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GÂVUR, BİR TÜRK HİKÂYESİNDEN BİR KISIM ESERİNDE KADIN/ERKEK KARAKTERLERİNİN TANIMLANMASI

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Özet

Lord Byron, İngiltere'den uzakta macera ve deneyim arayışında olan İngiliz Romantik bir yazardır. 1809-1811 yılları arasında Portekiz, İspanya, Malta, Türkiye ve Balkan bölgeleri olan Arnavutluk ve Yunanistan'da yolculuk yapar. Yolculuğun uzun olmasına rağmen beklediği heyecanı ona tattıran Balkan bölgesi olur. Bu bölgenin coğrafyası, tarihi, sosyal koşulları ve kültürünü tanıyarak, güvenilir başarı malzemesi olarak yazılarında kullanır.

Byron'un, seyahatinden önce Balkan bölgesi hakkında bilgi sahibi olduğu inancı, yazılarının özgünlüğüne gölge düşürmez çünkü Byron, bu dünyayı ilk elden yaşar. O, oryantal dünyası hakkında olan bilgisi ve yakınlığını, Oryantal kültürel birikim ve kelimelerini kullanarak ispatlamıştır.

Bu çalışma, Byron'un kadın/erkek karakterlerini, onların konumunu tanıtmalarında kendi tecrübesini nasıl kullandığını inceler. Gavur hikayesinde, Byron, ihanet konusunu işlemiştir. İlk önce, Leyla'nın, Türk hareminde kalan ve tabuları yıkmaya ve erkek etki alanına girmeye çalışarak, Osmanlı dünyasının ahlak değerlerini bozan bir kadın olarak konumunu tartıştı.

Leyla'dan sonra, çalışmamızda Leyla'nın Hristiyan sevgilisi, Gavur ve Türk eşi, Hasan'a odaklandık. İkisinin kültür birikimleri arasında olan zıtlıkları bilerek, hikâye, Gavur'u, Hasan'dan farklı olamayan bir Osmanlı erkeğine dönüşerek, bir "kültürel hibrit" olarak tanıtmakla bizi şaşırtır. Diğer taraftan, Hasan, kendi toplumunun ahlaki değerlerine göre

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yaşamaya çalışan zalim bir eş olarak tanıtılır. Hasan ihaneti öğrenmesiyle zihniyet ve öfkesine yenik düşer ve Leyla'yı öldürür.

Çalışmamızda, Leyla'nın ölümünden sonra, Türk Hasan ve Venedikli Gavur'un benzemesinin başladığını gördük. İki farklı kültürün temsilcileri olan bu iki erkek öfke anında aynı zihniyeti paylaşır. Buna rağmen, Byron, Gavur'un, Hasan'a karşı cinayetini savunarak, kendi batı mentalitesini fiiliyata geçirdiğini ispatlamaya çalıştık.

Anahtar kelimeler: Lord Byron, Doğu, Türkler, ihanet, zihniyet, intikam

MALE/FEMALE CHARACTER DEPICTION IN THE GAVUR- A FRAGMENT OF A TURKISH TALE

Abstract

Lord Byron is an English romantic writer who was in the quest of an adventure and experience far from England. In years 1809-1811 he undertakes a journey to Portugal, Spain, Malta, Turkey and Balkan region of Albania and Greece. Even though the journey was long, it was the Balkan region which provided him with the thrill he expected to get. He became acquainted with the geography, history, social conditions and culture of the region, which he did not hesitate to use in his writings, as a certain material for success.

There is a belief that Byron furnished himself with information on the Balkan region, prior to his voyage. These claims did not embower the originality of his work, as he experienced this world first-hand. He proved his familiarity and fondness with this world by using the cultural background and vocabulary.

In this study, we chose one of Byron, Turkish Tales, The Giaour-A Fragment of a Turkish Tale, which is known as a "snake of a poem" due to the constant revision and reaching to 1334 lines in the twelfth edition, from the 407 lines in its first copy.

