

HomerOS

Cilt / Volume 2, Sayı / Issue 2, 2019, pp. 23-30

E - ISSN: 2667-4688

URL: <http://www.ratingacademy.com.tr/ojs/index.php/homerOS>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33390/homerOS.2.004>

“FEARS AND FANTASIES OF THE DEVELOPING NATION” IN CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN’S LITERARY WORKS

Nigiar İSGANDAROVA *

* *Sumgayıt State University, Azerbaijan*

E-mail: isgani@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4954-7122>

Received: 18 December 2018; Accepted: 20 April 2019

ABSTRACT

The paper explores the "fears and fantasies" of the American nation in a post-revolutionary period. This period in the history of the American statehood is marked by the formation of national identity, new ideals of the post-Puritan stage and the Enlightenment. The literature of this period also reflects the double standards of a society freeing itself from the dogmas of puritanism and forming the Enlightenment ideals.

The article examines these processes on the samples of literary works by the American writer of the end of the XVIII century, Charles Brockden Brown, who is considered the founder of the American story and the Gothic novel. Depicting the problems of social and legal dependence of women in post-revolutionary America, the writer draws the attention of readers to the problems of the nation and its ideology.

Keywords: *post-revolutionary prose, national identity, developing nation, gender stereotypes, fears, fantasies*

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of American literature is the story of the emerging New England nation, its ideology, cultural and national interests. Like all New England politics, this literature synthesizes the cultural and historical experience of its European ancestors, trying to find new forms and means to reflect their fears and fantasies, and create new myths about the “country of Colombia”.

The expression "fears and fantasies of an emerging nation" was first introduced into the literary circulation by researcher Cathy Davidson. Summarizing the experience of literary practice, Davidson points out the historical, cultural and social background that contributed to the development of these fears and fantasies. The search for historical roots and attempts to demonstrate the national identity of the Americans for centuries have been central in the study of the history of the North American state. Perhaps the reason for interest in this issue is that these roots by no means are not aristocratic, but to justify the phenomenon of a superpower is

a matter of honor of the whole nation. The researcher Bernard Baylin considers that the "founders of America" were provincials who lived outside the Atlantic civilization [Baylin, 2003: 7]. Undoubtedly, the "provincialism" of the colonists was reflected in the American prose of the early period, the originality of which the spoiled readers of the European capitals tried to overlook.

2. THE EARLY AMERICAN PROSE: THE CRITERIA OF DEVELOPMENT

According to Cathy Davidson, early American prose served as a means of expressing, "the fears and fantasies of a developing nation" [Davidson, 2004: 78]. Following the opinion of this researcher, contemporary critics treat prose samples of this period as "political texts" that contained information on the formation of the young Republic, its attempts to control racial and sexual differences, to determine personal and national identity during the crisis period. The motifs of temptations, violence, incest, murder, suicide, and other types of threats to the physical body repeatedly used in these texts are more read as a political threat to the "national body". So, in her study, Shirley Samuels argues that in early American literature, political and family topics intersect so closely that the threat of political or national ownership is considered equivalent to a threat to the female body [Samuels, 1996: 56]. Developing this thesis, Elizabeth Barnes calls the theme of seduction in the early American novel "an allegory symbolizing a threat to the national body", and the sentimental manners of patriarchal politicians are nothing but the search for access to the "national body" [Barnes, 1997: 43].

The formation of the American nation was influenced by three development criteria:

1. The myth of the "chosen people" became the basis for the expansion of nations, who were historically and culturally superior to the Americans. The myth of their exclusivity forced them to find new ways for world domination [Bancroft, 2010: 395].
2. The Interest to the East, and its spiritual and material values, inherited from the European ancestors, forced the Americans to turn towards India, Asia, and the land of Israel, to dream of "possessing, using and managing the East" [Said, 1978: 87].
3. The "women's question" that caused anxiety of all the Americans at all times occupied the minds of the American society. On one hand, the Puritan views with moral and socio-economic restrictions on the American women, on the other hand, far-fetched stereotypes about the sexual freedom of the Eastern women and men did not give them the possibility to decide on a gender issue. At the same time, it was Orientalism "that evoked images for idealizing and fulfilling American men's desires", and motivated American women actively participate in the formation of the American ideology [Edwards, 2000: 39].

