

Stage representations of the Ottoman world in the Low Countries

The case of Osman

IRENA AJDINOVIĆ

Irena Ajdnović is a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam. She specializes in early modern literature in a cross-cultural perspective, with a particular focus on the Low Countries, the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans.

I.Ajdinovic@uva.nl

Abstract

In 1622, two playwrights from the Low Countries each decided to use the news of the murder of Sultan Osman II as material for a tragic play. One of them was Denis Coppée, who came from the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, and the other was Abraham Kemp, from the Dutch Republic. The two tragedies have a lot in common: besides the theme, they also share the source, the genre (in part), and the year of publication (1623). Interestingly, however, the two plays offer different representations of Osman's end. In this article these differences will be illuminated by tracing the Ottoman/Turkish commonplaces in each play. In doing so, the author focuses on two main discourses: the international role of the Ottoman Empire, and the question of the legitimacy of rebellion against a tyrannical ruler.

Keywords: Image-forming, the Ottoman Empire and the West, Sultan Osman II, Abraham Kemp, Denis Coppée

Stage representations of the Ottoman world in the Low Countries

The case of Osman

IRENA AJDINOVIC

In May 1622 dramatic events shook the Ottoman capital Istanbul. A Janissary revolt broke out with an unprecedented outcome. In the course of three days young Sultan Osman II (1604–1622) became a victim of the first regicide in Ottoman history.¹ At the same time, his uncle Mustafa was propelled from a life of imprisonment in the royal dungeons straight to the Empire's throne.² The story about these developments became breaking news both in the Ottoman Empire and in the West. European envoys present in Istanbul at the time hurried to report back home about the rebellion that they had witnessed. Such reports found their way to the press, and the story of Osman's death soon became available across Western Europe in the form of news sheets and pamphlets. One of these publications was the letter of French Capuchin priest Pacifique de Provin(s) (1588–1648), who was on a mission in Istanbul when the events unfolded.³ Provin's letter had particular impact in the Low Countries. There it inspired two otherwise unrelated poets to turn the story of Osman into tragic plays: Denis Coppée, in the *Prince-Bishopric Liège*, and Abraham Kemp in the *Northern Netherlands*.⁴ Both plays bear Sultan Osman's name on

1 This article is based upon the third chapter of my PhD dissertation (in progress) at the University of Amsterdam. The topic of my research, provisionally entitled *Five Osmans. Universality and Ethnocentrism in seventeenth century literature*, are the literary reactions across Europe to the news of the murder of Osman II. I am very grateful to my supervisors Lia van Gemert (UvA) and Henk van Nierop (UvA) for their input in the previous versions of this article.

2 Ottoman successors to the throne were kept in house-arrest in the part of the Palace called the *kafes*. Although the living conditions in a *kafes* were supposed to be bearable, the life of confinement was known to have had a devastating effect on its occupants' psyche. See C. Finkel, *Osman's Dream. The History of the Ottoman Empire*, New York 2006, *passim*.

3 *Lettre du Père Pacifique de Provin, Prédicateur Capucin, estant de présent à Constantinople, enuoyée au R.P. Joseph le Clerc, Prédicateur de mesme Ordre, et Déffiniteur de leur Prouince de Tours. Sur l'estrange mort de grand Turc, Empereur de Constantinople*. This letter had two editions in the 1620s: in 1622 in Paris at F. Huby's, and in the early months of 1623 in *Mercurius François* t. VIII, 1621–1622, Paris 1623, p. 357–374, both available at the French National Library. For more on Provin see C.D. Rouillard, *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature (1520–1660)*, Paris 1941.

4 According to the analysis of Kemp's play by C.G. Brouwer (in the afterword of *Sultan Osman (1623) & Bedroge Bedriegers (1646). Turkse tragedies van Kemp en Kroes*, uitgegeven door C.G. Brouwer, Amsterdam 1994),

the cover page: *L'Exécrable Assassinat perpétré par les Ianissaires en la personne du Sultan Osman Empereur de Constantinople. Avec la Mort de ses plus favoris. Tragédie. Par Denis Coppee Huitois, and A. Kemps Droeff-cyndich spel vande moordt van Sultan Osman, keyser van Turkijen, geschiet den 20sten mey 1622, ende eerstmael vertoont by de camer Vernieut uyt Liefden, binnen Gorinchem, op den 20sten mey 1623, op den zin Beter bemindt, dan ghevreest*. They are both history plays with elements of the Senecan model of tragedy. Both appeared in print simultaneously in 1623, and were also likely performed around this time, exactly one year after the events they describe.⁵ Yet, despite all these commonalities, Coppée and Kemp gave diverging interpretations of the Istanbul crisis of 1622.

In this article I will investigate the Ottoman/Turkish stereotypes in these two tragedies in relation to the political and cultural contexts of the two playwrights. I will show that their representations of the Ottoman world can offer insight both into the early seventeenth-century Western discourses concerning the Ottoman Empire, and into the authors' self-positioning in domestic political debates. In order to do so, I will trace two discourses in each play. The first one is the representation of the Ottoman role on the world scene. The playwrights, just like the contemporary pamphleteers, reflected on the international impact of the Istanbul crisis of 1622. The second discourse pertains to the domestic conflict within Ottoman society. In the story of Osman's death Western playwrights also found resonance of the ongoing debates on the matters of rule, rebellion and regicide/tyrannicide. Osman's destiny gained an exemplary meaning, reflecting the standpoints of their respective countries on the justifiability of rebellion.

The Ottomans and the Western crisis

In Provin's letter, the source for both plays, the story goes as follows. Young Sultan Osman bore grudges against his soldiers, the Janissaries, for their lukewarm performance

Kemp's main source was a pamphlet based on the reports of the Dutch ambassador to Istanbul, Cornelis Haga: *Wærechtich Verhael, van die notabele gheschiedenissen onlangs tot Constantinopel ghebeurt / met de afkomste van Tiurcksche Keyseren ofte Sultanen van den Osmansche Geslachte tot op den tegenwoordigen / etc.*, Dutch Royal Library (KB), KB, Knuttel 3324a. My research has pointed to Provin's letter as Kemp's primary source. Coppée's and Kemp's *Osmans* are the only immediate literary reactions to this news in Western Europe that have been preserved today. Other literary versions of the story of Osman originate from regions bordering with the Ottoman territories. This bordering position has implications for the representation of the Ottoman world. A mutual comparison of all these texts would therefore be beyond the scope of this article.