This study, aims to discuss Byron's usage of his experience in the description of male/female characters by unfolding their status. In this particular tale, Byron treated the subject of infidelity. Initially we discussed the wife, Leila's position as a woman in Turkish harem who tried to break the taboos and enter male realm of action, just to go through her condition after her disturbance of moral values of the Oriental world.

Following Leila's state, this study focused on the Giaour, Leila's Christian lover and Hassan Pasha, Leila's Turkish husband. Knowing the polarity between their cultural background the tale surprises us by presenting the Giaour as "a cultural hybrid" who turns into Oriental man not different from Turkish Hassan. On the other side, Hassan is portrayed as a cruel husband who strives to live and die in accordance to his cultural

values. Upon his discovering Leila's infidelity, Hassan is defeated by his mentality and spills out his rage by killing Leila.

The study reveals that only after Leila's death the resemblance between Turkish Hassan and Venetian the Giaour starts. As representative of two different worlds these two proud men shared the same temperament in the moments of anger. However, we tried to prove that Byron put into action his western mentality, thus favored the Giaour by justifying his murdering of Hassan.

Key words: Lord Byron, Orient, Turks, infidelity, mindset, revenge

1. Lord Byron and Oriental World

Lord Byron's fascination with the Balkans as a region with Oriental mysticism is already known. His reaction to Ottoman Orient was subject of many criticisms, yet we cannot omit the fact that his experiencing this numinous world, gave his writing the vividness that a masterpiece should carry. He was frequently compared to names such as Moore and Southey who used the Orient world as their subject of interest. Nonetheless, Byron held his uniqueness as more realistic, due to his long-year experience in Balkan region. This being the case we can call Byron "the participant" of Oriental world in comparison to "the passive observant" that the other English writers were. Peter Cochran researching on Byron and the Orient, writes:

*A familiarity with William Jones' Works (1799), the Letters (1803) of Lady Wortley Montagu, George Sale's Preliminary Discourse (1734) and Pouqueville's Voyage en Moree, A Constantinople. en Alnabie et dans plusieurs autres parties de l'Empire Othoman (1805) would have furnished the poet with more than sufficient detail for his Oriental Tales even without his firsthand experience.*¹

This emphasizes the belief that Lord Byron has already created an idea on the Oriental world he is going to visit in Balkans, solely by reading aforementioned authors among others. This is validated by Cochran who further cites Byron's letter to his mother "of Constantinople you have of course read fifty descriptions of sundry travelers, which are in general so correct that I have nothing to add on the subject."²

We cannot but agree with Cochran on his facts that Byron has supplied himself with background information beforehand his journey to Balkans, knowing his interest for this world which is far different from his own England. His extended use of eastern terms in his portrayal of the locals, the landscape as well as behavioral analysis proves his acquaintance with the Eastern world and life-style. He is mentioned for his interest in the *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, translated by Sir William Jones's and Barthélémy D'Herbelot's dictionary of Oriental culture, *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1776)³, works which have furnished him with the knowledge on the Oriental cultural elements. Using these fundamentals of Eastern culture

¹ Peter Cochran, *Byron and Orientalism*, Cambridge Scholars Press, Newcastle, 2006, p.147

² Peter Cochran, *ibid.* p. 156

³ Naji Oueijan, *Byron, D'Herbelot, and Oriental Culture*, Notre Dame University Lebanon, 2006, p.14

give more vivid picture of the region and stronger name of Byron as the truest author of Balkan culture, which he validates by using glimpses from religious rites.

*Strange rumours in our city say
Upon that eve she fled away
When Rhamazan's last sun was set,
And flashing from each minaret
Millions of lamps proclaimed the feast
Of Bairam through the boundless East.(450-455)*

Importance of Byron's works and the influence it made on general western opinion of Balkan and the Orient is profound, as much as it was interpreted and taken as basic knowledge in other artists' work.

