

TURKS AND OTHER GERMANS IN THE WORK OF DANIEL CASPER VON LOHENSTEIN



By Todd Kontje

With a view of the background of his role as public administrator in the complex geopolitical situation of Silesia a number of works by Lohenstein (1635–1683) directly or indirectly relate to the Turkish theme, simultaneously treating themes of relevance to the author's own context. His drama Ibrahim Sultan about a monstrous Oriental despot thematizes relations between autocratic power and the role of court and bureaucracy as advice and restraint. Although events in Lohenstein's last work, the huge novel Grossmütiger Feldherr Arminius oder Herrmann, take place in Germanic and Roman antiquity and have a nationalistic theme related to the so-called Hermann-Schlacht, it is also an indirect reflection of Lohenstein's attitude to the Turks, a depiction of modern Turkey in the guise of ancient Rome.

This essay examines the image of Turks in the work of Daniel Casper von Lohenstein (1635–1683), a seventeenth-century German author who lived at a time when the Ottoman Empire was at the zenith of its power. I begin with a brief overview of his life in historical-political context, turn next to his two dramas set in Turkish courts, and conclude with a look at his historical novel. I will argue that while Lohenstein portrays certain corrupt Turks as stereotypically decadent Oriental despots, he also leaves room for a more tolerant view of the foreign culture and a critical view of his own.

Lohenstein's Breslau in Geopolitical Context

Daniel Casper was born in the Silesian town of Nimptsch in 1635, but attended school and spent his adult life in the capital city of Breslau, today's Wrocław in eastern Poland.¹ His father was granted a hereditary title of nobility in 1670, and thus the writer became known to his contemporaries and posterity as Daniel Casper (or Caspar) von Lohenstein.² He studied law at the

¹ For an overview of Lohenstein's life and work see Asmuth 1971; Spellerberg 1984; and Browning 1996.

² Casper was the German family name that was Latinized to Caspari; the patent of nobility was granted Lohenstein's father just weeks after his son was elected to a high administrative

universities of Leipzig and Tübingen, went on the obligatory European tour that included travel to the Netherlands, northern Germany, and up to the Turkish border in Hungary, before settling down as a lawyer and leading city administrator in Breslau. Lohenstein also wrote a half-dozen plays and a massive courtly novel, but unlike modern authors compelled to work for a living at jobs that impede their creative endeavors, Lohenstein does not seem to have experienced a conflict between his professional and artistic activities. Literature for Lohenstein might better be considered the continuation of politics by other means.³

Lohenstein lived in a complex geopolitical landscape. He was born in the midst of the Thirty Years War in a region that was particularly hard-hit; parts of Silesia suffered a population loss of up to 85%.⁴ Silesia nevertheless experienced a remarkable literary “boom” during the seventeenth century, with such authors as Martin Opitz, Andreas Gryphius, Friedrich von Logau, Johannes Scheffler (Angelus Silesius), Christian Hofmann von Hofmannswaldau, and Daniel Casper von Lohenstein rising to prominence.⁵ Lohenstein’s literary works display the elaborate rhetorical flourishes and encyclopedic erudition that were expected and appreciated in the highly stylized court culture of the baroque, but they also contain graphic images of horrific violence that shocked later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century readers. The seventeenth century was the era of punishment, not discipline, as Michel Foucault reminded us, a time when public torture and gruesome executions were staged against the backdrop of a land ravaged by religious war, famine, and pestilence.⁶ It would be another century before Germany would experience the cultural revival of the “Age of Goethe,” and two before its first national unification and rise to become a major European military, industrial, and imperial power.

In Lohenstein’s lifetime, Louis XIV’s France was emerging as the dominant European power, while the Ottoman Empire threatened Europe from the southeast. When Lohenstein died in April 1683, Ottoman troops were advancing on Vienna; their defeat in that September would mark the

post in the government of Breslau, so ennoblement of the Casper family may well have been more in recognition of the son’s accomplishments as a lawyer, administrator, and writer than those of his father (Asmuth 1971, 2, 12).

³ See Béhar 1988, Lohenstein’s “actes littéraires sont autant des gestes politiques” (1, 4).

⁴ Barraclough 1992, 76–77, map 5.

⁵ Szyrocki 1978, in *Die Welt des Daniel Casper von Lohenstein* (Kleinschmidt et al. 1978). This volume contains valuable and accessible essays on various aspects of Lohenstein’s work by leading scholars in the field; see in particular Oestreich 1978.

⁶ Foucault begins his work with a memorable account of the public torture and execution of “Damiens the regicide” in 1757, 1977, 3–31. Michael Kunze (1987) goes into similar graphic detail.

beginning of the end of their power within Europe, but that was after Lohenstein’s time. While the macro-political setting placed Silesia between France and the Ottoman Empire, between Paris and Constantinople, the micro-political tensions within German-speaking lands stretched between Vienna and Berlin. Breslau was a predominantly Protestant, semi-independent city-state within the Holy Roman Empire, with the capital city of Vienna as the center of the Catholic Counterreformation, but Prussia was a rising Protestant power to the north. The highpoint of Lohenstein’s diplomatic career took place when he was sent as an emissary to Vienna to try to dissuade Emperor Leopold from turning Breslau into a garrison city. Lohenstein succeeded in negotiations that revealed the delicate balance of power between Breslau and its neighbors, a complex political situation that would also be reflected in Lohenstein’s creative work.⁷

Propaganda and Politics in Lohenstein’s Turkish Tragedies

Lohenstein’s first drama, *Ibrahim* or *Ibrahim Bassa*, was published in 1653, although it was written as a school exercise three years earlier, when he was only fifteen.⁸ Its plot is quickly summarized: Ibrahim is an Italian Christian who has risen to prominence in Soliman’s Turkish court. While Ibrahim is on an important diplomatic mission to Persia, Soliman becomes interested in Ibrahim’s wife, Isabelle. Ibrahim tries to flee with her back to Italy, but is apprehended and returned to Constantinople, where he and his wife are imprisoned and condemned. At the last moment, however, Soliman changes his mind, pardons Ibrahim, and renounces his desires for Isabelle. But Soliman’s wife, Roxelane, and his advisor, Rustahn, convince him that defiance of the sultan must not go unpunished. Soliman objects that he had promised Ibrahim that he would be safe as long as he (Soliman) remained alive; to execute him now would be to go back on his word. The Turkish courtiers solve the problem by convincing Soliman that sleep is a kind of death, and that the execution can therefore be carried out with no loss of honor while the sultan slumbers. Thus Ibrahim is executed after all. A distraught Isabelle at first considers suicide, but decides instead to go abroad to spread the news of Turkish perfidy.

