Mahomet repudiated the Moslem religion to become a Lutheran and married a German Woman.”¹⁵ Of the two, Hatton writes:

Both so much a fixture at George’s court in England that they were depicted in the murals of [Hampton Court] Palace, Mehmet held the more responsible position and was in charge of George’s private accounts, the Schatullrechnungen or Quittungen from 1699 until his death in 1726. The surname he adopted on his ennoblement in 1716, von Konigstreu (lit. true to the king), can be assumed to have been chosen by himself—since

self advertisement was against George's temperament—and tells us something of his attitude to his master.¹⁶

Mahomet, with little command of English, continued to communicate with his master in German and probably in French. For example, according to Lady Cowper's diary, "the King," according to Mahomet's statement "was in such Sorrow" after the death of his sister the Queen of Prussia that "he refused to see Anyone till Mahomed found the Duke of York in the outward Room, and carried him in without asking Leave. As soon as [the King] saw the Duke of York, he flung his Arms about his Neck, and said 'Quelle Perte venons-nous de faire, mon Frere!... est-il possible que cette charmante Femme nous puisse quitter en si peu de Temps?'"¹⁷ Therefore one might infer that Mahomet spoke French sufficiently fluently to realise what his master was complaining about, and appears not to have needed to improve his English, especially since the court's official language became French.

Mahomet's taking charge of the king's private accounts would have enabled him to play a significant role in the new British court. The paradoxical roles of a body-servant and an accountant of the king may have given him greater access to the monarch than is implied in some contemporary and present-day sources. In other words, the *Quittungen* translates literally from German as "receipts" or "quittance," the discharging of various private debts of the king. Mahomet in such an office would have been responsible for paying for the king's private needs, whether in clothes, wigs, coiffure, or his private gifts for the court household. For example, John Beattie explains that as George I's personal treasurer, or keeper of the privy purse, Mahomet paid "numerous bills" to "the coffer-bearer," and "it is perhaps worth noting," Beattie continues, that "he was not prepared to be generous to the coffer-bearer[s] with the king's private money. They received ten shillings a day for traveling charges from the treasurer of the chamber, but Mehmet gave them only five."¹⁸ He seems to have been a thrifty and indispensable servant to George I.

Upon his arrival, however, George ushered his two Turkish servants into the new British social and political scenes as exotic objects. As *valets de chambre*, they had extensive functions at court. It seems that Mahomet and Mustapha, like other contemporary *valets de chambre*, were responsible for their “master’s appearance,” charged with ensuring that he “appear[s] as modish as possible.” Their close proximity to George would have made it possible for them to “literally [help] him on with his clothes,” and prepare his “coiffure.”¹⁹ It is crucial to understand that being body-servants of the king, Mahomet and Mustapha were constantly present around their master, while Mahomet would have been responsible for paying whatever the king commanded in daily court expenses. This proximity to the king underlines the many advantages enjoyed by these Turks in contrast with their English colleagues, who might not even have been able to communicate with their new monarch as he conducted his daily transactions either in German or French. However, this close attachment to the king made Mahomet and Mustapha targets for contemporary criticism. Being a Turk in Britain during the early eighteenth century does not seem to have been an easy role. H. M. Imbert-Terry argues that “because they were prevented from [acquiring] crown land [George’s] German mistresses and even the Turkish valets invariably sold their influence to the highest bidder.” He adds that “popular opinion confirms this contemporary testimony, the delinquencies political, moral, and pecuniary, of George’s male and female dependents [excited] the deepest irritation and dissatisfaction in the minds of his British subjects.”²⁰ Finally, on top of being accused of political corruption like the rest of the German court, Mahomet and Mustapha seem to have represented for many contemporary Britons the abomination of Islam.