It is a fact, but in the modern history of the United States, the gender stereotype with regard to the East also occurs in the social and political life of the country. No one could forget the latest presidential race when at the Congress of the Democrats in the California state the current head of the White House, Donald Trump, publicly insulted the mother of a military officer Captain Humayun Khan perished in the Iraq war, accusing her of the passivity inherent to the Eastern women. It is also a fact, that all America was immediately ready to defend this family and Gazala Khan: all, without exception, Muslims and Christians, people from Europe and Asia, men and women made a stand for the woman whose son died in the name of the US interests. All the officers' mothers considered themselves offended [New York Times, 2016/08/01].

3. CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN, THE FOUNDER OF EARLY AMERICAN PROSE

The revival of interest to the history of American national statehood and identity in contemporary history requires a revision of attitudes to the literary works of the mentioned period, including the works of Charles Brockden Brown, the founder of this genre in the young American Republic. His literary works caused the greatest controversy and debates among both contemporaries and researchers of the writer's creativity.¹ The discussions were caused by the "aesthetic heterogeneity" of his stories and gothic novels. Only the reanimation of these unrecognized literary forms in the literary criticism at the turn of the twentieth century revived the interest to the works of C. B. Brown [Cowie, 1951: 69].

C.B. Brown is one of the writers who is not indifferent to the fate of women in the American society. He believes that "attitude to women in any society determines the power of this nation". Brown's reasoning about the role of women in the young Republic was particularly significant for a developing nation. Therefore, Brown's conclusions on gender issues, as, the necessity of education for women, gender equality, freedom of choice while creating a family, are used by modern feminist scholars [Lewis, 1996: 167]. The writer is also concerned about such problems of the American society, as the formation of the ideology of a democratic society and the role of the individual in this society, the formation of a national character and system of values².

The principles of the society' democratic structure by John Locke are reflected in the works of this prominent representative of early American prose. Thus, in the novel "Ormond" he recognizes the inseparability of the personal and social status of a citizen in a democratic Republic, and therefore even the traditional act of creating a family represents like "moving a woman from a private household environment in a social environment where she will be sexually significant for her husband and socially important for his family and relatives"[Brown, 1799: 28]. Designed in the form of a biographical sketch, "Ormond" demonstrates the synthesis of political and sexual virtues on the example of the young hero Constantia Dudley. Like all her contemporaries, Constantia grew up under the auspices of her family. Later, by the will of fate, being alone with the vicissitudes of life, she is forced to solve her problems independently. All the difficulties that this decent and self-sufficient girl had to overcome, and her attempts to achieve a balance between public debt and personal destiny figuratively signify the attempts of the young Republic to develop. Constantia actively participates in the life of the society, at the request of which a Republican woman should be socially active, as well as preserve women's dignity and sexual integrity, which is an indicator of her status in society [Brown, 1799: 34]. Based on the ideals of Puritanism, the attitudes of Brockden Brown undoubtedly express the demands of an emerging American society during the transitional period. Thus, at the end of the 18th century, the ideas of equality, social success, and hope for the future of the American dream still mature in the American society, which was not completely freed from the dogmas of Puritanism. A number of progressive elements of Puritanism were subsequently transformed into the ideals of the Enlightenment, represented by Charles Brockden Brown. In the works of this author, we can discuss the formation of a new type of a personality bred up from an American puritan, who appears to be more purposeful, rationalistic, and open to new ideas.

4. THE PROBLEMS OF GENDER IN CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN'S STORIES

A new image of an American woman is also reflected in "Alcuin", a dialogue that explores the status of women and the "ordinary rights" necessary for her emancipation in the society [Brown, 1982: 8]. In "Alcuin", the author is experimenting a form of dialogue between a school teacher, Mr. Alcuin, who, by the nature of his work, should be motivated to bring progressive ideas to the masses, and Mrs. Carter, the pedantic widow, and as she is called in the story the "blue stocking." Mrs. Carter is the host of the house, which challenges "people of different ages and classes with different talents" to gather there. This fact indicates that Mrs. Carter herself also is a smart woman and she does not devoid of talents in all areas. Actively and freely discussing the issues of society, its morality and legislation, the mistress of the house causes the annoyance of the schoolteacher at the freedom of thought of the woman.