Philhellenic works by Eugene Delacroix included a number of paintings inspired by various Byron poems, as well as Greek on the Ruins of Missolonghi (1826), the proceeds from whose exhibition were pledged to the effort to rescue Greek women abducted after the conquest and destruction of Missolonghi by the Ottomans that same year.⁴

Edward Said in his work *Orientalism* is critical of Byron, among other names, accusing them for not mirroring the true East, yet initially straining it through their Western mindset and only then serving it to the reader.

In the Orient one suddenly confronted unimaginable antiquity, inhuman beauty, boundless distance. These could be put to use more innocently, as it were, if they were thought and written about, not directly experienced. In Byron's "Giaour," in the Westiistlicher Diwan, in Hugo's Orientales, the Orient is a form of release, a place of original opportunity.⁵

Mohammed Sharafuddin has a different view of Byron and his stance on Orient writing: "Even if Byron is exaggerating his precociousness, the range and depth of his (oriental) reading cannot be doubted."⁶ His protective stance further writes, "Byron was concerned to correct British errors about the East."⁷

Disregarding the criticism and judging Byron's work with a blank mind and without having knowledge of critical background of his writings, one would initially be amazed with his usage of the eastern diction. His eagerness to put into practice the knowledge of this eastern spirit makes him appear as an enthusiast of eastern culture and life-style, respectively of Balkan world where he gains his experience from.

Using his experience, Byron first wrote *Child Harold's Pilgrimage Cantos I and II* which brought freshness to the English literature of the period. Once Byron received this

⁴ Irvin Cemil Schick, "Christian Maidens, Turkish Ravishers: The Sexualization of National Conflict in the Late Ottoman Period", ed. Amila Bturvic, Irvin Cemil Schick, Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, London, 2007, p.283

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 1979 .p.167

⁶ Mohammed Sharafuddin, *Islam and Romantic Orientalism: Literary Encounters with the Orient*, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 1994, p. 249

⁷ Mohammed Sharafuddin, *ibid.* p. 215

unexpected recognition by the audience, he resorbed the source that regained him his name among the English society. He used the reminiscence of his Balkan journey in his following work “*Turkish Tales*” with his poetic opus, *The Giaour-A Fragment of a Turkish Tale*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Corinth and Parisina*. This work’s subject of interest will be the first of the *Turkish Tales*, *The Giaour*, where we will deal with characters’ hardships and eastern mentality portrayed by Byron.

2. The Giaour’s Tale

The tale set in Balkan region, narrates of a love triangle, where it includes the clash between a Muslim, Hassan and a Christian, the Giaour, over a maiden Leila who is one of Hassan’s wives. Hassan, a man with strong Islamic values cannot bear the fact that his wife had a lover, thus he punished her by throwing her into the sea. The Giaour, the lover could not stay indifferent over Leila’s death for the sake of their love and rushes into revenge. Killing Hassan does not ease Giaour’s pain and he drowns into desolation and despair for the outcome of his love affair.

Lord Byron called the poem, *The Giaour*, “snake of a poem”, with merits, as the first manuscript consisted of 407 lines, ending with the 1334 in its final edition. He opens the tale with an introductory note entitled Advertisement of two paragraph holding a mixed signals of praising the “modern” Eastern women as more prudent than in the period when the tale took place, adding a comment in a sarcastic tone on the “older period” Christians who might have lost their courage to repeat this bold act for the sake of love.

The tale which these disjointed fragments present is founded upon circumstances now less common in the East than formerly; either because the ladies are more circumspect than in the ‘olden time,’ or because the Christians have better fortune, or less enterprise.⁸

Without offering the reader a space or time to think and judge the position of a woman living in Balkan area, he calls Leila “a slave” creating an idea of female oppression and misogynistic behavior of Oriental men. Byron fortifies the cruelty demeanor of the husband with female’s punishment “in the Mussulman manner” by being thrown into the sea for adultery. Giving the historical background of the area, Byron does not withhold himself from the commentary that these men “exercised the cruelty on all sides.”