Daniel Defoe (1661?-1731), for example, in his social and political commentary, *Considerations on the State of Affairs of Great Britain* (1718), criticises the king for retaining his two Turkish servants after he came from Hanover and blames them directly for the “moral” corruption of the court.²¹ For Defoe, as for many of his contemporaries, one might presume,

keeping a mistress did not totally discredit individuals, especially if those individuals were monarchs or aristocrats, but Defoe was disturbed by the function of Mustapha and Mahomet in the new British court. Indeed, for Defoe, and presumably for many of his readers, the two turbaned, German-speaking Turks could only serve an “abominable purpose” at court.²² Perceiving the ungodly Turks as the followers of a false religion who happen to be already stationed in the British court seems to have stimulated Defoe and his contemporaries to re-launch already established discourses about the Other (the Muslim Turk). However, Defoe was shrewd enough not to accuse the king directly of committing abominable acts, but instead chooses to direct his criticism at Mustapha and Mahomet.²³

Defoe knew that in the popular imagination, Turks, or Muslims in general, represented the abominable sodomites and non-believers who would bring the damnation of God on Britain. These apostates were never trusted either as Turks on the battlefields or in their political intrigues all over Europe, let alone being trusted in the court of a king who was himself damned by many of the British public as an imposter and the usurper of the Stuart throne.²⁴ Defoe, therefore, seems to have concentrated his criticism on Mustapha and Mahomet as the arbitrators and mediators of abominable activities at court, apparently blaming them alone for its moral corruption. It was they, according to Defoe, who, as Turks, were commonly associated with contemporarily reported abominable acts of sodomy, and if they resided and had recognisable functions at court, as body-servants or accountants of the British monarch, abomination should logically follow.²⁵ Indeed, the presence of these Turkish servants had already attracted the attention of the not-so-friendly British public, as John Walters has documented, in relation to reports of Mustapha’s and Mahomet’s sexual liaison with the Princess of Wales.²⁶

In this way public criticism levelled at the court was quickly and conspicuously concentrated on Mahomet and Mustapha, as the Defoe case illustrates. Within such social and political contexts, how is it possible for a not-so-popular court to gain more sympathy and

advertise itself among British subjects? Indeed, the social, political, and cultural situations of eighteenth-century Britain were dire, sensitive and potentially explosive. John Beattie, for example, explains that “the presence of these personal servants naturally curtailed the activities of the English bedchamber staff.”²⁷ In Beattie’s view, George I needed these Turkish servants to overcome the rigid formalities of the conventional English court. He offers a contrast between George I and his son, who enjoyed the British court’s formalities. According to Beattie, “George I had such a strong aversion to formal etiquette that even without his German valets it is doubtful whether he would have submitted to the morning rigours that his son enjoyed.”²⁸ Of course, one can argue here that Turkish courts may have also subscribed to similar formalities, of which Mahomet and Mustapha would be already aware if they had worked there, but what is significant here is that as foreigners they were also used to facilitate their foreign master’s position in the British court. Lacking any real experience in the British court’s formalities, the new monarch needed their help to negotiate its etiquette. But while fulfilling such functions, Mahomet and Mustapha must also, inadvertently, have widened the gap which already existed between the new monarch and his new people.

For example, one might ask why the new king insisted on his Turkish servants continuing to wear their turbans. In addition, the Hanoverian family had become famous among its new British public for its inter-familial quarrels, escalating into a crisis between George I and his son and future king, George II. George’s hatred of and disgust for his son developed into an explicit questioning of his legitimacy.²⁹ These accusations were documented in many contemporary non-literary writings such as Lord Harvey’s diary and the diary of Lady Mary Cowper, lady-in-waiting to Princess Caroline, wife of the younger George.

These and other familial tensions led to a salacious rumour about George II’s son, Frederick, Prince of Wales. John Walters explains that there was “a wild and *ridiculous* [my emphasis] story, also without evidence, [that] Fredrick was the offspring of an illicit relationship

between [Princess] Caroline and either Mahomed or Mustapha.” This story, according to Walters, “has been bolstered by statements that Fredrick had ‘a dark complexion and thick lips.’”³⁰ The fact that there was no real evidence for this claim only underscores the ideological power of the prevailing stereotypes about the Turks, and the fear of the Other that these stereotypes represented in the British public’s psyche. However, the story Walters reports about the sexual liaison between Caroline and either Mahomet or Mustapha is no more ridiculous than many other representations of these two Turkish servants in contemporary writings and other cultural texts. Like the lips of George II’s son Frederick, the stories about these two Turkish servants were thick and visible to contemporary Britons. Mahomet and Mustapha had a greater role than we can glean from present-day retrospective commentary, and the complexity and ambiguity of their roles exposes the fact that political power, pervasive and indefinable as it was then and still is now, can use already constructed images of the Other to dissolve criticism directed against it.