⁵ Kemp's *Osman* had two early modern editions. The first one was published in Gorcum in 1623 for Adriaen Helmichsz (Leiden University Library, 1098 B 90:1), and the second one appeared in 1639 in Amsterdam for the occasion of the performance of Kemp's play in the Amsterdam theatre *Amsterdamsche Schouwburg*. The publisher of the second edition was Nicolaes van Ravesteyn for Dirck Cornelisz, and copies of this edition are available in Leiden University Library, KB and UvA Library (OTM: O 62-4043 for the last). Coppée's *L'Exécrable Assassinat perpétré par les Ianissaires en la personne du Sultan Osman Empereur de Constantinople. Avec la Mort de ses plus favoris. Tragédie. Par Denis Coppee Huitois* was printed allegedly in Rouen, for Raphaël du Petit-Val, in 1623. In fact the play was likely printed in Liège. The copy in possession of the Belgian Royal Library is also available online at http://lucia.kbr.be/multi/II_61802_AVviewer/imageViewer.html.

during his Polish campaign of the year before. He therefore devised a secret plan to move his court from Istanbul to Cairo, while spreading the word around the city that the reason for his voyage was a pilgrimage to Mecca. Despite the warnings from his ministers, and the ominous dreams he had dreamt, Osman nevertheless stuck to his plan. A rebellion broke out to put a stop to his undertaking. When, upon an open confrontation with the rebels, Osman refused to deliver his councilors, the soldiers stormed the sultan's palace. They found Osman's mentally unstable uncle Mustafa in prison, set him free, and proclaimed him the new sultan. Abandoned by everyone, Osman was arrested. Uncle and nephew thus traded places: the sultan became a captive, and a captive became the sultan. Mustafa reluctantly signed Osman's death sentence, and the executioners strangled the young sultan with a silk cord.

Pacifique de Provin's report is far from a neutral observation of the riots in the Istanbul streets. His story about political upheaval in Istanbul was pregnant with instruction for the Western reader. In his emotional account, Provin expressed sympathy with the 'pauvre petit Prince' Osman, and strongly condemned the rebels' conduct. He labeled the whole passage of history a 'disastrous and regrettable tragedy' (*funeste & pitoyable Tragedie*) (p. 4). Provin concluded his report with a lesson for his French compatriots:

Voilà que c'est que d'un Royaume où il n'y a point de princes legitimes pour soutenir le party de son Roy contre vne canaille de populace, vn seul eust mis tout cela en piece: Par ces mal-heurs de nos voisins, voyons-nous encore à quoy sert cette supreme Cour de Parlement qui s'est toujours rendue si vifvement protectrice de nos Roys, & s'est si rigoureusement oppose à tous ceux qui par escrit ou des parolles en ont voulu heurter l'autorité.⁶

Provin deployed one of the common Western topoi concerning the Ottoman state, the absence of hereditary nobility, in order to assert the advantages of the domestic state organization.⁷ This stereotype, together with other Turkish commonplaces, is embedded in a larger perspective of contrast between the Ottoman (Muslim) world and the Christian (Catholic) world throughout Provin's text. Denis Coppée in his *Osman* also adopted the image of irreconcilable differences between two worlds. In Abraham Kemp's *Osman* such a perspective is entirely absent.

Coppée: a world of difference

Denis Coppée (1580-1630?), a merchant's son from Huy (Hoei) in the Prince-Bishopric Liège,⁸ was one of the pioneers of French language theatre in Wallonia. He dedicated his literary oeuvre to religious and political topics. Although today we have no record about his education, Coppée may have attended a Jesuit college, considering

⁶ *Lettre du Père Pacifique de Provin*, Paris 1622, p. 26.

⁷ A. Çirakman, *From the "Terror of the World" to the "Sick Man of Europe"*. *European Images of Ottoman Empire and Society from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth*, New York 2002.

⁸ Liège was an enclave in the Spanish Netherlands that belonged to the Holy Roman Empire.

the enormous spiritual and cultural impact the Society of Jesus exercised in the southern parts of the Low Countries in the early seventeenth century.⁹

In Denis Coppée's *Osman* the stereotypical image of the Turk hinged on religious argumentation and had predominantly negative connotations.¹⁰ Turkish infidelity, barbarity, insolence, cruelty and blasphemy stood in explicit or implicit contrast with Christian virtues. This commonplace appeared throughout the Catholic world in Counter-Reformation propaganda. It was also present in Liège, where the local authorities regularly called for solidarity with Habsburg exposure to the Ottoman threat.¹¹ The concept of moral polarity between the Christian and the Muslim world also figured in the contemporary representations of political events in which the Ottomans played a role, including the Istanbul crisis of 1622.

Right from the beginning of his play, in his dedication of his *Osman* to the city aldermen of Huy, Coppée was explicit regarding his standpoint on the Turks:

C'est vne tragedie toute tragique: ceux qui la verront auront à remercier Dieu, de ce que la pieté Chrétienne, nous éloigne autant de telles cruautéz Turquesques, que notre foy est différente de la folle croyance des Alcoranistes.¹²

In Coppée's representation Muslim religion equaled moral corruption. This corruption manifested itself in the unnaturally cruel character of Turkish people. His *Osman* abounds in images of cruelty. Osman's associates are being killed and dismembered, their heads cut off and their bodies cut into pieces. These murders, including the strangulation of Osman, together with the exhibition of the heads, arms and legs of his assassinated comrades impaled on spears, were displayed to the audience. Dupont (1977) rightfully observed that in this respect Coppée neglected the Jesuit-Senecan theatrical decorum and presented more blood on stage than customary, because the play was set in a heathen environment.¹³ Coppée indeed remarked in the introduction of *Osman* that his play abounded with 'assassinations and corpses piled one upon the other'. If such cruelty had been inflicted on some Christians, he would not have had the courage to write about it, he added.¹⁴

Coppée's repeatedly qualified the Turks as barbarous and uncivilized people. Various characters in the play reiterate this standpoint. The chorus of the Ladies of Serail, for

⁹ B.A. Vermaseren, *De katholieke Nederlandse geschiedschrijving in de 16de en 17e eeuw over de opstand*, 2^e druk; Leeuwarden 1981, p. 176.