⁷ Jane O. Newman (2000) is particularly good at situating Lohenstein’s literary works in his local and international political context.

⁸ *Ibrahim* was Lohenstein’s original title; the posthumous reprint of 1689 added “Bassa” (Pasha) to distinguish it from Lohenstein’s later drama, *Ibrahim Sultan* (Asmuth 1971, 24). For the sake of clarity, I will follow tradition and refer to Lohenstein’s first drama as *Ibrahim Bassa*. Béhar offers a detailed account of the work’s composition history (1988, 1, 32–40).

Taken at face value, *Ibrahim Bassa* is a work of anti-Turkish propaganda, written by a precocious schoolboy at a time of rising Ottoman power.⁹ Lohenstein dedicated the play to members of the Silesian nobility, and, in an addendum marked by a typically baroque combination of servile self-deprecation and obsequious praise of his superiors, Lohenstein extols Ibrahim’s upright character and declares that the shameful practices of the Turkish court will be banished from Silesia.¹⁰ Lohenstein underscores his anti-Turkish polemic by beginning the play with an allegorical representation of Asia, wrapped in chains by vices and condemned to death. “Woe is me!” cries Asia: “I was once the queen of the world, Europe and Africa bowed down to me, but now I am entirely corrupt”.¹¹

A closer look at *Ibrahim Bassa* reveals somewhat more nuance in this admittedly heavy-handed condemnation of the Turks. Soliman is not so much evil as a weak and vacillating ruler controlled by a domineering wife and corrupt advisors. In his addendum to the drama, Lohenstein describes Soliman as “a virtuous prince who is nevertheless overwhelmed by the two strongest emotions” (lust and jealousy?) (“einen Tugendhafften/ doch von den zwey schärfsten Gemüths-Regungen übermeisterten Fürsten”).¹² Although his advisors tell Soliman that by Islamic law any Muslim who aids a Christian must be condemned, the actual practice at Soliman’s court must be different, for how else could Ibrahim have risen to the position of an ambassador entrusted with an important mission to the Persian court? In the brief interlude between the pardon and the final execution, Ibrahim and Soliman share a peaceful stroll in the late afternoon sun; shortly thereafter, Soliman sings Ibrahim’s praises to his wife, suggesting that respect, friendship, and even mutual admiration are possible between Christian and Muslim. True, the reconciliation proves deceptive, but we are left with the impression that if Soliman had not been undone by lust and evil advisors, the friendship and political alliance with Ibrahim might have continued indefinitely.

⁹ Klaus Günther Just reads both of Lohenstein’s “Turkish tragedies” as anti-Turkish propaganda. “Lohenstein und die türkische Welt,” in Lohenstein 1953, xxxvii–xlvi.

¹⁰ Lohenstein 1953 (*Türkische Trauerspiele. Ibrahim Bassa. Ibrahim Sultan*. Ed. Klaus Günther Just), 81. Just also edited Lohenstein’s *Römische Trauerspiele. Agrippina. Epicharis* (Lohenstein 1955) and his *Afrikanische Trauerspiele. Cleopatra. Sophonisbe* (Lohenstein 1957). In 2005, de Gruyter began publishing a multi-volume critical edition of Lohenstein’s *Sämtliche Werke*. As this edition is not scheduled to be completed until 2020, I quote Lohenstein’s dramas from Just’s earlier editions. Lohenstein’s complete works are also now available free of cost online at zeno.org.

¹¹ *Ibrahim Bassa*, in Lohenstein 1953, 16–19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 81.

Twenty years later Lohenstein transformed the weak and vacillating Turkish sultan into a monstrous Oriental despot. *Ibrahim Sultan* (1673) features a sex-crazed monarch whose unchecked desires spell disaster for his realm. One of the courtiers recalls with disdain that Ibrahim ascended the throne "with his neck adorned with pearls, his body with diamonds, his fingers with golden nail polish, and eagerly trying in many ways to be a woman" ("Mit Perlen schmückt den Halß/ mit Diamant den Leib/ Die Nägel gulden färbt/ und auf viel Arth ein Weib Sich emsiget zu seyn").¹³ Ibrahim's cross-dressing is symptomatic of his general willingness to subvert the natural order of things. In the course of the play he will imprison his own mother, threaten her with death, and even kill one of his sons on stage. The play begins with Ibrahim attempting to rape his brother's widow, who defends herself with a dagger in a melodramatic scene of the sort that recurs throughout Lohenstein's oeuvre.¹⁴ Although we later discover that Ibrahim already has two wives and five sons, we also learn that this "lascivious stallion" ("der geile Hengst")¹⁵ spends most of the time in his harem, which is luxuriously appointed with fur rugs, decorated with pornographic art, and well stocked with voluptuous odalisques. All is forgotten when Ibrahim sees a picture of the mufti's attractive fourteen-year-old daughter Ambre, however. Her father is not opposed on principle to the honor of his daughter becoming one of the sultan's wives, but she refuses. Undeterred, Ibrahim orders his loyal servant Achmed to throw her into bed "split-naked" (*fingernackt*).¹⁶ After he rapes her, Ibrahim exposes Ambre to public shame, whereupon she commits suicide.