Contentious Contexts: The Birth of “Abominable Turks”

James Stuart, the Old Pretender, by appealing to the anti-foreign sentiment in Britain, attempted to mobilise the English people against the newly installed Hanoverian monarch.³¹ His declamation against the house of Hanover reflected to some extent the general perception of George I among his new subjects. The British public’s reaction to the new king created a stereotypical image of him as psychologically incapable of rule. For example, on his coronation day on 20 October 1714 “a crowd disrupted the loyal procession of Frome clothiers by parading a fool, whose turnip-topped wand mimicked the insignia of their superiors, crying out all the while ‘here’s our George, where’s yours?’”³² As Nicholas Rogers argues, these “coronation-day affrays” were indications of how far the Tory “elites who resented the Whigs’ readiness to transform the coronation-day celebrations into party fanfare” were able to manipulate the public

sphere by orchestrating these counter-processions.³³ In other words, both Tories and Whigs seem to have used their full power to control the public space in attempts to further their political ambitions. However, one can argue that these public demonstrations and counter-demonstrations presented a new political context for further social unrest during the rest of the Hanoverian era.

The public space, as Habermas envisions it, as a new social and political phenomena in the eighteenth century, became after the coronation of George I in 1714 a more likely location for criticising the new regime.³⁴ I would argue that among the first targets of public criticism were George I's two Turkish servants. Daniel Defoe in the political tract mentioned earlier objects to the role of Mahomet and Mustapha at court because he argues that their primary function is to manage the king's sexual life. Describing what is portrayed as the "real" function of Mustapha and Mahomet, Defoe represents these two Turks as fulfillers of an "abominable purpose" at court.³⁵ What is fascinating in Defoe's description of their tasks is how he utilises and appeals to an already well-established negative public perception of Turks to antagonise and provoke his readers further against Mahomet and Mustapha. During the early eighteenth century, and even earlier, the British public, generally speaking, already associated "moral perversions" like sodomy with Muslims in general.

Various mediums, like travel narratives, cheap publications (chapbooks, small pamphlets, almanacs, etc.) contained stories that were mostly misrepresentations of Turks. As a case in point, earlier representations of Muslims as "infidels," apostates and "moors" in the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and contemporary periodicals were actualised through different social interactions into perceptible characters, though often sharing representation as sodomites.³⁶ In addition, the British public became increasingly interested in "oriental" news, supplied by "travel writers, scholars and religious thinkers" who were beginning to "[discover] the Middle East and Asia as they supplied a curious public with information, some accurate,

some quite fraudulent.”³⁷ The Turk, seamen, labourers, private manservants like Mahomet and Mustapha, and occasional continental “Moorish” visitors continued to occupy the spotlight in the British public sphere as foreigners. However, the “Turk” did not usually occupy a favourable position within this emerging phenomenon.

Three years before Defoe published his tract in 1718, a sample of the numerous advertisements in the publication of *Old Bailey Proceedings*, which were collections of reports of trials at Britain’s most important criminal court, dated 1-6 September 1715, reveals recent publications that seem to have been appealing to many contemporary readers. For example, a list “printed for Andrew Bell, at the Cross Keys and Bible in Cornhill,” contains some of the following titles: “The History of the most Remarkable Trials in the Courts of Britain in Capital Cases, viz. Hereby, Treason, Incest, Adultery, Rapes, Sodomy, Perjury, Murder, &c. Faithfully extracted from Records, and other authentic Authorities, as well Manuscript as Printed,”³⁸ but in addition, within the same advertisement, one finds titles like “The Arabian Nights Entertainments, consisting of 1001 Stories. In Eight Vols. Pr.11s.”³⁹ What is peculiar about this advertisement is that it juxtaposes proceedings of trials and Arabian tales, a curious combination of the grotesque and the exotic. The sensational, the exotic, and the absurd have been historically favoured by ordinary laymen, and I would argue that such a combination of genres contributed to later erotic and exotic projections of Mahomet and Mustapha. So when Defoe uses the adjective “abominable” to describe their supposed role at court (managing the monarch’s sexual life) and to express his apparent belief that they are worthy of the contemporary British public’s disgust, he bases his appeal on an already established representation of Turks, linked in the public imagination with moral and sexual corruption.