¹⁰ Westerners often used the term 'Turk' to refer to the members of the Ottoman dynasty, or in a general sense to denote Ottoman Muslims.

¹¹ B. Demoulin and J.-L. Kupper, *Histoire de la Principauté de Liège*, Toulouse 2002.

¹² Coppée, *L'Exécrable Assassinat* (n. 5), p. 5. In this article I use the original pagination of the 1623 (and only) edition of Coppée's *Osman*, without indicating the verse numbers. In the case of Kemp's *Osman* I will pursue the numeration introduced by C.G. Brouwer in the 1944 edition of the text.

¹³ L. Dupont, 'Denis Coppée: Tradition religieuse, actualité politique et exotisme dans le théâtre à Liège au temps du baroque', in: *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 55 (1977), p. 832.

¹⁴ 'L'on ne verra en cette piece (oultre la cruelle mort d'Osman, Empereur de Constantinople) qu'assassinats & corps emmoncelez les vns sur les autres. Si cette cruauté se fut pratiquée à l'endroit de quelques Chrétiens, ie n'aurois eu le courage d'y embesoigner ma plume', Coppée, *L'Exécrable Assassinat*, p. 6.

instance, pray to the heavens to punish the Turks for their barbarous acts (p. 64), while Osman's wife, herself of Christian origin, complains to a eunuch at the beginning of act v:

Je sçai bien que les Turcs, se rendant inhumains,
Trempe toujours au sang des orphelins leurs mains
Après auoir éteint de leur pere la vie,
Passant à tout excès leur enragée enuie.¹⁵

In Coppelée's perspective, one of the major manifestations of Turkish moral corruption was the lack of respect for their rulers. Throughout the text both Osman and Mustafa lament the absence of love from their subjects. The chorus of Christian renegades at the end of act II for instance long to go back to its native regions. The reason is that only Christian people have respect for their princes (p. 40). Coppelée also stereotypically associated the Ottoman dynasty with Hell. At the end of act I, a mythological creature, Megara,¹⁶ predicts Osman's imminent doom, announcing that his father, grandfather, and other forefathers, together with their Prophet, look forward to Osman soon joining them in the underworld (p. 24–25).

The discourse of opposition between the Catholic and the Muslim world in Coppelée's play stood in relation with the discourse about the breach within the Christian world. In post-Reformation times, the Turkish advance stereotypically served as a reminder to Christian audiences of the weakening effect of domestic conflicts. The threat of disunity among Christian forces was particularly strong in the early 1620s. Around this time the clashes between the Catholics and the Protestants continued with the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in 1618. In the Low Countries hostilities also resumed with the end of the Dutch Twelve Years' Truce with Spain in 1621. In Coppelée's play, a reflection on this situation is intertwined with the representation of the Ottoman role in the world. Announcing his play, the playwright called for the expulsion of the Grand Turk from what he saw as Christian territory:¹⁷

Le prie Dieu que les Princes de la Chrétienté se puissent reconcilier ensemble, & enseuelir leurs difficultez sous vne fauorable & oublieuse Amnestie, pour tourner la bouche de leurs canons contre ces puissans & irreconciliables ennemis, qui facilitent par leurs diuisions la conquête de leurs pais.¹⁸

15 Coppelée, *L'Exécrable Assasinat*, p. 68.

16 One of the three Furies.

17 Coppelée's call for a retrieval of Christian lands from the hands of the Turk was not an isolated case. Such calls were numerous in the early seventeenth century. In Liège, for instance, Remacle Mohy addressed in 1606 thirty-eight fictive letters to different rulers and governments to engage in a crusade against the Turk. This publication came from the press of Christian Ouwerx, the same publisher who later printed several works of Coppelée; see P. Bruyère and A. Marchandise (eds), *Florilège du livre en principauté de Liège du 1^{er} au 18^{ème} siècle*, Liège 2009. In France, Paris bookseller Nicolas Rousset expressed the same idea following the killing of Osman II in *Le Massacre du Grand Turc et du Soverian Pontife de Constantinople, nouvellement adueni par la rebellion de ses subiets: Avec le number des Villes & Pays conquis sur eux par leurs Princes voisins*, Paris 1622.

18 Coppelée, *L'Exécrable Assasinat*, p. 6.

Coppée used the news of Osman's death to call for reconciliation within Christendom. Elimination of Ottoman threat was, according to him, only possible after domestic religious division healed, and dissenting Protestants returned under the shelter of the Mother Church. The playwright adopted the larger perspective of the Catholic world combating the forces of dissent and evil, including both the Protestant neighbor and the Ottoman foe.¹⁹ In this way Coppée's perception of the relations with the Ottoman Empire was interweaved with his perception of the internal Christian conflict.

