

Issues of Cultural (Mis)Representations in
Lord Byron's *The Giaour: Fragment of a Turkish Tale*
(1813)

By

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Abstract: Cultural representations of other cultures and people is a rich theme in literature. Throughout ages, literature has functioned as an expression and reflection of humanity, human behaviors and perceptions, and has stood as a valuable source of knowledge, understanding and interacting with other cultures and people. However, such understanding might sometimes be blurred by lack of enough knowledge of the ‘other’ that ultimately results in (mis)representations of other cultures and people belonging to that culture.

When either the East or the West comes under the influence of ‘us the superior’ and ‘them the inferior’ then misrepresentation is bound to occur. One clear example of this cultural discrepancy is the West and the East through different historical periods starting from the Dark Ages to the present time. Literature and

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men of letters are expected to represent other cultures and people in a true and objective way to boost mutual understanding of each other, particularly in the age of globalism and emerging issues of global concern that bring humanity together more than ever before.

The present research discusses issues of cultural representations and misrepresentations in *The Giaour* by the major British writer Lord Byron. The research methodology used in this study is qualitative: the text is thematically analyzed focusing on cultural mis/representations in *The Giaour*. As described by Lord Byron, *The Giaour* is a Turkish tale poem. In *The Giaour*, there are two main characters; the Giaour, a Christian, and Leila, an Ottoman slave girl. Both had an illicit relationship that was deemed to be socially unacceptable as both major characters belong to different cultures. Byron's treatment of the incident reflects a lack of sufficient understanding of the Eastern culture that was not deliberate. In addition, there were some examples of contradictions between Byron's personal perceptions versus an established social norm of the other culture. Thus, there is a need for correct and mutual understanding of cultures to avoid misrepresentations. If such a practice might be understandable, it can by no means be accepted from a well renowned writer like Byron.

Keywords: Orientalism, Ottomans, romantic orientalism, cultural representations, cultural bias.

*Issues of Cultural (Mis)Representations in Lord Byron's Turkish**Tale Poem The Giaour (1813)***I. Introduction**

Lord Byron's *The Giaour* is a tragic tale about a fallen woman, a foreign tyrant and an avenging murderer. Leila, a slave in her Master Hassan's harem, falls in love with a Christian, the *Giaour*. Once Leila's guilt is discovered, Hassan orders that she be tied in a sack and thrown into the sea as a death sentence. The *Giaour* comes to seek revenge; he kills Hassan. However, the *Giaour* cannot cope with the loss of Leila nor rid himself of the guilt of the murder he has just committed. What happens next is indecisive, for Byron has subtitled his poem *A Fragment of a Turkish Tale*. In essence, the framework of the story is familiar in both Western and Eastern literatures. Like *The Giaour*, *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare and *Layla and Majnun* -as depicted by Nizami Ganjavi (1188)- are few examples of "the revolt of individuals against violent and oppressive social systems and moral values" (Poole, 1998, p. 64). However, Byron brings originality to *The Giaour* by giving it an oriental setting and casting characters that have long been in cultural conflict throughout Eastern and Western history. Hence, the story is not simply about tragic love but a story about the East versus the West, the Muslim versus the Christian, the believer versus the non-believer, the sinner versus the virtuous and the ostracized versus the acknowledged. The poem also carries a personal dimension to it. Many

passages in the poem, as the researcher will explain in this paper, can be interpreted in terms of Byron's own personal struggles and his inability to overcome his guilt and shame. Thus, *The Giaour* mingles the private struggle with the public one; a never-ending conflict in the self is set against the background of religiously and politically clashing nations.

In combining all these elements, *The Giaour* promises to intrigue and entertain its reader. Still, the Muslim oriental reader finds him/herself unable to overcome the various negative preconceptions about the East and especially Islam. Byron has travelled twice to the East: the first trip was his 'grand tour' where he travelled mainly to Spain, Malta, Greece and Albania. And the second is when he decided to settle in Venice. Towards the end of his life, he relocated in Greece in an attempt to fight the Turkish fleet. Given this long contact with the Orient, one would expect Byron to have a less prejudiced perspective of the East and its culture. Nevertheless, Byron was not able to use the opportunity to acquire a better and more accurate understanding of the East.