Mahomet: Royal Populist Par Excellence

In fact, George I, a shrewd politician, seems to have enjoyed allowing the image of Mehemet and Mustapha and their role in his court to be exaggerated in the British public awareness as representatives of the abominable actions deemed to be happening in his court. According to Hatton, George I had already fashioned “the layout of English [royal] palaces” to “impose a spatial distance between ruler and subject, the privilege of access being graded from the relatively public to the increasingly more private rooms.”⁴⁰ However, later on, “George removed the innermost sanctum, his bedroom, even from those who claimed a traditional right to wait on the King wherever he might be in his palace.” No other than “Mehemet and Mustapha guarded the privacy of his bedroom in a way that was unexpected and disturbing.”⁴¹

Indeed, the king used his Turkish servants to evade public scrutiny. Their status as “orientals” and the king’s apparent insistence that they continue to wear their Turkish costumes, I would argue, indicate that he used them for propagandist purposes (diverting public scrutiny from what went on in his royal household).

The Turk as a Court Entertainer

Lady Mary Cowper in her *Diary of Mary Countess Cowper, Lady of the Bedchamber to the Princes of Wales, 1714-1720* (published posthumously in 1864) relates an interesting account about Mahomet, which represents one kind of projection the king might have chosen to use in order to usher his Turkish manservant into the court’s public sphere. In her diary entry of 24 April 1720, Lady Cowper explains that during one of the monarch’s visits to one of his granddaughters (the daughter of Princess Caroline—Princess of Wales—wife of the future George II and a woman to whom the king was physically attracted),⁴² a group of members of the court aristocratic household including Baron John Harvey who became later a favorite in Queen Caroline’s inner circle, herself, and some other ladies-in-waiting were “entertained” one day by Mahomet, who always accompanied his master.⁴³ The group, waiting on the king outside his

mistress's apartment where he was visiting his granddaughter, heard him tell the story of the late Queen of Prussia, George I's sister, who had recently died. Mahomet, according to Lady Cowper's diary entry, "prais[ed] the late Queen of Prussia, Sister to the King, who died at Hanover of two Day's Sickness." Mahomet informs his listeners that the late queen was "suspected of having been poisoned, before she left Berlin, with Diamond Powder."⁴⁴ According to Mahomet, the suspicion of death by poisoning of the late queen was confirmed by him. Indeed, the Turkish royal *valet de chambre* tells his listeners that he is certain that the queen was poisoned because, implicitly commanded by his master, Mahomet proves the truth behind this rumour through a physical examination he conducts on the queen's body.⁴⁵ After "she was opened," Mahomet explains to his aristocratic court listeners, the Queen of Prussia's "stomach was so worn, that you could thrust your Fingers through at any Place," as, in fact, Cowper reports, "did Mahomed."⁴⁶

What is fascinating about the circumstances surrounding Mahomet's anecdote is that Lady Cowper, before she writes in her diary about how he thrust his fingers in the queen's stomach to make sure that she was poisoned, describes his narration as entertainment.⁴⁷ Indeed, using such a term to describe Mahomet's story might mean that Lady Cowper, simply listening to an entertaining story, considers the Turkish servant as an entertainer. The circumstances surrounding the story, Mahomet waiting outside the apartment of the little Princess of Wales for his master, and Lady Cowper's description of the story as entertainment, support my original argument that Mahomet may have functioned as an entertainer and publicist for the King. At least in this incident, while he entertains his listeners with the story of the Queen of Prussia, Mahomet serves his master in two very important functions, first, as an unofficial spokesman, and secondly, as court jester or entertainer.