Kemp: reconcilable differences

While Denis Coppée used the same discourse of Christian-Muslim dichotomy as his source Provin, the Dutch Abraham Kemp departed from it. Kemp (1600?-1656) was a relatively little-known poet from Gorcum, a town in the Republic of the United Netherlands.²⁰ He was a prominent member of the local rhetorician society (*rederijkerskamer*) 't *Segel Bloemken*. The majority of his preserved work consists of allegorical plays and occasional poetry. He is also remembered as the first chronicler of his town.²¹

Kemp used the story of Osman as a platform to reflect on the role of his country in the international political arena. The triangular division of Mediterranean spheres of influence into Protestant/Catholic/Muslim, implicit in Coppée's *Osman*, is made explicit in Kemp's play. In Kemp's representation the Pope, King Philip IV of Spain, King Louis XIII of France, the Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand II and King Sigismund of Poland are the great Ottoman enemies. The sultan's allies are the Protestant Hungarian ruler Bethlem Gabor and 'Bhemens Prins Chur-paltz', the Winter King (I, I, 63). The sultan's greatest enemy are the Spanish, who, luckily for the Ottomans, have 'a lot of work' with Holland and the Princes of Orange (I, I, 309). That the Dutch in his play rival the Spanish Empire and stand on equal footing with the Ottomans can be understood as a projection of Dutch international impact. Kemp enhanced the impression of the global importance of his own country by stressing the commonplace of Ottoman power. The Ottoman Empire had existed for 300 years, had a large fleet, a large multiethnic army, endless resources, while its territory stretched 'from

19 Coppée treated the problem of Protestantism in another play: *La Sanglante Bataille d'entre les Impériaux et Bohèmes, donnée au Parc de l'Estaille, la Reddition de Prague. Et Ensemble l'origine du trouble de Bohème. Tragédie dédiée a la Sérénissime Altesse de Monseigneur Maximilian Dus de Bavière, Très-digne Electeur du Saint Empire, etc. Par Denis Coppée Huytois*, Liège 1624; see also http://lucia.kbr.be/multi/II_61806_AViewer/imageViewer.html.

20 For biographical data on Kemp see B. Stamkot, *Het Gorcumse Boek. Vijf eeuwen drukken, uitgeven, verzamelen, lezen en leren te Gorinchem*, Gorinchem 2004; W.A. van der Donk, *Gorcumse oudheden (V) in de jaren '49*, Gorinchem 1949-1950.

21 *Abraham Kemp's Leven der Doorluchtige Heeren van Arkel ende Jaar-Beschrijving der Stad Gorinchem*, Gorinchem 1656; this book was published posthumously by Abraham's son Hendrick. http://books.google.nl/books?id=nltbAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=nl&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

where the Sun rises to where it sets' (*van daer de Sonne daelt tot daer s'haer opganck heeft*) (I,1,28). This splendid Empire wanted above all to keep friendly relations with the rising Dutch Republic. The political agenda of the new sultan, Mustafa, culminates at the end of the play:

Des vrientschaps onderhout met Hollant, wijt vermaert,
 Dat Hollant welckers Faem tot aen de wolcken vaert,
 Dat Hollant dat soo lang ghestreden heeft met Spaengiën
 Met hulp Maurtij des Princen van Oraengiën,
 Dien tweeden Hannibal, Dien Blicxem in den crijch,
 Wiens daden ick alsnu om cortheys wil verswijch.
 Dat Hollant, seg ick, dat, dat wil ick vrinschap toonen,
 En al de lien van daer die in Turckijen woonen.²²

With 'the Dutch who live in Turkey' Kemp meant the merchants who had settled in the Ottoman territory and ran lucrative businesses. Kemp referred to the Dutch capitulation of 1612 to express Dutch economic self-confidence.²³

Anti-Muslim stereotypes seemed to have lost their importance in the light of Kemp's pragmatic message. Kemp presented Ottoman religion without voicing explicit moral judgments against the Islam. The Dutch poet shared with the audience his knowledge about the Turkish (Ottoman) beliefs and customs. From Osman's monologue in act I one could deduce that Ottomans recognized the Prophets of the Old Testament, and that they believed that Mohammed brought them their Holy Scripture, the Qur'an (I,1,83-92). Kemp presented the Islam in an informative way, refraining from the commonplace characterization of Muslim religion as false, loathsome and deceitful.²⁴ Even Osman's prayer for a place in the Muslim heaven (III, 22, 1366-1387) was not a target of usual Western criticism.²⁵

The fact that Kemp did not criticize Islam does not mean he admired it. None of the Turkish protagonists of his *Osman* may be described as a hero. Osman is a tyrant, Mustafa too feeble-minded to rule a country in a stable, rational way. The leader of the rebellion, Silactar, not only drinks and gambles, but is also engaged in a morally suspicious love triangle.²⁶ However, Kemp did not equate moral corruption with the Muslim background of his characters. On the contrary, the worst character in his play is a Catholic. Likely inspired by the work of the Dutch poets De Koning and

22 *A. Kemps Droeff-eyndich spel vande moordt van sultan Osman, keyser van Turckijen, geschiet den 20sten mey 1622* ..., IV, 11, vss. 1857-1885.

23 A capitulation (*ahdname*) was a bilateral agreement formalizing relations between a non-Muslim country and the Ottoman Empire. The Dutch-Ottoman capitulation was obtained in 1612 by the first Dutch ambassador to the Porte, Cornelis Haga (1578-1654).

24 This was the case for instance in the works of Kemp's compatriots Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), *Oratio De religione Turcarum*, in: *Joh. Cocceii Opera Anecdota, Tomus Alter*, Amsterdam 1706, p. 519-530, or Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), *De Muhammedismo*, Utrecht 1648.

25 M. Curtis, *Orientalism and Islam. European thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India*, Cambridge 2009, p. 32-33.

26 This was a sin according to both cultural standards, since Islam forbids wine.

Bredero,²⁷ Kemp introduced a light-toned subplot involving characters of lower social status (*minderemensen*), in which Silactar has to make a choice between a Turkish girl, Flora, and a Dutch lady, Celia. Since Celia proves to be a Catholic adept in black magic, the subplot ends happily for Turkish Flora.

Kemp's play aimed at good reception in the Dutch Republic, where the *topos* of Ottoman/Protestant friendship underscored the common enemy in Catholic Spain. According to historian N. Mout, during the Revolt the image of the Turk underwent a change and ceased to be the epitome of Evil, since Evil was now localized in the Spanish foe.²⁸ The Turk started to serve as a declarative device to express antipathy towards Spain, like in the famous Dutch rebels' motto 'rather Turkish than Popish' (*Liever Turks dan Paaps*).²⁹ Nevertheless, despite occasional flirtations with the idea of a military alliance with the Porte, the States General did not really cherish such ambitions.³⁰ The prospects of the lucrative Levant trade, however, were considered attractive. Trade formed the basis of the Dutch-Ottoman official relations, which started with the capitulation of 1612.³¹ Kemp's *Osman* displays awareness of this political context, and uses the story of Osman's demise to underline its positive sides from the perspective of the Dutch Republic.