As in the case of *Ibrahim Bassa*, *Ibrahim Sultan* can be read as anti-Turkish propaganda. The specific occasion for the completion of the drama was the marriage of the Austrian Emperor Leopold to Archduchess Claudia Felicitas in 1673.¹⁷ This marriage took place against the backdrop of a rising threat to the Austrian Empire from the east. In 1663, the year in which Lohenstein drafted the first version of this drama, Silesia was under attack

¹³ *Ibrahim Sultan*, Act IV, lines 29–31, Lohenstein 1953, 177.

¹⁴ Lohenstein's penchant for graphic violence and explicit sexuality made his works seem shocking to nineteenth-century readers, but the raw emotions of his "baroque maximalism" (Browning 1996, 272) might prove fertile ground for today's interest in melodrama and affect in literature. See Meyer-Kalkus 1986.

¹⁵ *Ibrahim Sultan*, Act II, line 75, Lohenstein 1953, 138. Ambre protests against the notion that her "pure crystal ... should be a vessel into which the lascivious stallion should spurt his filthy scum" (Chrystall ... rein ... Darein der geile Hengst den Schaum der Unzucht spritze). Asmuth notes that more than one critic has raised an eyebrow at Ambre's precocious "knowledge of sexual details" (1971, 41).

¹⁶ *Ibrahim Sultan*, Act III, line 507, Lohenstein 1953, 172.

¹⁷ Béhar 1988, 1, 67.

from Turkish armies and refugees from afflicted areas sought shelter in the city of Breslau.¹⁸ Within a decade of the drama's completion, Vienna would be besieged for the second time by the armies of the Ottoman Empire. As Lohenstein writes in his dedication, the play is about "the eclipse of an Ottoman moon" ("Verfinsterung eines Oßmannischen Mohnden") by the Austrian sun.¹⁹ In the prolog to the play, an allegory of the Bosphorus laments the corruption of the Turkish court and decides to marry the Danube as a way of declaring loyalty to the virtuous Austrian royal pair. Lohenstein's drama thus presents the Ottoman court as the negative counterpart to Austrian splendor, contrasting its sexual debauchery and moral turpitude to the marital fidelity and just rule of the Holy Roman Emperor and his new wife.

Here again, however, Lohenstein complicates the overt message of his political drama. As Jane O. Newman has argued, "Lohenstein's political analysis reveals more similarities than differences between the Turks and the Europeans at the time, especially as concerns the mechanics of power at the court."²⁰ *Ibrahim Sultan* also suggests a more nuanced appreciation of the virtues as well as the vices of Islamic politics. A typical martyr drama of the period would represent a virtuous Christian victim persecuted by infidels.²¹ Andreas Gryphius's *Catharina von Georgien* (1657), for instance, portrays the Christian queen of Georgia imprisoned by the Persians. The Shah presents her with an ultimatum: marry me or die! Catherine gladly chooses death by slow torture, scorning the pleasures of this world for the comfort of eternal salvation. Lohenstein's first drama follows a similar pattern, as the Muslim Soliman lusts after Ibrahim's Christian wife Isabelle, but Lohenstein seems more interested in the psychology of political power than in the glorification of religious martyrdom. *Ibrahim Sultan* removes questions of religious difference entirely, as the political crisis unfolds within an all-Muslim court. Thus the Islamic religion per se is not to blame, but rather the depravity of one bad ruler.²² Act II opens with the innocent Ambre praying fervently to Mohammed and promising to make a pilgrimage to Mecca if only she can be spared from being besmirched by the sultan's filthy desires. After her rape and suicide, Ibrahim is deposed from his position of authority on the grounds that he has violated both civic and religious law: "He who does not accept the Divan's laws is no longer a sultan, and indeed, no longer a Muslim" ("Wer

¹⁸ *Ib.*, 1, 49–50.

¹⁹ *Ibrahim Sultan*, Lohenstein 1953, 102.

²⁰ Newman 1995, 349. Gillespie also argues that Lohenstein's Turkish dramas serve "a double function": condemnation of an evil Orient that "also offered convenient foreign dress in which to parade the manners of one's own age." (1965, 29).

²¹ Szarota contrasts Lohenstein's secular tragedies to the religious dramas of his contemporary playwrights: 1967, 306–313, 329–340.

²² Newman, 1995, 349.

das Gesätz und Recht des Divans nicht nimmt an/ Der ist kein Sultan mehr/ ja auch kein Musulman").²³

Just as religion takes a back seat to politics in Lohenstein's drama in a way that differs from the work of his contemporaries, social class distinctions are less important than they will be in the bourgeois tragedies of the late eighteenth century. Ibrahim prefigures such characters as Samuel Richardson's Lovelace, Goethe's Faust, and Mozart's Don Giovanni, but his victim is not a young woman who embodies the virtues of her social class.²⁴ There are to be sure gradations of power within Ibrahim's court; to be chosen as a potential wife for the sultan would normally be a step up for the daughter of a mufti, if only this particular sultan were not so debased. But there is a vast gap between the intrigues and power struggles at court and the faceless mob or "Pöfel" (*Pöbel*) that seethes outside the palace walls. Lohenstein gives frequent reminders that a bad ruler threatens the stability of the state, but the suggestion that we find already in Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), "that the *Governments* of the World ... were made by *the Consent of the People*", would have been alien to the Silesian aristocrat.²⁵ Lohenstein's focus in *Ibrahim Sultan* is on personal corruption as a threat to political authority, and on what must be done to restore the proper exercise of power in the state. He highlights the wise council of court officials that tempers the sultan's tyranny. In doing so, he transposes the political dynamics of the Austrian Empire to the Ottoman court, for Lohenstein and other members of his social class sought to exert similar influence on royal authority. One might even argue that the condemnation of the corrupt Turkish ruler in *Ibrahim Sultan* by his top advisors served as a covert warning or even a veiled threat to the Austrian emperor not to abuse his power, even as it offered an overtly flattering contrast between the two courts.