Lady Cowper records the grotesque details of his story as if she is used to associating Turks with the abominable. In other words, it is surprising to find such a refined court lady and

one of the aristocratic attendants of the royal chamber writing such an entry in her diary.

Nonchalantly, Lady Cowper starts her unemotive account of the story's grotesque details, as she heard them from Mahomet, who continues by relating how "the king was in such a sorrow, that he was five Days without eating or drinking, or sleeping, but kept walking and wailing all the Time, and by hitting his Toes against the Wainscot (which he ever does when he walks), he had worn out his Shoes."⁴⁸ She does not record Mahomet as showing any revulsion from thrusting his fingers in the late queen's stomach. On the contrary, as quoted above, Lady Cowper focuses on the effect of the late Queen of Prussia's death on her brother, and ignores what Mahomet might have felt in this situation. Cowper, like many of her British contemporaries, implicitly associated the Turks and Muslims with vulgarity, primitivism, sexual degeneration, and emotional lethargy. In short, the Muslim figure came to occupy the position of an *abject* figure within eighteenth-century British consciousness.

The Abject Muslim Other

In "Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection," Julia Kristeva defines abjection as follows:

the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.⁴⁹

Kristeva provides examples of abjection by pointing out its properties: it is "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you."⁵⁰

Kristeva's notion of abjection is useful to clarify my rereading of Mustapha's and Mahomet's situation in eighteenth-century Britain. To begin with, what makes the Turks primary targets of public and political critique is that they come already associated with a specific cultural package of corruption, sodomy, unnatural sexual deviations, and perpetual association with what is ugly,

with what is abject, filthy, disloyal. They come to the British scene already saturated with their Turkishness, their Islamism. Indeed, for many Britons, Mahomet and Mustapha might have represented devils incarnate. However, King George, to borrow Kristeva's word, cannot "part" from his two Turks. They seem to preoccupy his mind. Indeed, "the King had these faithful servants' portraits incorporated by William Kent in a *trompe-l'oeil* on the King's Grand Staircase at Kingston Palace."⁵¹ In particular, he needed them to offset contemporary British political and public criticism.

Mahomet thrusting his fingers in the queen's stomach does not become a doubting Thomas for his master, practising his examination in a search for truth. In fact, as a Turkish servant to the king, it was expected of him to deal with dead bodies, for after all he is a body-servant to his master.⁵² Mahomet, in the account of this graphic incident, does not seem to be repulsed by what is ugly or what is corrupted (the queen's corpse). He plays the role of an abject Other to perfection and seems totally capable of projecting his other qualities as a Turk. In other words, occupying a negative position in eighteenth-century British consciousness, Mahomet projects one ultimate representation of himself when he "entertains" Lady Cowper and her courtly companions: that of abominable Turk. Lady Mary accepts Mahomet's dead-body-finger-thrusting as a culturally proper and socially acceptable act as long as it comes from an *archetypical* Turkish figure.⁵³ Both he and Mustapha were already categorised by many of the British public as "nefarious" servants of their master.⁵⁴

Mahomet and Mustapha, used primarily as ornaments for the court, helped the King to evade or disperse further public scrutiny from royal and familial turmoil, internal court struggles, etc. However, this dispersion or relief of the pressure from the court through arraying and exposing Mahomet and Mustapha in their Turkish costumes relies originally on contradictory premises. As a case in point, one might ask how Mahomet continued to retain his Muslim name even though he converted to Christianity. Mahomet, "having taken the Christian

faith and been christened Ludwig Maximilian...was ennobled by the emperor in 1716 as Ludwig von Konigstreu. He married the daughter of a wealthy Hanoverian and by her had two children, one of whom became a cavalry officer in the Hanoverian army.”⁵⁵ For George to allow him to retain his Muslim name Mahomet is contradictory, for it is a derivation of the name Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. By keeping this name after his conversion to Christianity, Mahomet may have continued to retain some of its negative connotations to the British public. There is no contemporary evidence to indicate whether he objected to such contradictory naming, but it is safe to assume that he already knew that his master preferred him to keep his Turkish origins alive in contemporary British consciousness.