Further, the topic of these discussions is the powerless position of a woman and her role in the society, politics, and the family. The work addresses the issues of the country's political structure, ideology, education, legislation, and the complete absence of women's rights in these areas, where "the Constitution does not make any distinction between a woman and an animal". Further development of the dialogue is aimed at the problems of unequal marriages, uncomplaining life in marriage, where a woman is obliged only to "love and obey", being in complete material and moral dependence on her husband. On the one hand, Alcuin does not approve women's rights in politics and business, on the other - he recognizes the superiority of the female half of the country [Brown, 1982: 32]. Thus, the main character expresses an ambivalent attitude toward women: obviously, the smug and narrow-minded schoolteacher does not lag behind the rulers and legislators who created the social dependence of women in the country, and praises the superiority of his own gender, which has only a physiological need for a woman. Next, Alcuin tries to smooth over his mistake by proposing a model of a utopian society — a "paradise for women", in which both men and women are treated equally, for example, when receiving education, but there is no marriage in this society. To his surprise, Mrs. Carter, independent in discussing marriage issues, responds to this model with the protection of the institution of marriage, and under certain circumstances, the need for divorce. As a result, she recognizes the most important thing in the institution of marriage: marriage should be based on mutually independent choice and desire.

To enhance this thought, the author turned to a very popular at that time theme of the East, the theme that caused fear among all the Americans, and established stereotypes concerning cruelty and barbarism of the easterners³. "The most precious thing I have is my independence," says Mrs. Carter. It is impossible to describe all my feelings in the case that anyone or something impinges upon my freedom. It is better to let me be convicted of slave labor under the command of the Egyptian slave driver, put in shackles in the dark ... but I beg you, let us allow ourselves to choose a husband" [Brown, 1982: 58]. In this wish Mrs. Carter implies the fear of a woman and perhaps of the entire generation — the fear of losing the freedom acquired by several generations of new settlers in America. In this monologue, Ch.B. Brown, like the eighteenth century English feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft, compares the position of a woman in America with that of slaves and reveals the position of a woman ready to fight for her freedom [Wollstonecraft, 1992: 9].

Revealing the tyrannical attitude of the government towards its citizens, the author compares it with the cruel attitude of the husband to his wife, idealizing the woman to the status of a state torn by contradictions of social order. Thus, he considers any violence against a woman to be equivalent to violence committed by an unfair government. Feminist writers, on the one hand, consider Brown an America's first feminist, on the other hand, reject his work,

calling it a patriarchal and degrading women. Others call "Alcuin: A Dialogue on the Rights of Women" "the first argument worthy of attention ever published in the United States" [Fleischmann, 1982: 6-41]. According to some scholars, by the arguments defending free love and the breakup of the institution of marriage, Brown ridicules the radical platform of the first feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft⁴. Thus, Leland Persona argues that Alcuin expresses "some concern about the role of women in society. Probably, contrary to Brown's uncompromising opposition to many despotic traditions of marriage, the attitude of his male characters towards marriage and women is very problematic" [Person, 1981: 33]. Cathy Davidson singles out "Alcuin" from the general mass of publications on the topic of marriage and free love as a work that followed in response to the publication of the biography of M. Wollstonecraft [Davidson, 2004: 71-86]. Obviously, all the debates around "Alcuin" come down to the biography and feminist platform of Mary Wollstonecraft, the first European human rights defender of the XVIII century, whose literary work entitled "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792) gave impetus to the development of the feminist movement not only in Europe, but also in America.

Following this principle of feminism, C. B. Brown in his works put forward independent and self-sufficient women, as his central images. Only such type of women would be able to break the familiar circle of relations that degrade her, the relations between a woman and a man, a woman and the society. The women, like Constantia Dudley or Mrs. Carter, who has a strong will and desire to break out into the world of active life, will be able to realize their "American dream". Obviously, such personalities become stronger as they are included in social life. However, the American society that has barely entered the path of the Enlightenment could not accept such women — their own citizens — and treated them as a pathology of social order. This society has long formed the concept of the world order and social distinctions, where a woman is placed on the lowest scale of assessment according to her physical abilities and gender. Any violation of the norms of behavior adopted in this society upsets both natural and social balance and leads to the emergence of new fears.

Any discrepancies from the generally accepted charter at all times were fraught with unpredictable consequences. Thus, contrary to Brown's feminist views, his contemporaries — writers and scientists, chose the concept of the biological purpose of a woman as the basis for relations between the sexes, in which childbirth, the pursuit for pleasure, the features of female physiology are more important than her passion for freedom and independent judgment [Lavater, 1794: 13]. Thus, the protagonist of Brown Alcuin is the representative for these social demands and the natural fears of men against women's independence. That is why he invites a woman backward - "to the paradise for women", where institution of marriage is missing, backward from her social and legal claims to her natural essence. Thus, in the study of William Alexander, this invitation is expressed in a subtle form. Describing the beauty of female physiology, the author points out that "these features give a woman indirect power over men". The author points out, that while men act directly depending on the circumstances, women have to become "objects of beauty and tenderness in order to manipulate the stronger sex, on which they depend and fulfill their desires". The author of the article William Alexander skillfully manipulates the public consciousness, directing it to the necessity of women' social rights denial of and the allocation of their natural status [Alexander, 1792: 13].