A literature review of the life of Byron and *The Giaour* reveals that Byron's mind is liberal religiously and politically. Byron was also interested in expanding his knowledge on the Orient, all of which reflected on his books, especially *The Giaour*. Peter Cochran (2006) argues that although Byron has brought his personal experiences from the East into his works, "much of his knowledge of the Orient [was derived] from books" (p.15). That is, Byron's knowledge of the East was based on his own reading of such books rather than on a first-hand personal

experience. Cochran thinks that “[Byron] used the books, particularly travel books written by people more experienced than himself, to frame his own idea about the Orient in context,” (p. 15). In the same book, Cochran quotes Naji B. Oueijan who positively writes on Byron: “among his contemporaries Lord Byron was the only Englishman who truly experienced the Orient by assimilating himself into the culture ... Byron spent his time in living, enjoying, and studying Oriental life and culture for its own wealth as well as for its existing exoticism,” (pp. 22-23). Despite Byron's interest in the Orient, he was not to adopt or condone an oriental lifestyle. His interest was rather in an exploration of different possibilities to experience life. He could never settle himself to a certain dogma, a certain culture or a certain morale. Bernard Betty, editor of *The Byron Journal* summed it best when he said that “[Byron was] a sceptic; [yet] he [was] religious. He believ[ed] passionately against war, [yet] he die[d] as a soldier. He [was] extremely English, but was born a Scot and [made] himself into a European. You [could] keep going in that way indefinitely” (History Channel, 2009). This frame of mind reflected itself on *The Giaour*. Dr. Gabriel Poole (1998) explains that “Leila and the Giaour both seek a space where they can move freely, a space which is not rigidly codified by society, unlike the harem, the city, or the monastery” (p. 43). To act and to express oneself without constraints were essential to a quality-life for Byron and the romantic poet in general.

Still, the question remains: can a free thinker, an experienced traveler and a good reader on his/her topic of interest be an authority on a people, a culture and,

most importantly, a religion that is not his/her own? This paper attempts to address this question critically. In analyzing *The Giaour*, the researcher will explore how literary orientation, historical events, personal affairs and cultural boundaries can hinder an objective understanding of the Islamic law and the Muslim culture. The first part of the paper will address the four basic themes in the poem: infidelity, polygamy, slavery and crime. The researcher will examine how Byron exposed these themes and their implications concerning the discrepancy between Christianity and Islam. The second part will attempt to elucidate the reasons behind these implications and the factors that contributed to their existence. Cultural barriers, the political clash between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, the cultural influence of *The Arabian Nights* and Byron's own life-ambitions are among the factors that held back the Westerner's understanding of Islam. Finally, the researcher will conclude with a comment on the consequences of misrepresenting Islam in works of art that are revered and made part of the classical heritage of English literature.

II. Definition of Concepts:

Orientalism is a whole established field of study aiming first to study the Near East, its language, culture and people. Its beginning is not known for certain. Edward Said defined Orientalism, in his pioneering book *Orientalism* (1979), as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience” (p. 1). This ‘special place’ comprises different ways the West perceives the East to handle and control it in the best way to serve their interests. This East is not to be mistaken with the Far East, i.e. China and Japan

mainly. (Said 1979, p. 1). One of the Western aspects to control the East is to impose their culture on the East. Cultural hegemony is part of an overall colonial process. Said (1979) states that “Orientalism [is] a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). Among the domination aspects is the cultural representation of the Orient; a systematic process that turns to be typical *mis*-representations in many texts and contexts. Lord Byron is no exception in this regard. One evident example of cultural (mis)representation is his famous Orient-set work, *The Giaour*, which is the topic of this research. This systematic process is best described by Said: he argues that the “European culture gained its strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (p. 3). Moreover, the West “constructed an image of the East as uncivilized and in need of Western intervention to help them progress in their lives” (Jukaku 2019, p. 1). Thus, the East was subjected to continuous interventions by the West, military, cultural and economic throughout the colonial period. Other forms of intervention are still undertaken in our present time. Jukaku states that “Western imperialism took over many parts of the Arab world, colonizing them not only through military intervention but also by maintaining a cultural hegemony” (p.1).

Cultural representation is “a concept cultivated by Stuart Hall within cultural studies, a discipline originating in Great Britain during the 1960s” (Connor 2010, p.169). Its aim and scope are to portray and depict the “other” in the terms set by the representor. This kind of portrayal finds its way in all literary

genres, written and performed. Hall (1997) argues that “culture is about ‘shared meanings’” (p. 1), and that language is the medium for sharing these meanings. He calls language a “*representational system*” (p. 1). Hall also asserts that “[r]epresentation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced” (p. 1). Hall’s concept of ‘shared meanings’ is the essence of cultural representation. Meanings about the *represented* people or culture are shaped and shared among the representors. Cultural representation is one aspect of cultural hegemony. The represented “other” has only to concede. Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) asserts that the “capacity to represent, portray, characterize, and depict is not easily available to just any member of just any society; moreover, the “what” and “how” in the representation of “things,” ... are circumscribed and socially regulated” (p. 80). Culture, which is a social practice, is the concern of cultural representation. Connor states that “[i]n Hall's view, any social practice is open to interpretation, and for each individual within any interaction, there is room for both ascribing (giving) meaning and constructing (creating) meaning, which in turn shapes human identity” (p. 169). Shaping human identity is the ultimate end of the process of cultural representation. The strength of identity emanates from the strength of a superior culture it belongs to. Cultural hegemony is a natural outcome and a by-product of colonialism, particularly of the Arab/Muslim lands. To keep this cultural force going, there are “forces in modern Western societies that shape and set limits on the representation of what are considered essentially subordinate beings; thus representation itself has been characterized as keeping the subordinate

subordinate, the inferior inferior” (Said 1994, p. 80). This cultural characterization is evident throughout *The Giaour*.