This essentially Protestant rhetoric coming from a Dutch poet may seem unsurprising, were it not for the fact that Kemp himself was a Catholic. The position of a Catholic in a Protestant-governed city was not easy. The atmosphere of 'intolerance, harassment and exclusion' kept Catholics in the Republic out of the public sphere.³² Kemp, on the other hand, had literary ambitions inextricable from public involvement. The success that he had as a *rederijker* suggests that Gorcum's audience appreciated his literary skill regardless of the poet's confessional background. Kemp, however, also contributed to

27 E.M.P. van Gemert 'De snoepige grillen van hillebillen. Straatgewoel op het zeventiende-eeuwse toneel', in: E. Ruijsendaal, G. Rutten and G.R. W. Dibbets (eds), *Bon jours Neef, ghoaden dagh Cozyn! Opstellen aangeboden aan Geert Dibbets bij zijn afscheid (...)*, Münster 2003, p. 121-134.

28 M.E.H.N. Mout, 'Turken in het nieuws', in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 97 (1984), p. 362-381.

29 For Dutch image-forming about the Turk see: B.J. Kaplan, *Muslims in the Dutch Golden Age. Representations and realities of religious toleration*, Amsterdam 2006; M.E.H.N. Mout, 'Calvinoturcisme in de zeventiende eeuw. Comenius, Leidse oriëntalisten en de Turkse Bijbel', in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*, 91 (1978), p. 576-607; idem, 'Turken in het nieuws'; G.A. Wieggers, 'De Nederlanden en de islam in de zeventiende eeuw. Wisselwerking tussen cultuurcontact en beeldvorming?', in: W.A. Shahid and P.S. van Koningsveld (eds), *Religie, cultuur en minderheden. Historische en maatschappelijke aspecten van beeldvorming*, Tilburg 1999; H. Theunissen (ed.), *Topkapi en turkomanie. Turks-Nederlands ontmoetingen sinds 1600*, Amsterdam 1989; J. Oddens, *Een vorstelijk voorland. Gerard Hinlopen op reis naar Istanbul (1670-1671)* (introduction), Zutphen 2009.

30 See the pivotal study of A. de Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic. A history of the earliest diplomatic relations, 1610-1630*, Leiden 1978, p. 86-93.

31 Ibidem. For more on Dutch-Ottoman economic and diplomatic relations see M. Bulut, *Ottoman-Dutch economic relations in the early modern period 1571-1609*, Utrecht 2000.

32 Ch.H. Parker, *Faith on the Margins. Catholics and Catholicism in the Dutch Golden Age*, Cambridge (MA), Londen 2008, p. 24.

this success by deliberately steering clear from compromising religious statements, as he openly expressed in the dedication to his comedy *Bly- Eynd spel* of 1643:

Tussen de twee aanstootelikke klippen, by de Po'eten, Scilla, en Charibdis, by my, Lof der Daaden, myns tegenvoelders, in gheloofs zaaken, is't het my, soo zorggelik zeylen, om de middel-streek te houden, als de Schippers, by de Po'eten. Immers, zonder Schip-breuk, zy ik deurgeraakt.³³

Kemp's position was especially vulnerable in the atmosphere of resuming Protestant/Catholic hostilities with the end of the Twelve Years' Truce in 1621, the time when he was working on his *Osman*. The poet therefore had a good reason to protect his position in the Republic by opting to depart from Catholic-tinted rhetoric present in his source, Pacifique de Provin's letter, and give it a more Dutch-friendly twist.

The West and the Ottoman crisis

The attitude towards the Ottoman Empire was not the only point in which Kemp's and Coppée's perspectives diverged. They also gave different interpretations of the political conflict that led to Osman's death. Both poets lived far away from Istanbul. There is no evidence of either of these authors having had direct contact with, or personal interest in the Turks. They turned the news of Osman's death into tragedies because of the theme that is central in this story: legitimacy of rebellion.³⁴ This theme was familiar to audiences in the Low Countries in the context of the Dutch Revolt and the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War. Osman's and Mustafa's destinies brushed upon the popular debates about tyranny and the right to rebel. Again, Kemp and Coppée gave opposing interpretations of the story of Osman. Coppée's Osman dies a victim of the blind rage of the Turkish masses. Kemp's Osman dies justifiably, as a punishment for the faults he has made as a sultan.

Coppée: An ignominious massacre

Coppée's representation of the Istanbul rebellion corresponded with his perception of domestic politics. Focusing on the disastrous consequences of the popular insurrection, the poet defended the sultanate and, by extension, the monarchy. The division in Coppée's interpretation of the conflict in the Ottoman state is between the ruling instances

33 A. Kemp, *Bly-eind-spel. Van wegen de Gorkomze kamer, Vernievd' uit Liefde tot antwoord op de vraag van de kaamer tot Ryswyk, Beeld' af, hoe Bataviers, soo veel en lange tijden, kloek hebben weder-staen, haer vyant in het strijden ... Eerst gespeeld tot Gorinchem, den 6. van Somer-maand s'iaars, Gorinchem 1643*. Copy available in the Amsterdam University Library, OTM: O 62-5634.

34 For more on European theatre with Turkish subjects see M. Dimmock, *New Turkes. Dramatizing Islam And The Ottomans in Early Modern England*, Franham 2005; J. Burton, *Traffic and Turning. Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624*, Newark 2005; D. Vitkus, *Turning Turk. English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean*, New York 2008; H. Meeus, 'Turken op het toneel', in: *Literatuur. Magazine over Nederlandse letterkunde*, 13 (1996), p. 310-312; C.D. Rouillard, *The Turk in French History, Thought and Literature (1520-1660)*, Paris 1941; D. Chatenier, *Le sujet turc sur la scène française des XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles. Un voyage dans le tragique, du récit d'Orient à la tragédie*, Sorbonne 2010; L. Mc Jannet, *The Sultan Speaks. Dialogue in English Plays and Histories about the Ottoman Turks*, New York 2006.

