

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE ORIENTAL THEME IN THE WORK OF BYRON AND THOMAS MORE

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ABSTRACT:

In the early English Romantic literature, oriental themes began to flourish in the early XVIII century after the translation of the Arabian tales One Thousand and One Nights. The mysterious events, scenes, and character of the protagonists in these tales inspired many British writers to create works in a new genre called Oriental Tales, such as Byron and Thomas More. So this article is devoted to research the oriental features in the works of Byron and Thomas More.

KEY WORDS: Lake School, Romanticism, Romantic literature, fragment, Orientalism, oriental tales, literary genres, rhyme.

INTRODUCTION:

In the eighteenth century, as a continuation of the Romantic Movement initiated by the poets of the Lake School in England, Coleridge and Wordsworth, it became a tradition in the next century to depict supernatural plots, unusual events and dissimilar heroes in oriental romantic works. The East was seen in their imagination as a land of wonders. The Romantics described luxurious castles, wonderful landscapes, eastern heroes, Islamic tradition and customs as their main theme. The most prominent writer among them was Lord Byron. He raised the issue of the value of Islamic principles in his famous oriental poem *The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (1813). This work brought the author both critical and financial success. In 1810-1811 Byron intended to write this poem during a travel with his friend John Cam Hobhouse. During a travel to Athens, he

informed about a woman who was thrown into the sea in a sack for adultery, in violation of Muslim law. Therefore Byron described the Giaour as irreligious and unfaithful person. The poem is titled *A Fragment of a Turkish Tale*, and it was Byron's only prose poem. The series of events in the poem were narrated by the three people. Christian and Muslim traditions can be compared through the images of love, death and the afterlife in the poem. The poem *The Giaour*, written during Byron's rise to fame, was republished, bringing further success to the author. Such a high mood prompted the poet to write more Turkish tales and he published series of epics - *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), and *Lara* (1814) from the Turkish tales. His epics were written under the influence of Nizami's "*Layli and Majnun*" and Firdavsi's "*Yusuf and Zulayha*".

These epics, written by Byron between 1813 and 1814, were well received by readers, and within six months *The Giaour* was reprinted seven times. Within a month the poem *The Bride of Abydos* was sold in six thousand copies. The book *The Corsair* was sold ten thousand copies on the same day as it was published. Six thousand copies of the epic *Lara* were sold in five days. These facts not only prove Byron's success, but also people's respect and interest in the Eastern world of the time. Byron did not write these works with as much contemplation as his contemporaries. As literary critics have pointed out, his epics are not as perfect as Southey's. Byron also admitted that he did not consider himself a professional writer at all. But none of his contemporaries, even during their voyage to

the East, could perceive the romantic atmosphere and emotions as intelligently as Byron. And the poet wrote a series of his works based on the events he had read and imagined in Oriental literature. The author was aware that although his works were not of high quality, they were highly valued. He placed his imaginary protagonist in a oriental world that well-studied by himself and he wrote a series of stories one after another. It is known that Byron was inspired by the epics *One Thousand and One Nights* and *Vathek*, but there was no place in his poetry for the very supernatural plots written in them. In his point of view, the East was not only the land of wizards and fairies where incredible magic would take place, but also the land of tyrannical kings, bandits and invaders. As he read the works of his contemporaries, he tried to take a more realistic approach to the subject of the East, gathering information. He wrote his poems based on his personal observations and experiences in Albania, Greece and some Asian countries, which were colonies of the Ottoman Empire. One of the important aspects of Byron's work is that his protagonists are unlike any others. They act with you, as if they are along with the events. They reflect both historical and individual reality. For example *Giaour*, *Selim* in *The Bride of Abydos*, in *Lara* and *The Corsair's* heroes *Lara* and *Conrad* were described in reality as rebel and sometimes as traitor. But it does not mean you should consider them as the antagonists. Only through a deeper study of them will it be possible to determine the identities of the heroes. Perhaps his heroes stand out from others with their peculiar and oriental qualities. E. H. Coleridge, editor of Byron's works, wrote: "Byron's metrical "Tales" come before us in the guise of light reading, and may be "easily criticized" as melodramatic - the heroines conventional puppets, the heroes reduplicated reflections of the author's personality, the Oriental

"properties" loosely arranged, and somewhat stage-worn. A thorough and sympathetic study of these once extravagantly lauded and now belittled poems will not, perhaps, reverse the deliberate judgment of later generations, but it will display them for what, they are, bold and rapid and yet exact presentations of the "gorgeous East," vivid and fresh from the hand of the great artist who conceived them out of the abundance of memory and observation...".