III. A Thematic Analysis of The Giaour

In *The Giaour*, Islam, the dominating religion of the East, comes to represent the East. The same can be said about Christianity and the West. Therefore, the poem alternates religion and culture in a sense that makes them interchangeable. The problem with this association is that the reader cannot determine whether Byron is making a judgment upon Islam or the people who hold the faith of Islam. Evidently, the reader must perceive them as one, though there is much fault in this perception. To authenticate his views and convince his readers, Byron makes his claims about Islam and the Muslims grounded in reality. His story is a historical account and his Islamic references are taken from his readings and his observations of Muslim behavior. Deducing from this, the themes of infidelity, polygamy, slavery and crime, as exposed in the poem, can hold different interpretations and, accordingly, should be analyzed in terms of religious and cultural interpretations without confusing either.

The theme of infidelity in *The Giaour* raises three different issues. First, Byron addresses the punishment of infidelity in Islam. Second, he draws a contrast between men and women in connection with this issue. And, third, Byron makes a distinction between infidelity and love. In the first case, Byron expresses an outward condemnation of the Turks’ punishment of infidelity on the convicted adulteress. In the first lines of “The Advertisement” for the poem, Byron (1900) gives a synopsis

of the tale: "The story, when entire, contain[s] the adventures of a female slave, who [is] thrown, in the Mussulman manner, into the sea for infidelity, and avenged by a young Venetian, her lover." The diction of the advertisement evidently connotes the tyranny and inhumanity of the Turks, the heroism of the 'young Venetian' and the sad fate of a woman whose only sin was love. Byron's condemnation continues when he protests against women's lack of soul: "Yea, Soul, and should our prophet say / That form was nought but breathing clay, / By Alia! I would answer nay" (*The Giaour*, lines 480-82). Moreover, Byron refuses that women should be used as mere objects of desire: "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?" (*The Giaour* 487-90). Here, Byron is making two accusations against Islam: that women have no souls, and, that women are merely objects for men's desires. Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad (1975) explain in "Women in the Afterlife: The Islamic View as Seen from Qur'an and Tradition," that "the idea that women in Islam do not have souls has prevailed in many European reports and has been accepted by some missionary witnesses at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one" (p. 39, footnote no. 2). Smith and Haddad argue that this notion is "specifically un-Qura'nic and has never been an accepted part of Muslim dogma" (p. 39). Lazarus and Sullivan (2008) assert that "[in] Christianity, women are often shunted aside. Early theology insisted that women don't possess souls and are inherently evil, because of Eve's original sin" (p. 136). Thus, Byron mistakenly ascribes to Islam a doctrine that is essentially Christian. Smith and Haddad (1975)

say that the position of women “as demonstrated by the traditions” has compromised the “Qur’anic assertion of equality” (p. 39). In *The Giaour* it is the punishment of infidelity that Byron saw in Leila's punishment as a denial of her humanity. However, it is important to clarify that this case is not a legitimate Islamic punishment for infidelity. Rudolph Peters (2005) in his book *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law* explains the penalties of adultery and how difficult it is to prove that act of adultery:

Finally, under very special circumstances, persons who have had illegal sex can be punished with the fixed penalties of either 100 lashes or death by stoning, depending on their legal status. For proving this offence, very strict standards of evidence are applied: instead of the testimonies of two, those of four eyewitnesses are required and most schools hold that a confession must be made four times in four different court sessions. (p. 60)

Peters (2005) notes that the severity of these punishments, as some have argued, serves as a “rhetorical device” for warning those who might transgress the laws established by Islam (p. 55). To conclude then, Leila's punishment is a cultural convention; it has no roots in Islam. And men are by no means excluded from punishment if they transgress such Islamic laws.