Two questions that are of particular importance within the dynamics of the play would have resonated in European courts as well: can women occupy positions of political power? And are subordinates who carry out the commands of despotic rulers morally responsible for what they do? Whereas Ambre is an innocent victim who gets relatively few lines in the play, Ibrahim's mother Kioseme plays a much larger role. She tries to prevent Ibrahim from raping his brother's widow in the opening scene and is thrown into prison by her own son as a result. Much of the subsequent strategizing on the part of those who want to remove Ibrahim from power centers on their need to enlist Kioseme in the campaign against her son. She eventually agrees to join their cause, on the condition that Ibrahim be imprisoned rather than

²³ *Ibrahim Sultan*, Act V, lines 573–574, Lohenstein 1953, 208.

²⁴ On the eighteenth-century theme of "seduced innocence" see Petriconi 1953.

²⁵ Locke 1988, 336.

executed. Kiosem’s active role in Turkish politics reflects a situation that regularly confronted Lohenstein’s European contemporaries. The last male heir to the Silesian Piast dynasty died in 1675,²⁶ for instance, raising questions about the legitimacy about of female rule in central Europe of the sort that had already troubled Elizabeth’s reign in England in the previous century. Lohenstein’s dramas engage this issue by repeatedly portraying powerful women in positions of political authority. Here again his work differs sharply from eighteenth-century bourgeois norms, which equated female domesticity with virtue and any form of public life for women – be it on stage, in politics, or as a prostitute – with aristocratic vice.²⁷ For Lohenstein, female rule may be problematic, but it is not out of the question; what ultimately matters is not a ruler’s sex, but his or her character and ability. In fact, one might argue that the female figures in Lohenstein’s oeuvre best exemplify the virtues required to intervene in conflicts at court. Characters such as Cleopatra and Sophonisbe use their physical charms to further their political goals. Their strength of character is exemplified by their ability to control their emotions, subordinating personal desires to political strategy.

The question of moral responsibility for carrying out immoral commands in *Ibrahim Sultan* centers on the character of Achmet, who aids and abets the sultan’s rape of Ambre. When confronted in the final act, Achmet is defiant:

was ist des Achmets groß Verbrechen? [...]
Ich leugn ihr Freunde nicht:
Daß ich des Mufti Kind gewaltsam weg hieß holen.
Doch! wen entschuldigt nicht? Der Sultan hats befohlen.
Steht Fürstlichen Befehl zu weigern/ Knechten frey?
Zu grübeln: Ob sein Thun recht/ oder unrecht sey.²⁸

What is Achmed’s great crime? My friends, I don’t deny that I had the mufti’s child taken by force. But who would not excuse [what I did]?
The Sultan commanded it. Is it up to subordinates to resist a royal order?
To worry about whether or not the deed is just?.

Modern German history is notorious for its stories of those who argued that they were “just following orders” while perpetrating crimes against humanity, but the question of where obedience to authority ends and individual responsibility begins is not unique to Nazi Germany. Although Achmet is summarily executed by unsympathetic enemies of the sultan, his defense of

²⁶ Spellerberg 19884, 648. See Newman 1995 on Kiosem’s important role in *Ibrahim Sultan*.

²⁷ Landes 1988.

²⁸ *Ibrahim Sultan*, Act V, lines 379, 386–390, Lohenstein 1953, 203.

his actions raises a question that would have resonated just as much in Lohenstein’s society as it did in the realm of the Oriental court.²⁹

Germans, Romans, and “Turks” in Lohenstein’s *Arminius*

Lohenstein spent the final decade of his life working on the novel *Großmüthiger Feldherr Arminius oder Herrmann* (Magnanimous General Arminius or Herrmann, 1689/90). He had completed all but the final chapter of the novel when he died in 1683; his brother and a pastor from Leipzig completed the work and published it a few years later.³⁰ The novel is huge, stretching to over 3,000 double-columned pages. In a nutshell, it tells the story of the Germanic struggle against the ancient Romans, beginning with the victory of Herrmann or Arminius over the Roman general Varus in 9 CE.³¹ As is typical for the baroque genre of the heroic or courtly novel, the convoluted plot features romance as well as war among the ruling elite, with episodes sprawling across the ancient world from Europe to the Middle East, and on to northern Africa, India, and China.³² Action scenes alternate with seemingly endless discussions in which characters digress with encyclopedic thoroughness on any topic that comes to mind. What to the modern reader may seem superfluous nevertheless serves a purpose, for Lohenstein’s *Arminius* is an encyclopedic “mirror of princes” (*Fürstenspiegel*) set in the form of dialog and debate. For this reason the novel that seems so alien to modern taste made a powerful impression on its contemporary readers,³³ although the percentage of those in Lohenstein’s society with the literacy and leisure to engage with his enormous work was quite small. Only in the course of the eighteenth century, as the aesthetics of genius began to replace the rhetorical flourishes and ostentatious erudition of the baroque novel, did Lohenstein’s *Arminius* fall into disfavor. Ironically, the author who had devoted himself to the most “German” of themes, Herrmann’s victory over the Romans, was denounced as the practitioner of a style at odds with the German national character.

²⁹ In the context of his discussion of Lohenstein’s *Cleopatra*, Spellerberg (1984, 655) notes that the play engages questions raised by Machiavelli’s radical ideas: “ob überhaupt und in welchem Maße politisches Handeln gegenüber den Normen einer religiös fundierten Ethik Autonomie und Eigenwertigkeit beanspruchen könne” (if at all and to what extent political actions can claim autonomy and independence over the norms of a religiously based ethics). *Ibrahim Sultan* transposes the same sort of question into a fictional Turkish court.