(the sultan and his ministers, Selictar, Capi and Kissilar Aga) on the one side, and the common folk under the military command on the other.

In this division, Coppée expressed more sympathy for the ruling classes than for the soldiers and the common people. The rebels bear no proper names in his play. They are called the Chief of the Militia, Captain, or a Group of Soldiers (*Chef de la milice; Capitaine; Troupe des soldats*). This lack of personal names implies that these characters represent the masses from the lowest layers of society, a destabilizing social factor. Different characters repeat the same critical view of the rebels. Selictar Aga for instance refers to them as to a ‘seven-headed monster’ (*hydre à plus de sept chefs*) and an ‘audacious beast’ (*bête pleine d’audace*) (p. 21). In Coppée’s representation people are prone to violence and losing self-control, a dangerous combination that can result in anarchy. The murder of the sultan was not planned, but a result of the uncontrolled passions of the multitude. Towards the end of the play, with their bloodlust abated, Osman’s murderers realize their mistake. Ruining their monarch means that they have ruined themselves as well (p. 71). Coppée presented the public repentance as an argument against rebellion in general. Any attempt on the life of a Prince, including an infidel one in *Osman*, the poet condemned as a sinful and godless act.

The ministers on the other hand have a positive role, as they wisely warn the young sultan away from making the fatal mistake of the voyage to Mecca. Coppée’s view that the monarch shares the sovereignty with his nobles, represented in different councils, was based on his perception of local political reality in Liège.³⁵ The nature of the monarch’s rule is the crux of this play. Coppée’s Osman makes mistakes which can be traced to the Lipsian model of good kingship.³⁶ Under the influence of Justus Lipsius’ (1547–1606) political philosophy, a number of conventional royal traits qualified a good ruler: political wisdom (*prudentia*), virtue (*virtus*), restraint (*modestia*), mercy (*clementia*), steadfastness (*constantia*) and righteousness (*iustitia*). Osman lacks all of these qualities. He does not listen to his advisors, nor does he recognize the authority of law, embodied in his council, and insists that his will is his only law (*mon vouloir est ma loi*) (p. 24).

According to Lipsius, the people should also feel love and respect for their Prince (*amor, veneratio*) for they know that God also loves him. In return, the Prince loves his people.³⁷ Coppée’s Osman, however, despises his subjects. He openly tells them that he would feel more secure living amongst the wolves than carrying a crown amongst them,³⁸ and that he

³⁵ Similar ideas can be found in the political philosophy of the poet’s contemporary and compatriot, Johannes de Chokier de Surlet, who in the time Coppée wrote his *Osman* occupied the position of vice-general of Prince-Bishopric of Liège. According to de Chokier’s *Thesaurus politicorum Aphorismorum* (Moguntiae 1613), both burghers and the ministers are part of politics (*arcana imperii*). E. de Bom, *Geleerden en politiek. De politieke ideeën van Justus Lipsius in de vroegmoderne Nederlanden*, Hilversum 2011, p. 197.

³⁶ J. Lipsius, *Politica. Six books of political instruction*, J. Waszink (ed.), Assen 2004.

³⁷ For numerous examples see De Bom, *Geleerden en politiek*, p. 209–302.

³⁸ Coppée, *L’Exécration Assasinat*, p. 34: ‘Il seroit plus seur de vivre entre les loups / Que non pas (en portant la couronne) entre vous.’

had been better off with naked Indians than with his ungrateful people.³⁹ At the same time he accuses his people of wanting to ruin the state by resorting to oligarchy.⁴⁰ Osman is far from the ideal fatherly monarch. As one of his councilors, Kissilar Aga, phrases it while trying to comfort Osman, a benign king, father of his country, does not need to fear for his life; only barbarous tyrants and felons are the ones who should fear.⁴¹ Why is Osman so embittered about his own subjects, and why is his royal benignity brought into question?

According to the neo-stoic philosophy embraced by Lipsius, steadfastness, or the adherence to one's moral ethos in the face of arbitrary changes of fortune, was an indispensable trait of a good ruler.⁴² Osman, however, lacks royal integrity. The play opens with Osman's monologue in which he expresses signs of irrationality (melancholy): he is being tormented by a dream and bad premonitions. This ominous dream warned him to suspect some evil coming from his subjects, which was, according to Coppée, also Osman's motive to leave Istanbul. His tragic mistake lies in the fact that he lost his steadfastness and turned against his people for irrational and personal reasons. Coppée depicted his Osman as the type of tyrant that featured in Jesuit historical plays: the character who, overruled by passions, smothered all potential for the good in himself, and thus wasted his God-given elevated royal character.⁴³

Mustafa in Coppée's play displays the traits reminiscent of the Jesuit martyr hero.⁴⁴ Martyr heroes are fearless and joyfully steadfast in the face of the worst pains and misery. This all seems to them to be worthless of consideration compared to the reward they will obtain in heaven. Although an infidel, Mustafa in Coppée's play resembles this type of character. He is meek and pious and prefers meditation in his cell to kingship. In his ascetic modesty Mustafa only wishes for cold water, when freed from his cell and offered a glass of sherbet.⁴⁵ He loves the people and is ready to give his life for them (*il veut vivre et mourir avec vous & pour vous*) (p. 55). Coppée's Mustafa also abundantly exploits the neo-stoic ethos of princely responsibility, in which rule is understood both as a privilege and a burden. According to him, royalty is a fleeting human state, and the crown a 'short-lived pleasure, paved with misfortune' (*un plaisir bien court de Malheur talonné*).⁴⁶

In general, Coppée's rhetoric embraced the pro-monarchal ideas of Counter-Reformation.⁴⁷ Human action in his *Osman* is set against Christian ideals. Since monarchs were understood to be at the top of moral and since social order was given by the

39 Ibidem, p. 36: 'Il me seroit plus seur d'aller faire sejour / Entre les Indois nuds, & y dresser ma cour / Qu'entre vous, peuple ingrat (...).'