Byron further justifies infidelity by claiming that it is a form of love, not treachery: “Howe'er deserv'd her doom might be, / her treachery was truth to me; / to me she gave her heart, that all / which tyranny can ne'er enthral” (*The Giaour* 1067-69). His views about love and devotion are rather philosophical. He states, “Yes,

love indeed is light from heaven, / a spark of that immortal fire / with angels shar'd by Alia given / to lift from earth our low desire” (*The Giaour* 1131-34). Byron turns to a spiritual definition of the relationship between man and woman. By implication, he sets the Western perspective at a higher level than the worldly East. He also claims that a man/woman can be faithful to only one person. Those notions are admirably ideal in theory. In practice though, Byron is sanctioning free and open relationships between men and women, married or not, for the purpose of finding love. Byron forgets that people, unlike their ideal theories, are far from being ideal themselves. Love is not fickle, but people are. Therefore, Islam has put down rules against infidelity to protect people from many negative health and social consequences like sexually transmittable diseases, broken homes, children with unidentified parents, disrespect for women and abuse of women as ‘objects of desire,’ just to name a few. Byron states that “love is light from heaven ... to lift from earth our low desire” (George Byron Quotes, n.d.) But how can love achieve this purpose without commitment? If a man or a woman have doubts that their spouses are faithful, then how can love exist amongst them? Emotional devotion and commitment are essential for a lasting relationship. The *Giaour* mentions that “[Leila's] treachery was truth to me” (*The Giaour* 1068); Leila was emotionally devoted to the *Giaour*, but neither he nor she was committed to each other publicly. Public commitment ensures the health and continuity of any relationship. However, Byron neglects this for his ideals. A reader might indulge in such poetry. Nevertheless, Byron's claims cannot be substantiated in reality.

Byron's assertion that women are a "soulless toy for tyrant's lust" (*The Giaour* 490) comes from the fact that Hassan owned 'a harem.' Byron depicts Hassan on a journey with his new bride, as if the loss of Leila meant nothing to him: "Tis said he goes to woo a bride / More true than her who left his side" (*The Giaour* 534-35). When Byron sets the punishment of Leila against the polygamous Hassan, his claims about the inequality between men and women in Islam become even stronger. Polygamy was practiced in the Ottoman society, and especially among the wealthy, (Howe 2006). Indeed, polygamy is sanctioned in Islam with the restriction of four wives. Yet, it should not be taken as "evidence of sexual inequality and male privilege" (Barlas, 2007, p. 264). Barlas also notes that polygamy has put an end to "the pre-Islamic practice of marrying an indefinite number of times" (p. 265). In addition, the Qur'an sanctions polygamy on the condition of being 'just' to these women. In Surat An-Nisa', the Qur'an, as interpreted, says: "And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you from [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice] (Chapter 4, Verse 3). This condition of 'being just' makes it near to impossible to marry more than one wife. A devout Muslim would fear the consequences of injustice whether in this life or the afterlife; this condition curbs a man's selfish desires and forces him to perceive women as invaluable beings whom the Qur'an has protected and set rules to deal with them with respect and honor.

Leila, however, was not a wife; she was a slave. Moreover, Hassan could have an indefinite number of slaves. Therefore, Byron was referring to both gender and social inequality. Slavery is an age-old institution that had been practiced by many societies, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. In the case of Islam, Abdullah An-Na'im elucidates that the "[Islamic] Shari'a recognized slavery as an institution but sought to restrict the sources of acquisition of slaves, to improve their condition, and to encourage their emancipation through a variety of religious and civil methods" (An-Na'im, 1990, p. 172). As a supporting evidence, in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Abu Huraira narrates that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever frees a Muslim slave, Allah (God) will save all the parts of his body from the Hellfire as he has freed the body-parts of the slave" (Al-Bukhari, 2009). Islam also recognizes slave-rights and emphasizes the importance of treating them with respect and kindness (An-Na'im, 1990). Byron previously confused polygamy with gender inequality on the one hand, and the punishment of infidelity with the Christian doctrine that women are inherently evil, on the other. Here, Byron also confused slavery as practiced throughout history with slavery as controlled and gradually abolished by Islam.

Finally, it is impossible to overlook Byron's striking contrast between the fate of Leila and that of the Giaour. Both have gravely sinned; she was unfaithful while he was a murderer. She was killed; he confessed to his priest, and, consequently, was forgiven. In such a framework, Byron illustrates a world of difference between the 'barbarous' East and the merciful West. He even ironically comments on the

heavenly reward for Hassan and the punishment of the Giaour from the Islamic perspective of the afterlife:

But him [Hassan] the maids of Paradise

Impatient to their halls invite,

.....

They come their kerchiefs green they wave,

And welcome with a kiss the brave!

But thou, false Infidel! shalt writhe

Beneath avenging Monkir's scythe ;

And from its torment 'scape alone

To wander round lost Eblis' throne (lines 739-748).

The exaggerated description of Paradise and Hell becomes a caricature of the Islamic faith. In portraying Hassan with the *Houris* (fair women in Paradise) welcoming him, Byron extends and perpetuates the image of the lustful Muslim man. He is also making a judgment upon God Almighty as being, far it be from Him, unjust. To Byron, He, (Allah), is the God of Muslims. Thus, Byron in *The Giaour* denounces the Ottomans as barbarous and the cause of their deteriorating state is Islam. In his description of the Giaour's Hell, Byron shows how far Islam can be vengeful and hateful to those who have transgressed its laws and those who are non-Muslim. Byron's views reflect typical intolerance, harshness and injustices usually ascribed to the Islamic East in a biased manner. In effect, Byron stereotypes

the Islamic perspective of the afterlife classifying people into three types: Paradise as an exclusive “club” for Muslim men; second, women have no souls, so it would not be a crime to use them and kill them at will and third, non-Muslims as infidels who are misrepresented as enemies in life and doomed after death. Byron's simplistic approach to the Muslim faith makes Islam look like a backward religion designed to please men and wield their power on earth.