3. Leila and Female World of Constrains

Initially, Byron chose the name Leila which is very common in Muslim culture and literature. It phonologically produces the sense of harmony and peace, creating an expectation of a gentle person. Leila is a typical female figure who can represent her gender’s position in Balkans and Ottoman world. Byron’s usage of Leila as meek character enlisted oriental women as pitiable, thus creating a general opinion of eastern gender relations as unequal. Related to the opinion created in the western world through these literary works, we will quote Irvin Cemil Schick:

⁸ Lord Byron, *The Giaour, A fragment of a Turkish Tale*, John Murray, London, 1813, p.255

*War as sexual conquest-a trope widely used in art and literature and deeply engrained in the European collective memory-was a powerful discursive tool for mobilizing public opinion in support of independence movements struggling against Ottoman rule. Blended with orientalist motifs such as Asiatic despotism, gender and sexual stereotypes were deployed with great political efficacy in the works of Victor Hugo, Lord Byron, and other, less prominent, writers and artists, influencing the course of events not only then but even today.*⁹

In this work, Leila was portrayed as a *houri*, who according to Muslim religion are the most beautiful maidens dwelling in paradise. She had a gaze of a Gazelle, with a glow of a gem of Giamschid.¹⁰ Leila's beauty is picturesque and considered to be refreshing part of the melancholic setting.

As a stereotype of eastern woman, Leila would be expected to have life full of restrictions. Her appearance would determine her faith. Her obedience would be a "must" and not a case of "probability". Her movements would be within boundaries and contact with certain people. She would have no freedom of choice or voice to speak her mind. Nevertheless, Leila did not play according to the rules. She did not remain in the gender-determined realm of deeds. Leila was not a typical Ottoman woman. She tried to step into the male realm of action and use the right of "freedom of choice". She granted herself the right which would normally be male's. She metaphorically raised her voice which was not even known to be existent. She chose to fight her fate and reject to be victim of the social conventions. She refused to live up to these words anymore:

*Oh! who young Leila's glance could read
And keep that portion of his creed
Which saith, that woman is but dust,
A soulless toy for tyrant's lust? (487-90)*

As the Ottoman mentality requires, Leila's usage of "freedom of choice" will have disastrous outcome. She broke the taboos and she will be punished for that. Ottoman society of the age would not be surprised by sanctions that found her. Byron depicted Leila as destined to die the most horrible death and the narrator not being moved by this. Her chastity was what she played with and this being a part of identity that defined a girl and determined her status in the society, Leila would pay for its loss. Honour is not a notion that a woman should challenge and Leila's decision to test it was her doom. Eventually Leila was punished and put to death. Though her punishment was harsh, Leila as a significant character appeared in the tale only when she physically disappeared. Her death is the key fact and the point when

⁹ Irvin Cemil Schick, *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture and History*, p.283

¹⁰ The explanation Byron gives of the "jewel of Giamschid" is as follow: The celebrated fabulous ruby of Sultan Giamschid, the embellisher of Istakhar; from its splendour, named Schebgerag [Schabchiragh], "the torch of night;" also "the cup of the sun," etc. In the First Edition, "Giamschid" was written as a word of three syllables; so D'Herbelot has it; but I am told Richardson reduces it to a dissyllable, and writes "Jamshid." I have left in the text the orthography of the one with the pronunciation of the other. Taken from George Gordon Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron: With His Letters and Journals*, John Murray, London, 1832, p. 167

her importance starts. With her punishment series of actions start, all evolving around her name.

Leila's situation raises question in our head. Who is to be punished severer for what Leila and the Giaour did? Both the Giaour and Leila did Hassan wrong and as a man of action Hassan is going to take revenge from both of them. He is determined to kill the Giaour from the rage and need to show his power as a man to man; while punishing Leila, for the wounded pride of a husband and creation of the epithet of a cuckold.