40 Ibidem, p. 13: 'mais ie vois bien le but de votre âme enduree / Tendante à ruiner l'état de Monarchie / L'oligarchie plait aux brouillons comme vous / Du bon-heur de leur Roysans cause étant ialoux.'

41 Ibidem, p. 23: 'Un monarque benin, un pere à la patrie / Ne doit tant redouter qu'on aguette sa vie / C'est à faire aux tyrans barbares & felons.'

42 J. Lipsius, *De Constantia libri duo, Qui alloquium praecipue continent in publicis malis*, Leiden 1584.

43 W.H. Mc Cabe, *An Introduction to the Jesuit Theater*, St. Louis 1983, p. 177.

44 Ibidem, p. 156.

45 This same detail occurs in contemporary historiography, usually as a sign of Mustafa's paranoia.

46 Coppée, *L'Exécration Assasinat*, p. 18.

47 H. Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought. The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540-1630*, Cambridge 2004.

all-good God, a revolt or a regicide thus went against God's plan. Was the regicide in an infidel sultanate also against God's order?

Coppée strove to undermine the moral legitimacy of the Ottoman society on account of its Muslim faith. At the same time, he wanted to exalt the role of the monarch in an internal conflict with the common people. These two attitudes create tension in Coppée's play; if for the poet the Muslims were bad and the monarchs good, how did he then present Osman and Mustafa, Muslim monarchs? Coppée had a solution. Osman is in the beginning of his play an infidel Prince. As a heathen sultan, Osman *a priori* lacks Christian virtue (*virtus*) together with its main component, Christian piety (*religio*). However, he undergoes a change, and, in the last moments of his life, admits the higher moral ground of Christian faith:

O qu'heureux sont ceux-là regentant des pais
Où les Princes iamais ne se voyent trahis,
Où comme demi-dieux vu chacun les honnore,
Pour ne point irriter le Dieu qu'on y adore,
Duquel ils sont tenus entre vrais pourtraits.⁴⁸

This epiphany coincides with a change in Osman's character, as he collects royal courage to fight the executioners, desiring to die a noble death rather than ending like a criminal (p. 64). The playwright's argument is that, had Osman been a Christian, he would have had the chance of being a good monarch. The sultan's Ottoman blood is, according to Coppée, the source of his tragic hubris. Coppée allowed the young sultan to die an honorable character, due to his realization of the true Christian values in the last moments of his life.

The hero of his play, Mustafa, knows right from wrong all along. Throughout the play, he is aware of the advantages of Christianity and regrets that he was not born in a Christian country. He is reluctant to accept sultanhip, and chides the rebels with the following words:

Non, non il n'est pas seur entre les Musulmans,
De les vouloir fléchir a ses [the Prince's] commandemens:
Si vous auiez l'amour de la gent baptisée,
Ce seroit à un Roy chose bien plus aisée:
Le Prince est estimé y tenir du diuin,
Les necessaires loix n'y sont faites en vain:
Mais vous n'en faites cas, vôtre tête éuentée
Ne veut que celle-là qui d'elle est inuentée.
Vous n'auiez autre loy que vostre opinion,
Qui d'entre vous & nous fait la desunion.⁴⁹

According to Coppée, Muslims have no rule of law, a characteristic of civilized Catholic countries, and Mustafa distances himself from his 'barbarous' origin. The best attitude, for an individual as well as for the Prince, is the submission to the precepts

⁴⁸ Coppée, *L'Exécrable Assasinat*, p. 58. The poet shared this view, as he explicitly stated in his address of *St. Lambert* (1624) to Ferdinand of Bavaria that the monarchs are the most perfect images of our Savior.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

of Christianity. Furthermore, only Catholic teachings can prevent the Prince from falling into sin or tyranny.⁵⁰ Osman's and Mustafa's elevated royal character makes them realize these truths. Coppée sought to legitimize both royal Muslim characters in his play, without having to abandon his Catholic doctrine. He thus distanced his sultans from their Turkish, Muslim ethos and used them to propagate the Catholic-monarchist principle.

Kemp: Better to be loved than feared

Abraham Kemp presented a different picture of the rebellion than his contemporary from Liège. Although the Dutch playwright relied on the same Lipsian tradition as Coppée, in his play there is no condemnation of rebellion. On the contrary, Kemp used the neo-stoic imperative that a Prince must not give himself over to unbridled passions to represent Osman's rule as tyranny.⁵¹ Kemp's Osman failed to control his passions. In consequence, he stopped seeing the right order of values. Such a representation can be traced beside the works of Lipsius in Coornhert's *Zedekunst* (1587), Spiegel's *Hertenspiegel* (1614), and yet again in the works of Kemp's model, P.C. Hooft.

The cast in Kemp's play is also different from that in Coppée's *Osman*. While Osman and Mustafa are referred to as the Princes, and for the Ottoman Agas and Pashas, Kemp used the Dutch equivalents *Adeldom* (vss. 538), *het best van 't Lant* (vss. 575) and *Edel-lien* (vss. 597), in Kemp's *Osman* common people play no role. The trio of Agas – Capi, Silactar and Quissilar – are presented not as Osman's supporters, but as the leaders of the rebellion who, when they realize that Osman's rule has turned into tyranny, shift allegiance away from the young sultan. When casting political roles in his *Osman* Kemp looked up to the famous P.C. Hooft's play *Geeraerd van Velsen* (1613), a historical tragedy in which a group of nobles plots against their sovereign, Count Floris v. Just like in *Geeraerd van Velsen*, the central question is the legitimacy of rebellion against a 'natural' ruler.⁵²

Already in the opening scene of Kemp's *Osman* the audience can understand that there is a conflict between the sultan and his lords. Osman is showing clear signs of arrogance. The sultan, full of wrath about the failure of his Polish campaign, for which he blames his own army, reveals his plan to go to Mecca and pay a visit to the grave of the Prophet. His councilors are alarmed: not only would this be a dangerous voyage, but also the situation in the capital is tenuous, as the people are still upset about the military failure in Poland. However, Osman discards their admonishments, and dismisses the council. As we have also seen in Coppée's play, not listening to advisors was a sign of bad government. From a local standpoint, the state was ideally based upon a constitution that limited the power of the Prince, thus preventing him from turning into a tyrant. Kemp's *Osman* exhibits

⁵⁰ L. Dupont, 'Denis Coppée (n. 13)', p. 810-11.