IV. Reasons for Islamic and Oriental Misrepresentations in *The Giaour*

Why is it that so many misconceptions about the Islamic faith are readily embraced by the West and perpetuated in their literature? Even Byron, a freethinker who is well travelled in the East and well-read in its faith and traditions could not achieve an objective understanding of Islam. In this section, light will be shed on possible reasons behind such negative and false representations of Islam and Muslims as explored in the themes of the poem.

One of the first important factors contributing to the misrepresentation of Islam is the evolution of ‘Orientalism’ in the nineteenth century. Professor Günsel Renda (2006) says that during this century, the Oriental vogue has widely spread throughout France, England, Germany, Austria and Italy. He explains that Orientalism is “a concept created by Europe and nourished by imperialism and colonialism as a result of the industrial revolution;” for this, “[Europe] has manufactured an exotic, mystical, [and] ‘Oriental’ image filled with unknowns” (p. 18). He also notes that the most popular themes depicted in literature and art were the scenes of “the Oriental bath and the harem, which even if they travelled in the

East would be unable to see” (p. 18). Usually, these scenes were “exaggerated” in paintings to cater to the European audience of the time (p. 18). Lord Byron, one of the major Romantic writers of England in that age, benefitted greatly from the Oriental vogue. He published a number of Orient-themed ‘tales’ between 1812 and 1816 that brought him major success: *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, *The Siege of Cornith*, *Parisina*, and most famously *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Marchand, 2020). Byron was one of those who defined a sub-genre for Romantic literature: ‘Romantic Orientalism.’ *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* defines this genre as “the recurrence of recognizable elements of Asian and African place names, historical and legendary people, religions, philosophies, art, architecture, interior decoration, costume, and the like in the writings of the British Romantics” (Phillips, 2013 & Koster, n.d.). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* also adds that the translation of *The Arabian Nights* into English (from a version in French, 1705–08) has inspired the development of the Oriental genre “Romantic Orientalism” (Phillips, 2013 & Koster, n.d.).

The Arabian Nights is considered a literary work, or rather a conglomeration of literary works, that has greatly contributed to the creation of the image of the Orient. In the introduction to his book *Slave of Desire: Sex, Love, and Death in the 1001 Nights*, Professor Daniel Beaumont (2002) writes, “[in] my view, despite the antiquity of many of the plots in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the stories as we have them now seem to wear the garb of the late medieval period in the Arab-Islamic world, that is, the eras of the Mamluks and the Ottomans” (p. 25). We may

infer from Professor Beaumont's introductory article that, due to the many publications, translations and editions of *The Arabian Nights* since their first mention in the ninth century AD, the stories have been modified and appropriated to the taste of the period. Beaumont (2002) presents Muhsin Mahdi as a man who devoted himself to the reconstruction of a faithful Arabic text of *Arabian Nights*. Beaumont says that Mahdi argues that

European demand for a 'complete version' of the work distorted the Mamluk-era original. ... The result was the creation of Arabic manuscripts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that delivered more nights and more stories, and, as Mahdi puts it, the book came to be a "catch all" for popular narratives to meet European demand. (p. 22)

Therefore, popular taste and popular demand drive and control the creative process in art and literature. After all, even artists and authors must gain some financial benefit. In this case, art is not only an expression of the individual artist but also the expression of the general taste. Orient-themed European art combined with the popularity of *The Arabian Nights* represented a secured success for the ambitious artist, poet or novelist of that time. Accordingly, the image of the Orient and Islam could easily be manipulated, distorted or exaggerated.

The artist can justify these misrepresentations as being simply part of 'fiction.' After all, anything is possible in an imaginary world. Why, then, should Muslims feel offended by a work that is 'not real'? Byron subtitled his poem *The Giaour: A Fragment of a Turkish Tale*. In reality, the story is not only a mere work

of fiction. In Note 43 of *The Giaour*, Byron writes, "The circumstance to which the above story relates was not very uncommon in Turkey". He relates another story about the jealous wife of Muchtar Pasha who accused twelve beautiful women of adultery with the Pasha's son. Consequently, they were drowned in the lake like Leila. Of the tale presented in *The Giaour*, Byron says he "heard it by accident recited by one of the coffee-house story-tellers" (Byron 2019, Footnote 123 to *The Giaour*). Evidently, the story is a mixture of fact and fiction. The fiction itself is grounded in reality since drowning adulterous women was a Turkish custom in that time (*The Giaour*). As discussed previously, this custom has no relation to Islamic doctrines neither in proving adultery nor in the execution of the mentioned customary punishment. Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire was established as an Islamic state and was, therefore, considered to represent the heritage of the Islamic culture. Byron set himself to misrepresent the Islamic punishment of adultery; we are uncertain whether he was ever acquainted with this Islamic law. What we are sure of, though, is that Byron had a strong motivation to misrepresent Islamic culture, particularly, the Ottoman Empire. This was largely due to a combination of political and personal reasons.