One of the factors that made Byron famous was that he was clever enough to connect his intellectual roots with the East. According to tradition, he wrote introductory passages and references, using the information and sources he had collected in order to give a more realistic spirit. But he was able to describe the East as he saw it in his imagination, without much commentary like Robert Southey's. At a time when the demand for performances among the people was high, Byron won the attention of the public with his epic *Turkish Tales*.

It is well known that the literary environment that surrounds the creator also plays a special role in his great success. Byron also had like-minded contemporaries who shared a variety of creative issues and debated for a long time. However, his best friend and colleague, Thomas More, suffered from some of the poet's character. Because they were constantly discussing together the ideas of the work they were writing, taking each other's advice and starting a new work. More began writing another work glorifying the theme of the East in September 1811. Until he had completed and published the work, preferred to keep it a secret. But even though Byron was aware that his friend More was working on an oriental epic, he refrained from words that inspired him. The East was the main theme of the poetry of that period, and the two poets had shared their views on this subject many times. But More was astonished to hear that Byron

had also begun to write on the subject he had written. More was disappointed after seeing Byron rejoicing in the endless applause. Byron's epic *The Bride of Abydos*, which was a huge success, was actually almost identical to the idea of the poem More intended to publish. Such injustice offended him severely. He wrote a letter to Mary Dalby to express his grief: "Lord Byron's last poem did give me (I am sorry to tell you) a deep wound in a very vital part - my story; and it is singular enough, for he could not know anything about it".

Given the public's interest in the East, perhaps Thomas More's poems in the new spirit would have caused much controversy. Contemporary poets also followed him and a number of oriental works were completed. The poet, who experienced such thoughts, wrote: "... I feel rather downhearted about it. Never was anything more unlucky for me than Byron's invasion of this region, which when I entered it, was as yet untrodden, and whose chief charm consisted in the gloss and novelty of its features; but it will now be over-run with clumsy adventurers, and when I make my appearance, instead of being a leader as I looked to be, I must dwindle into a humble follower - a Byronian. This is disheartening, and I sometimes doubt whether I shall publish it at all; though at the same time, If I may trust in my own judgment, I think I never wrote so well before".

At a time when Byron's oriental epics were gaining public attention, Thomas More's poem *Lalla Rookh* was published in 1817 and became deeply ingrained in the hearts of European book lovers. The events in the poem take place in the eastern countries, which are a mysterious world. The protagonist Aurangzeb kept his promise and sent his daughter Lalla Rookh from Delhi to Kashmir for marrying future son-in-law, who son of the king of Bukhara. One of the companions sent by Aurangzeb to protect his daughter on the way

is the young poet Feramorz who does not bore Lalla Rookh with his various tales. But when she came and saw the Bactrian prince, she fainted cause of happiness.

The poem is divided into four parts depending on the tales of the royal singer Feramorz: *The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan*, *Paradise and the Peri*, *The Fire Worshippers*, *The Light of the Haram*. The best of them, *Paradise and the Peri*, is based on Persian mythology, about fairies descended from angels who radiate goodness to the Earth. Lalla Rookh continues the scientific tradition of Southey's oriental epics and rejects Byron's style altogether. Thomas More refers to completely unfamiliar glamorous scenes and colorful illustrated episodes in the play. The poet writes based on information about the countries of the East that he has read in various books. He summarizes the idea of his poems from literature unknown to many readers.

In the eighteenth century, the British became increasingly interested in exploring the East. Orientalism has become a cultural phenomenon, and has had a unique impact on architecture, gardening, art and literature. A number of works appeared in the literature, which created a new atmosphere and mood for the writers that incorporated oriental features. The approach to the East in this way was a clear expression of the transition from neo classicism to romanticism. And in plays, the inevitability of punishment for the sins of mankind was emphasized, drawing attention to the evils of that time. But in the second half of the XVIII century the focus of the artists was mainly on the exoticism and unusualness of the East. So that new methods, ornaments and images were needed to give the poetry an oriental tone that previous poets had not used. Interest in phantom and melodrama has grown on the stage, and dramas depicting rich costumes and luxurious scenes have appeared.