³⁰ For a brief overview of the novel’s composition and content, see Asmuth 1971, 62–68.

³¹ The more common spelling of the name in German today is Hermann, but I will follow Lohenstein’s practice and refer to him as Herrmann. Lohenstein’s primary source was Tacitus’s *Annals*.

³² Alewyn (1963) offers a useful overview of the two major forms of the baroque novel, the picaresque and the heroic or courtly novel.

³³ Borgstedt 2008, 155.

Arminius is nevertheless an important document of what might be termed baroque nationalism and an indirect reflection of Lohenstein's image of the Turk. As Simon Schama observes, the beginnings of German nationalist sentiment can be traced back to the fifteenth-century rediscovery of Tacitus' *Germania*.³⁴ During the early modern period, German humanists envisioned their Germanic forebears as noble savages, set against the decadence of ancient Rome and modern Italy. In the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Arminius would become one of Germany's national heroes in such works as Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's patriotic drama, *Hermanns Schlacht* (1769) and Heinrich von Kleist's *Die Hermannsschlacht* (1808), a violent drama of anti-Napoleonic nationalism. In 1875 the Germanic hero was immortalized in a monumental statue that still looms above the presumed ancient battlefield in the Teutoburg Forest outside the town of Detmold. Such dramas and monuments contributed to what George Mosse terms the "nationalization of the masses" as Germany moved toward political unification,³⁵ but in the seventeenth century, the unified nation-state of modern Germany lay far in the future.

What, then, did it mean to write of idealized Germanic heroes at that time? As suggested earlier, the erudite courtiers engaged in extensive debates about an encyclopedic range of topics in Lohenstein's *Arminius* are far removed from the robust primitives depicted in Tacitus's *Germania*. But how exactly are we to understand the relation of these fictional figures to their contemporary political context? In an early study of Lohenstein's *Arminius*, Elida Maria Szarota argued that the novel is another tribute to the Austrian Emperor Leopold as the modern incarnation of the ancient hero.³⁶ Thomas Borgstedt cautions against a one-to-one identification of Leopold with Herrmann, however, suggesting that the novel might better be understood as the representation of an idealized Germanic type rather than the encoded glorification of a particular regime.³⁷ The negative counterpart to the virtuous Germans in *Arminius* are the decadent Romans, but in keeping with the multivalence of the novel, the ancient Romans can also be understood as unflattering portraits of Lohenstein's contemporary French and also the Ottoman Turks.³⁸

³⁴ Schama 1995, 75–134. See also Krebs 2011.

³⁵ Mosse 1975.

³⁶ Szarota 1970..

³⁷ Borgstedt (1992) stresses Lohenstein's position as a leading representative of Protestant Breslau and sees his praise of Leopold more as strategic *Realpolitik* than heartfelt enthusiasm.

³⁸ Szarota (1970, 91) sees beneath the surface depiction of the Romans in *Arminius* evidence of Lohenstein's passionate loathing of Louis XIV's France and his fear of the Ottoman Turks.

As an example of how Lohenstein created an indirect image of modern Turkey in the guise of ancient Rome, I will focus on an episode in the fourth book of the novel's first half. Approximately the last third of this book relates Herrmann's brother Flavius's adventures in Rome. Amidst descriptions of battles and military campaigns that go on for hundreds of pages, this episode can be read as a semi-independent novella reminiscent of Boccaccio in terms of its narrative setting and its fast-paced plot with a series of unexpected twists and turns.³⁹ Like Boccaccio, Lohenstein sets the narrative in a frame: Flavius tells his story to a group of aristocrats gathered at the German fortress of *Deutschburg* shortly after Herrmann's victory over Varus. The exciting tale has all the ingredients of a potboiler, complete with court intrigue, jealousy, battles, shipwrecks, narrow escapes, and of course, true love.

In Rome, the German Flavius is a close companion of Caesar Augustus's two grandchildren, Lucius and Cajus. At the age of only thirteen, Lucius develops "a strong tendency toward lasciviousness" ("eine hefftige Neigung der Geilheit") (451)⁴⁰ that is indulged and encouraged by the debauched pseudo-philosopher Aristippus, who, like his older Greek namesake, advocates a life of sensual pleasure. Aristippus will eventually be arrested and executed for staging a mass orgy for Roman adolescents, but not before he has introduced Lucius and Cajus to the pleasures of the seraglio and awakened in Lucius a taste for black women. Thus when the African King Juba sends his sixteen-year-old daughter Dido to Rome, Lucius is inflamed with lust. But Dido falls in love with Flavius, much to Lucius's dismay. Matters come to a head in a flurry of violent action: Lucius stabs his rival in a fit of jealous rage, Dido wrenches the dagger from Flavius's wound and plunges it into Lucius, and yet another character stabs Dido with the same knife. When the authorities arrive, they find the hot-headed young lovers stretched out in a pool of blood, badly wounded, but still alive.

Flavius recovers with the aid of a British slave-doctor and sails for Africa, where he plans to rendezvous with his beloved Dido, but his journey is delayed by a shipwreck. Dido hears mistaken reports of his death and, in an effort to escape Lucius – also recovered from his wounds and as lascivious as ever – flees Rome and joins a religious cult dedicated to the goddess Diana. When she is finally reunited with Flavius (Lucius having fallen to his death

³⁹ Borgstedt (1992, 223) calls this episode "eine der erzählerisch reizvollsten Geschichten des Arminiusromans" (one of the most charmingly narrated stories of the *Arminius* novel). Szarota (1970, 217–222) summarizes the story in some detail and Borgstedt also devotes several pages to the episode (1992, 223–231).