As for politics, the fear of Europe from Turkish expansion goes back as far as the sixteenth century (Renda, 2006, p. 5). Professor Günsel Renda asserts that "prejudiced propaganda publications were prepared against the expansion policy of the Ottomans. In the newspapers and bulletins published in the Germanic countries there were pictures with a political content carrying negative images of the Turks"

(pp. 5-6). This fractured relationship between Europe and the Ottoman Empire spurred political and military collisions between the two. Of particular interest to our subject is the Greek War of Independence between 1821-1832. Byron was interested in this cause and contributed to it (Hanson, 2003). Hanson explains that Byron “longed for the opportunity for some noble action that would vindicate him in the eyes of his countrymen [such as his incestuous relationship with his half-sister and various other affairs with women.]. Therefore, “when the London Greek Committee contacted him in April 1823 to act as its agent in aiding the Greek war for independence from the Turks, Byron immediately accepted the offer” (para. 14).

In fact, Byron’s interest in politics and social welfare had started earlier at home. He took his seat in the House of Lords in 1809 and gave his first speech in 1812 on the Luddite riots; “... he used his power to stand up for the Luddites against Prime Minister Spencer Perceval, who was fighting for a bill that would make “machine-breaking” a capital offense. It was Byron’s first speech in the House of Lords” (Eschner, 2017, para. 6). Byron delivered some eloquent speech defending them: “... the perseverance of these miserable men in their proceedings, tends to prove that nothing but absolute want could have driven a large, and once honest and industrious, body of the people, into the commission of excesses so hazardous ...” (Simkin, 1997, para. 9).

Byron’s aforementioned political activities, local and abroad, were likely to be manifestations of his Romantic spirit. We see him as a man morally liberated but humanely committed to his cause. Unfortunately, Byron could not carry his

ideologies in a society so strict when it comes to morals. He left England in 1816, exiling himself from society twice: once to Switzerland and the other was to Venice (Marchand, 2020). Thus, he came into close contact with the Mediterranean world and its conflicts. The death of his close friend Shelley by drowning strengthened Byron to fight for a cause. For him, the cause was the Greek War of Independence (Marchand, 2020). It is interesting to note that in the opening lines of *The Giaour*, Byron speaks of the lost Greek civilization: “Such is the aspect of this shore / Tis Greece but living Greece no more! / So coldly sweet, so deadly fair, / We start for soul is wanting there” (90-94). Byron's lamentation on Greece was shared by all Europe because of the representation of Greeks' cause in so much of the Western classical heritage. “His poetry, along with Delacroix's art, helped arouse European public opinion in favor of the Greek revolutionaries ...” (Patsidou, 2011, para. 8). Byron, along with other artists and intellectuals of his time, took the Greek cause further; they succeeded in

treating modern Greek history as an extension of ancient history; the idea of a regeneration of the spirit of ancient Greece permeated the rhetoric of the Greek cause's supporters. Classicists and romantics of that period envisioned the casting out of the Turks as the prelude to the revival of the Golden Age.” (Patsidou, 2011, para. 9).

Thus, the political and cultural causes are enjoined. Through contributing to the Greek cause, Byron could envision achieving three heroic deeds: on the battlefield as a competent soldier, in protecting and sustaining the Western heritage

and in overcoming an age-old enemy, i.e. the Muslim Ottomans. His zest for success can be read through the following lines in *The Giaour*:

Snatch from the ashes of your sires

The embers of their former fires,

And he who in the strife expires

Will add to theirs a name of fear,

That Tyranny shall quake to hear,

And leave his sons a hope, a fame,

They too will rather die than shame;

For Freedom's battle once begun,

Bequeathed by bleeding Sire to Son,

Though baffled oft is ever won. (lines 116-125)