The presence of the Muslim Other within an eighteenth-century British historical, cultural and political context has created opportunities for many British authors and writers, whether diarists, poets, novelists or journalists, to create surrogate targets for their criticism of what many of them considered a corrupt British government and court. The Muslim Other, in fact, problematised these British authors’ treatment of many contemporary issues, while at the same time disrupting the structure of the texts in which it is treated as an object of desire, hatred, disgust and exoticism.

Notes

¹ Kenneth M. Setton, *Western Hostility to Islam and Prophecies of Turkish Doom* (Philadelphia: APC, 1992), 43.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵ Arthur Bryant, *A Thousand Years of British Monarchy* (London: Collins, 1975), 105.

⁶ Gerald Newman, ed., *Britain in the Hanoverian Age: 1714-1837, An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1997), 434.

⁷ “His ignorance of the English language and of British institutions and customs, debarred him from taking an active part in public affairs.” See J. A. Brendon, *Dictionary of British History* (London: Edward Arnold, 1937), 224.

⁸ Newman, 285.

⁹ The impact of the Pretender's declaration on the contemporary British political scene was significant. As a "brochure, it soon made one of the scores of pamphlets that were piled up in the stalls and hawked about the streets [and it made the ministers] frightened [and] moved to act." See W. T. Laprade, *Public Opinion and Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 170. One of the first Georgian courts' responses to the declaration of the Pretender was to "put into Execution with the utmost rigour the laws in force against printing, publishing, and spreading of false and scandelous libels." Within days, "London was almost entirely rid of the pestilent vermin of Libel-Cryers and Ballad-Singers." *Ibid.*

¹⁰ James Francis Edward Stuart, "Protest of King James III and VIII Against the Claims of the House of Hanover, August 29, 1714" in Marquis de Ruvigny and Raineval, ed., *A Legitimist Kalender...* (London: Henry and Co., 1895), 2.

¹¹ "When George I came to England in 1714 he brought with him about ninety ministers, courtiers and servants." See John Beattie, *The English Court in the Reign of George I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 220.

¹² "The English courtiers hated and despised their German colleagues." See Peter Quennell, *Caroline of England: An Augustan Portrait* (New York: Viking, 1940), 42.

¹³ Both of George's mistresses were "rapacious and made the best of their changed circumstances." See Bryant, 105.

¹⁴ Ragnhild Hatton, *George I Elector and King* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 99-100.

¹⁵ John Walters, *The Royal Griffin: Fredrick Prince of Wales 1707-51* (London: Jarrolds, 1972), 24.

¹⁶ Hatton, 100.

¹⁷ Lady Mary Cowper, *Diary of Mary Countess Cowper, Lady of the Bed Chamber to the Princes of Wales, 1714-1720* (London: J. Murray, 1864), 149-50.

¹⁸ Beattie, 63.

¹⁹ J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1980), 45.

²⁰ H. M. Imbert-Terry, *A Constitutional King: George The First* (Washington: Kennikat, 1927), 154.

²¹ Defoe also wrote against the new court of George I in 1714, defending his master Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, against his opponents [Whigs], leading one Whig contemporary anonymous writer to describe him as a "mercenary that has been hired to raise a Dust." Laprade, 169.

²² Paula Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 385.

²³ In "1703 [Defoe], as a result of The Shortest-Way [with the Dissenters,] is imprisoned in Newgate, and then sentenced to stand in the pillory." See Daniel Defoe, *Roxana 1724*, ed. John Mullan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), xxxiv.

²⁴ Here and there in London, seditious murmurs were heard and shouts from the mob of "Damn King George." See Quennell, 26.