The greatest contribution of the East to English literature was that it diverted the creative mind from the old way of thinking and gave it a completely new worldview. In the eighteenth century, after the British philologist Sir William Jones (1746-1794) began a serious scientific study of the East, the writers imagined a realistic view of the East. As a result, they refused to write some novels and short stories. Imaginary sultans and demons were replaced by real historical figures. Romantic poets Byron and Thomas More were still writing oriental poems, but there was a growing public demand for real life works such as Thomas Hope's *Anastatius* (1819) and *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* (1824).

It should be noted that the life of another nation and people, the cultural exchange through the study of its way of life and traditions, these changes are a new idea in the minds of the literary community, as well as in many other areas and it is natural to arouse thoughts. Europe was more positive about the artistic and cultural styles of the East than the influence of the Latins and Greeks on the West. The buds of the elements of oriental literature, which had already begun to sprout in the minds and correspondences of the Westerners, captivated the hearts of the Europeans. In this way, the Eastern elements helped to resume the European movement that had begun earlier in a new way. British passion for the East sparked a cultural and literary movement called "Romanticism". The passion for the East was evident mainly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first translation of Arabic fairy tales *One Thousand and One Nights* into English appeared in 1706-1707. In 1824, with the publication of James Morier's short story *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan*, reader's interest in exploring the East increased.

Christopher Marlowe, a well-known English poet, translator and playwright from

the Elizabethan era, was famous for his dramatic works. Marlowe, who was born in 1564, had a great influence on his contemporary William Shakespeare. Christopher Marlowe's first play *Tamburlaine the Great* that about our great ancestor Amir Temur in 1587 staged in London theaters. In which the protagonist rises the common pastor to the commander who has conquered half of the world. Great Temur with his invincible character gives to the work an oriental spirit. The play was a great success for the author and consistently ended the second chapter of the drama. The two-chapter *Tamburlaine the Great* was published in 1590. Due to the mysterious untimely death of Marlowe in 1593, all his other works were published after his death. In the tragedy *Tamburlaine the Great*, the Scythian herdsman *Tamburlaine* attains high standing with her unique ability. He defined justice and honesty as the basic criteria of government, and mercilessly killed many of his enemies. After conquering a number of Eastern countries, the glorious Timur surrendered the Turkish kagan Sultan Bayazid. *Tamburlaine* put his captive into the cage and tormented him. In the work, the great *Tamburlaine* bowed before the beauty of the Egyptian princess *Zenocrat* and married her. But in the second chapter of the tragedy, *Zenocrat* died and *Tamburlaine* was completely depressed. His love had left him, besides cruelty nothing stayed in his heart.

Marlowe wrote about tartars in *Tamburlaine the Great* as follows:

Then having passed Armenian deserts now,
And pitched our tents under the Georgian hills,
Whose tops are covered with Tartarian thieves,
That lie in ambush, waiting for a prey,
What should we do but bid them battle
straight, And rid the world of those detested
troops?

The passage shows that, apart from the author, the English attitude towards the Tartarus nation at the time was not positive.

Before the beginning of the Romantic period, it is clear that the oriental materials appear with scattered expressions, last qualities, and even poems that do not have the character of Orientalism. The structure of the eastern poems created during that period is not unusual. Devices of English poetry are created on the basis of usual lines of non-Oriental origin: rhyme bytes, eight-level poems, white poems and other lyrical genres. As for rhyme, Byron's poem *The Destruction of Sennacherib* (1815) is written except for rhythmic rules. This work tells us about the Assyrian King Sennacherib travels to Yerusalem. In this poem of the eastern theme, the poet approaches various lyrical genres. These include epic, lyrical, ode, eclogus (pastoral language), storytelling and many other genres.

It is natural that those who are interested in poetry, when they research eighteenth century English literature, will first begin to look for Oriental characters in it. Almost all of those poets that time, in oriental themes at a glance at least. Some of them are extremely eclectic and blend different ideas and theories during their attempts. According to source, the Oriental works by Byron, Southey and More were well received by the readers, but their creativity was not limited to the poems on this theme.

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