⁴⁰ As there is at present no modern edition of *Arminius* in print, I will quote from the online edition with page numbers included parenthetically in the text: <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Lohenstein,+Daniel+Casper+von/Roman/Gro%C3%9Fm%C3%BCtigger+Feldherr+Arminius>

while trying to storm the walls of her convent) they are unable to marry because she has taken a vow of chastity. Although Flavius insists that her vow was taken under duress and thus invalid, religious fanatics spirit Dido away to a secret location where she is forced to have ritual sex with the high priest to further bind her to the pernicious sect. When confronted by Flavius, the priest insists that he was following Diana's will, not his personal desires, that virginity is more a state of mind than a physical fact, and that in any case, he didn't enjoy the act. Flavius is not convinced by the specious arguments, and, in one of the more painful scenes of world literature, forces the priest to cut off his own penis. Flavius then writes a letter to Dido's parents saying that marriage to the deflowered woman is now out of the question. He returns to Rome, but when news of Herrmann's victory over Varus sparks anti-German riots, Flavius is forced to flee to an island where none other than Dido makes a surprise landfall, still in love with him but consigned to a life of loneliness. She gives him one of her ships in a final generous gesture and Flavius returns to his brother in Germany. Herrmann and the others thank Flavius for his tale, and the chapter comes to an end.

On the surface, Flavius's story underscores the theme of Germanic virtue versus Roman decadence that runs throughout the entire novel, but the work's multifaceted allegorical structure also allows us to substitute modern Turks for ancient Romans (who also resemble corrupt French courtiers). Aristippus looks and acts very much like the sultan Ibrahim from Lohenstein's late drama. He seems respectable enough by day, but the boys find him transformed into something quite different when they meet him in the seraglio: his bald head is covered by a toupee, his beard combed and perfumed, arms and fingers loaded with bracelets and rings, and he is wearing lipstick, rouge, and nail polish. In a room decorated "with the most obscene pictures" ("mit den geilsten Bildern"), Flavius recalls that "he plied us with the strongest drinks, bathed us in perfumed waters, anointed us with Syrian oils, and lavished upon us the entire inventory of Asiatic opulence" ("erqvickte er uns mit denen kräftigsten Labsaln. Er badete uns mit wohlriechenden Wassern/ salbete uns mit Syrischen Balsamen/ und verschwendete allen Vorrath des üppigen Asiens") (454). When Flavius is about to enter the "house of lust and pleasure" (*Lusthaus*) a second time, however, an old man restrains him. He is Sotion, a German who knew Flavius' father. He steers Flavius back onto the path of virtue and initiates the police raid that lands Aristippus in jail and soon sinks him to the bottom of the Tiber river with a rock tied to his neck.

As in Lohenstein's two "Turkish tragedies," a closer look at the Flavius episode in *Arminius* suggests that distinctions between Germans and Romans – and by implication, between Germans and Turks, or Europeans and Asians

– is not nearly as absolute as it seems at first glance. Aristippus is Greek, not Roman, and although his gospel of lust has a seductive appeal to Lucius, Cajus, and many other Roman youths, the Roman authorities strongly disapprove of his corrupting influence, just as the upright members of the Turkish court depose Sultan Ibrahim. In both cases, Lohenstein distinguishes between evil individuals and the foreign society as a whole. The distinction between Flavius and the Romans is also not as clear-cut as it might seem. Although he is German, Flavius is more of an undercover agent than an obviously alien presence in Rome. As Flavius explains to his listeners at the *Deutschburg*, he was so close to Lucius and Cajus that he was often able to dissuade them from their worst inclinations more effectively than Caesar, whereupon a minor character offers an important observation: “It is true,” said Duke Arpus. “At high courts you always have to be wearing a mask and do things cheerfully that you find most repellent.” (“Es ist wahr/ sagte Hertzog Arpus; Man muß an grossen Höffen allezeit verummte Antlitzer haben/ und das freudig mit machen/ dafür man die gröste Abscheu hat”) (451). Cleopatra will voice similar sentiments in Lohenstein’s drama of that name. In the fourth act she urges her son Caesarion to disguise himself as an African to escape the Roman invaders, silencing his concerns with a reminder of the need for dissemblance: “Why are you worried, my son? The entire world is in disguise now, and virtue cannot proceed without a mask if it is not to run aground” (“Was ficht/ mein Sohn/ dich an? Die gantze Welt geht itzt verummmt; und Tugend kan Nicht ohne Larve gehn/ sol sie nicht Schifbruch leiden”).⁴¹ Caesarion dons the disguise and no one contradicts his mother or Duke Arpus about the need for dissimulation at court. Flavius goes on to describe the constant role-playing that goes on in the elaborate mythological pageants and allegorical tableaux of ancient Rome, a kind of entertainment that would have been familiar to Lohenstein and his European contemporaries.

We are a long way from Rousseau’s confessional autobiography or the reckless honesty of Goethe’s *Werther*; in pre-revolutionary courtly culture, appearance matters more than essence, strategic role-playing more than heartfelt, soul-bearing confession.⁴² At bottom, Flavius is German, as he is reminded when his brother’s victory over the Romans suddenly places his life in danger, but he has a tendency to slip so deeply into character that he can pass for Roman: “Thus I gladly came [back to] Rome, and everyone took me for a Roman, not a German.” (“Ich kam derogestalt vergnügt nach Rom/ und ward allenthalben nunmehr nicht so wohl für einen Deutschen/ als für einen

⁴¹ *Cleopatra*, Act IV, lines 343–345, Lohenstein 1957, 115..

⁴² See Burger 1963; Elias 1983; and Watanabe-O’Kelly 2007, 621–651. As Asmuth (1971, 1) notes, German baroque writers left little or nothing autobiographical.