²⁵ On 24 May 1694, "Mustapha Pochowachett a Turk, was Tried for committing the most Unnatural and Horrid Sin of Buggery, which is so detestable, and not fit to be named among Christians; which he did on the 11th of this Instant May, upon the Body of one Anthony Bassa, Dutch Boy, of the age of 14 years, and upwards. Bassa swore, that they lay together in the Room, and in the Night-time the Prisoner assaulted him, and forced his Yard into his Body; upon which the Boy cried out, to prevent which he stopt his Mouth with the Pillow, and used him in a very unnatural manner. The Surgeon swore that he had given the said Bassa the Venereal Distemper, and that the Boy was very ill with it. The Prisoner was ask'd, What he had to say? which was done by an Interpreter sworn for that purpose. The Prisoner told him, that he never did any such thing, only lay in the Room with him. But then the Surgeon further deposed, That he being order'd to search the Boy, found two great Ulcers on both sides his Fundament, and that he was in a dangerous condition. That the Turk's Members were shanker'd, and much bloody, and a great hole upon the fleshly part of his Yard. The Turk said by the Interpreter, that he was not able to do such a thing, and would stand the Search, but that was not done. The Jury believ'd the Boy's [testimony]; and the thing appeared very very foul and detestable before the Face of Christians, being a Crime so grievous in the sight of God, the Jury having maturely consider'd of the Fact, brought him in guilty of Buggery." Pochowachett was sentenced to death. See *The Proceedings of the Old Bailey*, 24 May 1694 (http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/html_units/1690s/t16940524-20.html).

²⁶ Walters, 24.

²⁷ Beattie, 55.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ "The King and his son had not been on good terms when they came to England in 1714... when the King decided to go to Hanover 1716 [temporarily], he made plain his dislike of his son by casting about for an expedient to prevent the prince being made regent with full power in his absence." Beattie, 229.

³⁰ Walters, 24.

- ³¹ Many political factions in Britain like “the Tories mistrusted the new Hanoverian dynasty. They were attracted to James II’s young son in continental exile and drank toasts to ‘the king across the waters.’” See Raymond Birn, *Crisis, Absolutism, Revolution: Europe 1648-1789* (New York: Harcourt, 1992), 276.
- ³² Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 26.
- ³³ Rogers, 29.
- ³⁴ “In the first instance, by 1714 all Englishwomen and men, not merely privileged groups, were free from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. Provided their words did not breach the peace, they were permitted to speak or write what they pleased. An independent judiciary and local self-government were the two benchmarks of public life.” See Birn, 273.
- ³⁵ Backscheider, 385.
- ³⁶ “The Arabian Nights, [translated in 1717] by an unknown Grub Street writer. This work’s British popularity may be sensed from the number of genuine and pseudo-Eastern tales that began appearing, beginning with Turkish Tales (1708), Chinese Tales (1725).” Newman, 520.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ See *Old Bailey*.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Hatton, 132.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² “She possessed ample charms. A bosom of exemplary magnitude was encased in the fairest and pinkest skins. Her hair was fine, flaxen, abundant; her eyes sky-blue; her features heavy but good. Indeed she was the type of woman the King found hard to resist [and] the King, drawn irresistibly by her charms, not infrequently received a dexterous verbal buffet for his pains.” See J. H. Plumb, *The First Georges* (London: Hamlyn, 1956), 37.
- ⁴³ Cowper, 149.
- ⁴⁴ Cowper, 149.
- ⁴⁵ Mahomet describes “in macabre detail the death of his master’s sister, the late Queen of Prussia.” Quennell, 59.
- ⁴⁶ Cowper, 149.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva, “Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,” trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 44.
- ⁵⁰ Kristeva, 4.
- ⁵¹ Michael De-la-Noy, *The King Who Never Was: The Story of Frederick, Prince of Wales* (London: Peter Owen, 1996), 51. The King’s Staircase by William Kent is at what is more usually known as Hampton Court Palace.
- ⁵² Hatton, 99.
- ⁵³ De-La-Noy, 51.
- ⁵⁴ Nefarious: “wicked, iniquitous, villainous, despicable” (OED).
- ⁵⁵ Beattie, 260.