These introductory lines to the poem can be perceived as an expansion to the conflict in the tale itself; Byron is orienting the reader's attitude against the Ottomans before he even starts his tale by igniting the longstanding conflict between the East and West. Most importantly, he is also belittling the Islamic civilization in claiming that the Ottomans have extinguished the former spirit of Greece. He keeps going back to the idea of the barbarous, avaricious and philistine nature of the Islamic culture. In a sense, one can see that Hassan represents all these qualities through his portrayal by Byron. On the other end of the spectrum, the Christian culture is understood to be the spiritual, merciful and appreciative-of-beauty kind of religion. In emphasizing these cultural discrepancies, we can see that Byron's main

interest is culture, not religion. Byron was more interested in misrepresenting the Ottomans than misrepresenting Islam. For him, Islam, as a mere ritual practice, was of no concern. Consequently, to Leila's death, Byron was condemning the merciless mind not the merciless religion. Byron's religious and moral transgressions in his own country speak enough to say that he was not satisfied by his society's moral code and rigid approach to religion. But, when in Europe, especially in Venice, he felt most at home. Having said that, we come to understand that "cultural boundaries" are the strongest hindrance to bridging an understanding gap between the East and the West. The first step to accepting any religion is to accept its culture. Here, the Ottomans with their severe punishments of adulterous women, cause the reader to question whether Byron's arguments are justifiable. The danger of deviating from a correct application of Islamic laws has a wider resonance than can be imagined. It shapes the society from within by making it fear its own religion instead of embracing it, and it shapes the societies from without by creating a negative stereotype in their perception of Islam.

If Hassan represents everything negative Byron sees in the Orient, then the Giaour represents the split-self between fulfilling individual desires while conforming to social norms. In the Giaour, the conflict turns inwardly to the self. Thus, after the story is told, it is time to reflect upon it. This emphasis on individualism is a famous characteristic of Romantic poetry (Morner and Rausch, 1997). There are many indications in the poem that Byron actually identifies with the Giaour, and, that the Giaour's conflict concerning his illegal love for Leila

reflects Byron's own self-awareness of guilt concerning his incestuous relationship with his half-sister Augusta. In *The Giaour* the conflict was unresolved by the killing of Hassan. Towards the end of the poem, the Giaour confessed to a priest: 'I lov'd her, friar! nay, adored / But these are words that all can use / I prov'd it more in deed than word / There's blood upon that dinted sword' (*The Giaour* 1029-32). The Giaour tried to turn his illegal relationship with Leila into a story about true love devastated by tragedy. Nevertheless, the priest here is only a silent listener; there is no sense of judgment on his part. As in a dramatic monologue, although the Giaour is telling his story to someone else, he is essentially saying more about himself. There is also an effort on his part to convince himself that his deeds are acceptable or tolerable. However, he cannot reach conviction. He turns instead to blame "the other," the Muslim enemy Hassan: "Thou wilt absolve me from the deed, / For he was hostile to thy creed!" (1038-39). This sounds more as a hopeless cry than an effort to convince the priest. The Giaour also tries to mitigate his sin in contrast to the 'infidel' Hassan. This is another effort from the Giaour to rid himself from guilt. Nevertheless, the guilt lies heavy on his mind. He calls it 'The wound that time can never heal' (*The Giaour* 1121). The poem turns to a darker side of the Giaour, exploring the nature of sin and guilt. The reader is led to see that the self-tortured mind is far worse a punishment than being punished by drowning. Byron captures the consequences of a sinful life in the following lines:

A chase of idle hopes and fears,

Begun in folly, closed in tears.

If won, to equal ills betrayed,
Woe waits the insect and the maid,
A life of pain, the loss of peace,
From infant's play, or man's caprice:
The lovely toy so fiercely sought
Has lost its charm by being caught. (lines 398- 405)

These lines reflect a depressed soul that has no hope in life. Though these lines depict the psychological torture of the Giaour, yet, the lines show more autobiographical elements in Byron's own personal life. He became more depressed with a great shame he had brought on himself and his half-sister but he could not bring himself to reject her. Exiling himself to Venice was the manifestation of Byron's self-inflicted torture. Two lines from the poem show how people receive shame: "And every woe a tear can claim / Except an erring sister's shame" (*The Giaour* 420-21). This direct reference to 'sister' reflects Byron's digression on his own guilt while the framework of the story is still in perspective.

Going back to the cultural dichotomy between Muslims and Christians, this part that explores guilt and sin also shows another aspect. In the punishment of Leila and the subsequent episode where Hassan is depicted as going to look for another bride, the story is bereft of feeling. In contrast to the psychological analysis Byron makes of the Giaour, he does not offer any such attention to Hassan or Leila. This may be analyzed from two perspectives. Firstly, Byron's focus on the Giaour alone shows that his main interest in the tale is in understanding the psychological