Römer gehalten") (495). Even after he flees Rome, he continues to go by the name of Flavius, even though, as he mentions in passing, his real name is Ernst (469).

The ambivalence haunting the seemingly obvious distinction between German and Roman/Turk emerges most subtly in the story of Flavius' interracial romance with the African Dido. The theme is introduced when Lucius returns from his second night in Aristippus's den of iniquity. We recall that Flavius had been restrained from participating by his father's friend, Sotion, so he has to listen to the story of Lucius's exploits the following day. On the first evening in the *Lusthaus*, Aristippus had entertained the boys with beautiful women and their naked servants, but this time was even better, says Lucius, "because he had provided young Moorish boys and girls whose fiery erotic charms made the graces of white girls seem cold as ice" ("Denn er hätte sie mit eitel jungen Mohren und Mohrinnen bedienet/ gegen welcher feurigem Liebes-Reitze des weissen Frauenzimmers Anmuth nur für Schnee zu achten wäre") (457). Flavius scoffs at the notion that a raven could be prettier than a swan, but Lucius counters with a discourse on cultural relativity: an African Venus would be black, just as a Greek one would be white, he observes, and Flavius should not confuse German prejudice with universal truth. "But why shouldn't beauty and blackness coexist? Do you think that because your Germans are so white, just as you are, that Moors are equally ugly to everyone?" ("Warumb aber solte nicht auch Schönheit und Schwärtze bey einander stehen können? Meynest du/ weil deine Deutschen/ wie auch du/ so weiß sind/ daß die Mohren in allen Augen so heßlich seyn?") (457–458). Flavius concedes the point, but insists that he would never be interested in a black woman. Dido proves him wrong. Flavius gradually realizes that she is attracted to him, not Lucius, and before long we find him ready to ask for her hand in marriage.

Why does Lohenstein introduce the story of Flavius' love for Dido, and how does the episode fit into the larger pattern of cultural and racial difference in his works? At first it would seem that Lucius's attraction to black women is a sign of Roman decadence – and apparently not only black *women*, as Aristippus entertains the Romans youths with Moorish boys as well as girls. Interracial sex takes its place with *Knabenlust* (pederasty), cross-dressing, and incest as a symptom of "Oriental perversion". Flavius's initial defense of white supremacy reflects opinions expressed elsewhere in *Arminius*. "It is true," proclaims the Armenian King Erato in book six of part one, "white is the most perfect color, and thus the Germans are the most beautiful of all peoples" ("Es ist wahr [...] die weisse ist die vollko[mm]enste unter den Farben/ und daher die Deutschen auch die schönsten unter alle[n] Völckern") (761). We might therefore expect that Flavius's growing interest in Dido is a

sign of his moral turpitude, but this is clearly not the case: she loves him from the start, actively resists other potential lovers, and even helps Flavius escape after he has cruelly rejected the raped woman. When they meet for the last time, Dido approaches Flavius with a concern for his well-being that makes him ashamed for what he has done: "I blushed at the kindness of the woman whom I felt that I had insulted with my disdain" ("Ich ward schamroth über derselben Freundigkeit/ die ich durch meine Verschmähung beleidigt zu haben vermeinte") (495).

One could argue that Lucius is right after all, that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and that Flavius and the others are simply wrong in their prejudice against blacks. Before turning Lohenstein into an anachronistic proponent of modern multiculturalism, however, it is worth noting that Dido's beauty is carefully qualified: "She was, to be sure, black, as people from Numidia are, but her eyes sparkled with grace and her mouth laughed with friendliness. Her lips did not protrude in a Moorish way, but were in perfect proportion, just like the rest of her body" ("Sie war zwar ihrer Numidischen Landes-Art nach schwarz; aber die Anmuth leuchtete ihr aus den Augen/ die Freundigkeit lachte auff ihrem Munde; dessen Lippen nicht nach Morischer Art auffgeworffen/ sondern wie alle andere Glieder ihr rechtes Maaß und ihre vollkommene Eintheilung hatten") (465). Dido's skin may be black, but her features are white, just as the eponymous hero of Aphra Behn's exactly contemporary *Oroonoko* (1688) has skin of "perfect ebony, or polished jet" and yet a nose that was "Roman, instead of African" and a mouth that was "far from those great turned lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes."⁴³ In both cases it seems likely that these characterizations reflect the prejudices of the authors and their early modern audiences. Behn's noble African slave has the education and facial features of his European masters, just as Lohenstein's Dido looks just European enough to render her attractiveness to the Germanic hero plausible and palatable to the readers of *Arminius*.

The theme of racial difference in Lohenstein's *Arminius* also enables an indirect comment on imperial politics, both in ancient Rome and in the Holy Roman Empire. Lohenstein's choice of the name Dido for his African princess is particularly important in this regard. Her namesake is of course the African queen whom Aeneas must flee, lest he be distracted from his destiny as the founder of Rome. In the fifth act of Lohenstein's *Sophonisbe*, the ghost of Dido appears in a dream to the sleeping heroine and foresees not only the immediate triumph of Rome over Carthage, but also the eventual fall of Rome to the Germanic peoples: "The flood of Goths and the swarm of

⁴³ Behn 1994, 12.

Wends will rip these plundered goods from Roman hands” (“Der Gothen Sündflutt und der Schwarm der Wenden/ Wird Rom dis Raubgutt reissen aus den Händen”).⁴⁴ Dido goes on to prophesize future world dominance for the Holy Roman Empire over all of Europe, the New World, and especially the Turks:

Die verdamten Araber/ Gottes Haß/ die Pest der Erden/
Werden unsre beyde Reiche überschwemmend nehmen ein.
Ja der Saracenen Strom wird gehemmt [...]
Türcke/ Mohr und Mohnd erbleichet [...]⁴⁵

Our two realms [the Austrian and Spanish Hapsburgs] will engulf the damned Arabs, God’s hatred, the pestilence of the earth. Yes, the Saracen stream will be stopped up [...] Turk and Moor and moon will pale [...]