Condemnation of these two lovers by the society is assumed to be harsher towards Leila. On the subject Franklin writes "an acknowledgement that as the fabric of society is built on the foundation of female chastity, woman will always be the chief victim of illegitimate love."¹¹This similar stance is still to be encountered in some remote areas of Balkan and Turkey as female adultery is the outmost wrongdoing woman's "fall from grace", while man's as literary translated from Turkish language just "dirt in his hands."¹²

4. The Giaour and Hassan Pasha's Resemblance As Two Men In Balkan World

The Giaour is the first person from the love triangle introduced by the narrator. He appears in the scene with a dark horse and is given name "Giaour", creating an immediate idea that he will not be favored by the narrator as the word "giaour" is given by Muslims to infidels. Byron gives the Giaour mysterious look which elevates sense of anxiety in the reader. His dark appearance was often commented as being bad omen.

Though like a demon of the night

He pass'd, and vanish'd from my sight, (205-206)

Although the Giaour's intentions did not bear any other purpose except enjoying Leila's love, the circumstances that this love was based, on created the situation which conflicted two men of different backgrounds, where one is Turk and the other Venetian.

As Byron gives only negative quality to Leila's husband Hassan who will not necessarily be considered as wrongful by current Balkan mentality for his anger on the infidelity, the revenge manner is put into extremes and turns his position of a cheated husband into a cruel, revengeful man. At the same time, Byron, gives the Giaour oxymoronic traits of a romantic lover and an impetuous character.

Clash between two men seemingly representing two different worlds that of Muslim and Christian collided at one point where they reveal their resemblance. Their resemblance is also noticed by Elisabeth Bohls where she writes: He (the Giaour) has become, if not a full-fledged Muslim, a cultural hybrid: neither one thing nor the other, a man between, operating in a permeable zone of shifting alliances and turbulent local conflict"¹³ further quoting Richardson as a support to her own opinion "the Giaour has renounced his Christian faith and

¹¹ Michael J. Franklin, *Indian Culture and Imperial Control in Eighteenth-century British Orientalist Discourse*, Routledge, 2000, p. 47

¹² In Turkish language "Elinin kiri"

¹³ Elisabeth Bohls, *Romantic Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, Edinburgh University Press, 2013, p. 156

his European allegiance.”¹⁴ We assert the Giaour’s affiliation with the Balkan region and resemblance with Muslims through his clothes where he is “now array'd in Arnaut garb” (622)

Their resemblance is seen in their manliness and courage as well as expression of rage. After Leila’s death, The Giaour became the man he hated. He put on the cloak of wrath which covered his body and mind. He will now live just for the revenge. He became synonym of Hassan rather than the antonym he was striving to be. Hassan had to kill Leila for the revenge of stained honour, similarly Giaour’s revenge by ending Hassan’s life brings them closer in regard of the Balkanic mindset, where Giaour’s bloody deed is depicted as:

*Of sabres clashing, foemen flying,
Wrongs avenged, and Moslem dying.
On cliff he hath been known to stand,
And rave as to some bloody hand
Fresh sever'd from its parent limb,
Invisible to all but him,
Which beckons onward to his grave,
And lures to leap into the wave. (837-844)*

The Giaour does not deny his bloody deed. *There's blood upon that dinted sword, /A stain its steel can never lose* (1049-1050). He was now focused on the maiden “*whelmed beneath the sea*”(836) and justifies it as result of his love and care for the one who sacrificed herself for him.

*I loved her, Friar ! nay, adored ---
But these are words that all can use ---
I proved it more in deed than word; (1046-1049)*

But love towards Leila does not cloud the Giaour’s senses. He thinks straight and puts himself into Hassan’s shoes just to show us his other resemblance with the pasha. The Giaour now, probably under the influence of the Balkan region, truly abandons his European mentality and reveals the oriental man within him, where he says that although Leila loved him, she might have deserved her doom for her infidelity.