5. CONCLUSION

The paradigms of formation of the American ideology, especially in the gender issue, were examined on the example of the works of Charles B. Brown, the founder of the American novel and the first feminist writer of America. The dual attitude of the critics and researchers to his progressive thoughts about changing the status of women in the society is revealed on the examples of his "Ormond" and "Alcuin". The positions of his opponents are easy to understand: the fears of the nation are encoded in the minds of the first colonists who were expelled from their homes and the fantasies like the "American dream" and "heaven on the Earth" do not allow them to think outside the framework of the outlined ideals.

Charles Brockden Brown manifested interest to the fate of women in the American society and was distinguished by his feminist convictions. He experimented in his works, bringing innovative ideas and methods into American literature.

In addition to this, the creative works of Charles Brockden Brown, like the works of his compatriots, are not devoid of a biased attitude towards the East, oriental culture and its system of values. They used the theme of the East, which also aroused genuine interest and a sense of fear among the Americans, and especially as a tool for the self-determination of their nation.

REFERENCES

- ALEXANDER, William. On the Happy Influence arising from female society. Massachusetts Magazine, July 1795
- BANCROFT G. *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent, 1834-1875*: 10 vols. N. York: Nabu Press, 2010
- BAYLIN, Bernard. *To begin the World A new: The Genuis and Ambiquities of the American Founders*. New York: Knopf, 2003
- BARNES, Elizabeth. *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997
- BLOCH, Ruth. The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America. "Signs" 13 (1987): 52,37,46,53
- BOORSTIN, Daniel J. *The Americans. The Colonial Experience*. New York, Random House, 1958
- BROWN, Charles Brockden. *Alcuin. Dialogue*. New York, 1982
- BROWN, Charles Brockden. *Ormond; or The Secret Witness*. New York: G. Forman, 1799
- BUSH, Jr., Harold K. *American Declarations. Rebellion and Repentance in American Cultural History*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, USA, 1999
- COWIE, Alexander. *The Rise of the American Novel*. New York: American Book Company, 1951
- DAVIDSON, Cathy. The Matter and Manner of Ch.B.Brown's "Alcuin"// Bernard Rosenthal. *Critical Essays on Ch.B.Brown*, 1981, 71-86
- DAVIDSON, Cathy N. *Revolution and the World. A Rise of Novel in America*. Oxford University Press: USA, 2004
- EDWARDS, Holly Noble *Dreams: Wicked Pleasures. Orientalism in America, 1870-1930*. New York: Princeton University Press in association with Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute, 2000
- FLEISCHMANN, Fritz. Charles Brockden Brown: Feminism in Fiction. //American Novelists Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism. Boston: Hall, 1982, 6-41
- Langhorne. The Accomplished Female Character, Massachusetts Magazine, April 1792
- LAVATER, Johann Caspar. *Essays on Physiognomy*. Mass-setts Magazine, January, 1794
- LEWIS, Paul. Charles Brockden Brown and the Gendered Canon of Early American Fiction. *Early American Literature* 31:2, 1996
- SAID, Edward. *Orientalism*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978
- SAMUELS, Shirley. *Romances of the Republic: Women, the Family and Violence in the Literature of the Early American Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996
- PERSON, Leland. *My Good Mama*. "Studies in American Fiction 9", 1981, 33
- WOLLSTONECRAFT, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 1792; rprn. London: Penguin Books, England 1992
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/01/us/politics/khizr-khan-ghazala-donald-trumpmuslim-soldier>

NOTES

1 See: F.O.Matthiesen, (1968). *The American Renaissance*. New York: Oxford UP, 1941, 202; *Charles Brockden Brown and the Invention of American Gothic*// Leslie Fielder, (1992), *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Anchor Books, [1966], 126; David Lee Clark, (1952). *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America*. Durham: Duke UP

2 See: in Julia Stern, (1997), *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 153-238; Stephen Watt, (1994), *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 33-34

3 See: James A. Field Jr., *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776-1882* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); David H. Finnie, *Pioneers East: The Early American Experience in The Middle East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); A. L. Tibawi, *American Interest in Syria, 1800-1901: A Study of Educational, Literary, and Religious Work* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966)

4 Wollstonecraft has lived with the American businessperson Gilbert Imlay for 3 years and gave a birth to a daughter. This event considered unacceptable even for Paris and London in the XVIII century.