Drawing on the eschatological tradition of the prophet Daniel, Lohenstein sees the ancient triumph of the Roman Empire as a prefiguration of the even greater grandeur of the Holy Roman Empire.

Here again we find a direct parallel to a contemporary British work, Henry Purcell’s opera, *Dido and Aeneas* (1689), whose retelling of Virgil’s tale has been linked to the expanding British Empire of the seventeenth century and its participation in the African slave trade.⁴⁶ Yet Lohenstein tempers the triumphalism of early modern imperialism by lending a voice to those on the outskirts of empire. As Jane O. Newman has noted, it is more than a little ironic to place a paean to imperial power in the mouth of one of its most famous victims.⁴⁷ She points to an alternative tradition to Virgil that sees Dido not as a mere impediment to Roman destiny, but as a strong indigenous leader, and suggests that her presence in Lohenstein’s drama introduces a subversive undercurrent to his overt praise of the Roman Empire.⁴⁸ The character named Dido in *Arminius* plays a similar role: she is sent as a sixteen-year-old by her father from the colonial periphery to Rome, “to learn Roman customs and to win favor with the ruling family” (“um die Römischen Sitten zu fassen/und bey dem Käyserlichen Hause sich beliebt zu Machen”) (465). As it turns out, however, the African “barbarian” represents the civilized alternative to Lucius’s Roman decadence.

⁴⁴ *Sophonisbe*, Act V, lines 145–146, Lohenstein 1957, 337.

⁴⁵ *Sophonisbe*, Act V, lines 149–151, 155, Lohenstein 1957, 337.

⁴⁶ Roach 1996, 42–47.

⁴⁷ Newman 2000, 59.

⁴⁸ Newman 2000, 63–66. See also Breger 2004, 271: “Die Apologie imperialer Politik gewinnt ihre Konturen bei Lohenstein also nur als gebrochene” (the apology for imperial politics appears in Lohenstein only in fractured form).

Flavius’s tale of his youthful adventures thus complicates the seemingly clear-cut distinction between Germans and Romans in antiquity, and, by implication, between the Holy Roman and Ottoman empires. If read as a patriotic allegory, Herrmann “is” Leopold and the idealized Germanic peoples of the past are a flattering portrait of their latter-day descendants. But Flavius – or Ernst – is a more complex character than his brother: he is German, but a German who can pass for Roman and who even allies himself for parts of Book II with the Roman cause before returning in the end to his native people.⁴⁹ Dido also undermines oppositions between the colonial periphery and the imperial center, between barbarism and civilization, black and white.

The complications that Lohenstein introduces into his literary texts reflect the complexities of his delicate political position as an advocate for the interests of the semi-independent, primarily Protestant city of Breslau, while at the same time professing his loyalty to Leopold and the Holy Roman Empire. Not coincidentally, Lohenstein’s most famous tragedy, *Sophonisbe*, focuses not on the conflict between Rome and Numidia per se, but on tensions between Numidians who collaborate with Rome and those who resist: the African queen marries Syphax, a Numidian partisan or “freedom fighter” against Rome, but switches loyalty for debatable reasons to Masinissa, a Nubian who fights for the Romans against his own people. In the end, Masinissa is ill-rewarded by his imperial overlords, as the Roman general Scipio orders him to abandon his Nubian bride. Masinissa is given only two choices: he must either allow Sophonisbe to be taken to Rome and put on public display as a trophy of imperial triumph, or he can give her poison so that she can commit suicide in her native land. In the end, Sophonisbe and her three children take the poison, and Masinissa is placed in command of Carthage as the representative of Rome, but it is a diplomatic triumph that has come at a terrible personal price.

The tension between local loyalty to Breslau and subservience to the Holy Roman Empire also colors Lohenstein’s literary representations of the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, the Turks are stylized into the embodiment of evil, either directly, in the “Turkish tragedies,” or indirectly, in the

⁴⁹ In keeping with her interpretation of *Arminius* as an allegorical glorification of Leopold and the Holy Roman Empire, Szarota (1970) is quite critical in her assessment of Flavius, whom she views as an unreliable and selfish individual (326) whose personal flaws symbolize the character type of the insubordinate prince (330). Borgstedt finds her assessment too harsh, as he notes that Flavius shows signs of genuine remorse for Dido’s sorry plight (1992, 227). In a more recent article, Borgstedt notes the early modern tradition that viewed Arminius as a Protestant rebel against Rome, and argues that Lohenstein’s novel was actually a veiled threat to the Viennese Counter-Reformation (2008, 159).

depiction of Nero's Rome in *Epicharis* and *Agrippina*, and in the decadent Romans of *Arminius*. On the other hand, Lohenstein's literary texts complicate distinctions between Europeans and Turks in multiple ways: Turkish courtiers find a way to remove the despotic sultan Ibrahim from power, suggesting that the deranged individual does not represent their society as a whole; although Nero remains in power at the end of *Epicharis*, the play focuses on the conflict between tyranny and insurrection at an imperial court, again adding nuance to the image of an evil empire. Lohenstein also shows a repeated interest in figures who move between two worlds: the Christian Ibrahim is a loyal servant of the Turkish court and erstwhile friend of the sultan in *Ibrahim Bassa*; *Sophonisbe* features Nubian princes torn between resistance to and collaboration with Rome; Flavius fluctuates between loyalty to his German brother and alliances with his Roman friends; the black and beautiful Dido teaches Roman and German alike a lesson in courage, forgiveness, and love. By voicing his praise of Austrian glory from the peripheral perspective of Breslau, Lohenstein adds a subversive undercurrent to literary works that turn representations of Germans and their Turkish 'others' into images of Turks as other Germans.

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