*Yet did he but what I had done
Had she been false to more than one.
Faithless to him - he gave the blow ;
But true to me - I laid him low :
Howe'er deserved her doom might be,*

¹⁴ Elisabeth Bohls, *ibid*, p. 157

Her treachery was truth to me.(1079-1082)

Though his rage is metaphorically painted as similar to Hassan, his love is far more sensitive than Hassan's. Byron used Hassan as unresponsive to Leila's sentiment and tender nature, whereas the Giaour was favored and given the aptitude of passion. The Giaour's love is given the analogy of the Italian volcano Etna and the eruption which causes the stream of hot lava being the metaphor of flow of emotions.

The cold in clime are cold in blood,

Their love can scarce deserve the name;

But mine was like the lava flood

That boils in Ætna's breast of flame.(1117-1120)

Justifying his bloody act, by assumingly having better reason than Hassan, does not disregard the fact that these two men were sharing the same mentality. As Roderick Cavaliero writes on Byron's belief "The Turks had smothered Greece, with oriental characteristics that rendered her a pale shadow of her former glory,"¹⁵ similarly shows that Christian Giaour's behavior was "smothered" by Turkish temperament. By using the description of Giaour's love, Byron shows remorseful account of the Giaour, the fact which proves that he is sympathetic to the Giaour and pities his state of a depressed and culturally influenced man. Not conferring on Hassan's right for his anger and sense of revenge for his wife's adultery, Byron shows his western mindset by scorning the choice of punishment for an infidelity, thus presenting Ottoman of the age, respectively Turk mentality, as inferior. In his attempt to be "neutral between Christianity and Islam, as he did not wish to subscribe to either,"¹⁶ he stumbled in his forthrightness and favored the Giaour.

Conclusion

Lord Byron is one of the romantic western writers who is praised for his knowledge of affiliation with eastern world. After his journey through Balkans and acquaintance with the Muslim culture and Balkan nation he could not pass the mysticism of the region but inking it. His attraction and basic knowledge of the region is said to be a result of the reading of writers such as William Jones, Lady Wortley Montagu. This reading created him an idea of the region; nevertheless, it is his journey which made Byron and his work the writing to refer to when it comes to Balkans. As much as others influenced him now it is Byron's turn to influence the others, thus he had a huge impact on creation of a general opinion on East in the western world.

One of his works where he used the depiction of Oriental world is *the Giaour*, which he seasoned with some lust and Balkan mentality development, as a response to the sexual appetite. The work portrayed a story of a love triangle in, the Balkan region. With the aim of being more thorough, Byron used a maiden and her life in a pasha's palace. Although starting

¹⁵ Roderick Cavaliero, *Ottomania, The Romantics and the Myth of the Islamic Orient*, L.B. Tauris, London, 2010, p. 85

¹⁶ Roderick Cavaliero, *ibid*, p. 84

with stereotypes of the region, the story turned into a myth of an adulterous wife. Byron's tendency to justify the love between the girl and the lover made him put the pasha in the negative light as a cruel husband who kills his wife. Through this act Byron showed misogynistic behavior of a Turkish man and the restricted world that a Muslim woman lived in.

Even if Byron did not hide the resemblance between these two men's mentality due to a long stay of the Giaour in Balkans, he did not hide his favoring of the lover, the Giaour. Byron showed sympathy for the Giaour's love whereas accuses Hassan for coldness of his heart, pointing out the difference in sentiment of two men, striving to elevate this European man. As a bottom line Leila's stepping into male realm of action of "freedom of choice" doomed them all and while Leila was punished physically and the Giaour psychologically from the outcome of their love, it openly showed that disturbed morality is not the thing to bear in Oriental, respectfully Balkan society of Byron's age.

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