⁵¹ J. W. H. Konst, *Woedende waakgierigheid en vruchteloze weelachten. De hartstochten in de Nederlandse tragedie van de zeventiende eeuw*, Utrecht 1993.

⁵² Kemp referred in his introduction to *Osman* to Hooft's play as his model regarding the dramatic rule of the unity of time.

many tyrannical traits. For instance, when he divulges to his closest associates his plans to transfer the court to Cairo instead of going to Mecca, he meets the disapproval of his lords again (II, I). However, the sultan is still unmoved, asking:

Vrint Queissilar, voor wien Sou ick doch schromen?
Segt, wie heeft op my 't ghebieen? Ik pas op Goon noch mensch (...).⁵³

Osman thinks himself above God. No power is higher than his, and he does not have to account for his actions to anybody. Overruled by passions, the sultan forgets the customs and the natural order. Fallen prey to excessive self-confidence, Osman personally collects all the treasures from the palace to take with him to his new capital in Cairo (I, II). The last pieces are in the basement, in the royal tombs. Osman insists the graves of his father and son are to be opened and plundered, but his associates are hesitant to do so. Osman therefore opens the graves and enters them himself; he takes all he can find, commenting:

(...) Waertoe de dood ghebeenten
Verciert met desen Schat die onweerdeerlick is?⁵⁴

Kemp presented a whole series of arguments in favor of rebelling against the young sultan. Osman did not adhere to the in essence Erasmian proverb advising the monarch that it is 'better to be loved than feared' (*beter bemint dan gevrees*), Kemp's motto of the play. This anti-Machiavellian instruction is repeated throughout the play, for instance by Osman's mother, Thiossem:

Mijn alderliefste Kint, 'k heb dickwils u ghebeden
Uyt Moederlicke Liefid, met claechelicke reden:
Mijn Soon, doch daghelicx met yver 't spreek-woort leest
Dat beter is bemint te worden dan ghevrees.
Ick seyde u dat de Deucht meer blinckt dan Phebi stralen,
Wiens glants selfs in 't ghesicht gaet van de blinde dalen.
Soo doet de Sonne niet! De Deucht is 't hoochste goet.
Der Vrienden Deucht een Prins oock meest bewaren moet,
En zyner Burg'ren gunst, en zijn voorsichtich leven.
Der Onderdanen haet de Princen meest doet sneven.⁵⁵

Since Osman failed to adhere to his mother's advice, his rule is being discussed by the different characters in the play as a tyranny. Dahout for instance says:

In zynen handen staet ons leven, goet en eer.
Hy spottet met ons vrees. Hy bralt in zyne glory.
Hy hout ons onder 't jock. Dat schijnt hem een victory:
Den voet op onsen neck, den duym op onse keel (...).⁵⁶

⁵³ Kemp, *Sultan Osman*, II, I, vss. 441-442.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, I, II, vss. 297-298.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, II, 2, vss. 852-863.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, II, 4, vss. 559-564.

Boustangi continues:

Als hy op de Ghemeene welvaert niet wil achten;
 Als hy sijn ooren stopt voor d'Ondersaten clachten;
 Als hy montspeelders heeft en achter-raden hout;
 Als hy de best van 't Lant oock alderminst betrouwt;
 Als hy aenbrengers g'looft en deelt die milde gaven:
 Soo gaet hy t'eenmael na tyrannije draven.
 Hy denckt dan gantslick niet op 't spreek-woord dat men leest:
*Datt 't beter is bemindt te worden dan ghevreest.*⁵⁷

The arguments Kemp used to support the cause for rebellion are strongly reminiscent of those used by the Dutch rebels upon declaring the end of their allegiance to the Spanish king almost four decades earlier, in the preliminary declaration of Dutch independence, *Plakkaat van Verlatinghe* (1581).⁵⁸ The point of departure in this type of discourse was that the tyrannical lord would be replaced with another Prince. By analogy, Osman had turned into a tyrant, and could therefore rightfully be deposed. Although not directly addressed to a particular ruler, Kemp's play abounds with general instruction for princes how to avoid Osman's destiny. Since many plays written in the Republic in the same period as Kemp's *Osman* used the Dutch Revolt as a backdrop to reflect on the contemporary political situation, we could expect the possibility that Osman's destiny served as a 'mirror' for Prince Maurits. Kemp, however, gave no explicit reference to the Dutch ruler in the printed version of his play. It can therefore be concluded that in Kemp's *Osman* the young sultan's destiny stands for a universal example of government gone wrong.

Conclusion

Kemp's and Coppée's plays about Osman II may not be reliable sources of information about the Ottomans, but they are representative of how deep the ideological division between the Catholic and the Protestant regions in the Low Countries was in 1623. The two playwrights learned the story of Osman's death, and turned it into 'oriental' tragedies. The two *Osmans* can give us an insight in the image-forming about the Orient in a period of intensifying contacts between the Low Countries and the Ottoman Empire. The fact that this story was based on true events from the previous year inspired the two playwrights to reflect on the political role of the Ottoman Empire. Besides, they also used Osman's example to position themselves in the domestic political debates. Domestic political agendas dominated the Netherlandish views of the Ottoman Empire. When it comes to the international relations, Coppée criticized

⁵⁷ Ibidem, II, 4, vss. 572–579.

⁵⁸ M.E.H.N. Mout, 'Van arm vaderland tot eendrachtige republiek. De rol van politieke theorieën in de Nederlandse Opstand', in: *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 101 (1986), p. 345–365.

Turkish society and religion, but Kemp refrained from such criticism in order to underline the importance of the commercial relations between his own country and the Ottomans. As far as the representations of Ottoman domestic conflict are concerned, Kemp used the conflict to assert the right to rebel against a tyrannical ruler, and Coppée, to the contrary, to criticize rebellion. In both cases Turkish and Ottoman commonplaces served primarily to support different arguments in local political debates.