consequences of guilt and this is linked to the 'Romantic' tendency of interest in the individual as discussed before. Secondly, Byron's excluding of any descriptions of hate or love in relation to Hassan keeps him away from the sympathies of his readers. The reader is already framed to have prejudice against the East in the 'Advertisement.' But to silence the voice of Hassan altogether puts him at an inferior level to the Giaour. Hassan is not given a chance to justify himself and his crime as the Giaour is. For, after all, he is not a Christian, and he cannot be forgiven or seek forgiveness. Byron gives him the advantage though of a 'Turk's Paradise' in a tone of mocking irony. This distancing of the 'other,' the 'foreigner' from the text gives way to negative perceptions about the Islamic East such as 'tyranny, danger or mistrust'. It has become evident that the lack of bilateral cultural communication leads to a sequence of misunderstandings. As a result, the gap widens further between the East and West. Silencing Leila implies the silencing of Eastern women in general. They are to live in silence (in the hidden rooms of the harem), and they are to die in silence. That is to say, women have no voice in the Eastern world. The only voice that is heard is that of men. Byron also implies the "shame" Eastern men associate women with whether sinful or not. In the case of Leila, her shame was so great that she had to be immediately removed from that society. Accordingly, Byron plays on the intention behind Ottoman conventions in relation to women. Instead of perceiving women as invaluable, they become dispensable sources of shame.

V. Conclusion

It is important to think about *The Giaour* as a classical text written by a notable author in English literature. This is because such works endure for long periods of time. Lord Byron himself had a sufficient “oriental” experience and this credits the text with authenticity. The work is indeed authentic as far as it represents an “attitude” towards the Orient during that historical period, but not the Orient itself. So, readers must be cautious about interpreting literary texts based on actual events. Many issues have to be considered before making a judgment on a certain culture. In this paper, we have considered the historical, political, religious and autobiographical contexts.

Another thing that must be considered is how a certain culture accepts its own values. What may be valued highly in a certain culture may be considered a form of abuse or degeneration for another culture. We cannot measure Eastern values by Western ones. Byron judges love in the East according to Western values. What is considered an act of love for Byron can be an act of adultery for the Muslims (if extramarital). However, Byron exposed this idea in *The Giaour* only to suggest the anti-romantic relationship between a husband and a wife in the Orient. This type of thinking only reflects the European condescension over other cultures. It considers itself at the apex of a civilization that has achieved the summit of human intellectual capacity. It looks down upon other nations and judges them with prejudice.

Sheer human prejudice also drives others to misrepresent people belonging to other cultures. Byron is not excluded from this category. This too, must be taken

into consideration. Though Byron came in frequent contact with the East through his travels, he failed to acquire a fair and accurate understanding of the Eastern culture and values. Unfortunately, his experience did not go as far as understanding people like Hassan or Leila. Their silence in the poem reflects a lack of sympathy and communication between the two cultures. Although the East and West come across each other in travels by their own people, politics and other ways of communication, they rarely identify each other fairly. Their communication is essentially based on interest. For this reason, misinterpretation and negative attitudes arise on each side.

Finally, the West and East must look inwardly towards themselves and see how they represent themselves to the world. The Ottoman Empire, which once stood as a representative of Islam, did not stand by its laws completely. The Ottomans had immersed themselves in their cultural conventions so deeply that the world-wide appeal of the Islamic religion has lost its lustre. Consequently, Islam was viewed negatively by other nations. The practice of drowning adulteress women, like Leila in the poem, heavily distorts the image of Islam and how it treats women. *The Giaour*, therefore, becomes a classical example of how different cultures interact and view each other. The reader must be critical about all the factors that interplay in creating such works of art.

Further research may consider cultural, religious, psychological and social reasons for misrepresentations of other cultures and its own people. This would help cultures, at times, and people to interact and have a better mutual understanding of each other.

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إشكالات التمثيل وسوء التمثيل الثقافي في القصيدة السردية المعنونة

"حكاية الجاور (الكافر)" للورد بايرون (١٨١٣)

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ملخص البحث : يُعد التمثيل الثقافي موضوعاً حاضراً بقوة في الأدب لأن الأدب يعد وعاءاً للفكر والثقافة وموجهاً للسلوك الإنساني. يمتاز الأدب بأنه قناة لا غنى عنها في معرفة وفهم والتواصل مع الثقافات والشعوب الأخرى. ومع ذلك فإن هذا النوع من الفهم كثيراً ما يكتنفه نوع من الضبابية نتيجة نقص معرفة "الأخر" وبالتالي يؤدي هذا إلى سوء تمثيل ثقافي للشعوب والثقافات الأخرى في الأعمال الأدبية.

ومتى ما كان أي طرف تحت تأثير "نحن الأفضل والأرقى" وهم "الأدنى والأحقر" فإن التشويه المتعمد لصورة الآخر يكون سيّد المشهد لا محالة. المثال الأبرز للتشويه المتعمد لصورة الآخر هو التمايز الثقافي بين الشرق والغرب عبر العصور التاريخية المختلفة بدءاً من العصور الوسطى حتى العصر الراهن، ويكون الشرق غالباً في الجانب الأضعف. يفترض أن الأدب والأدباء يُظهرون الثقافات والشعوب الأخرى على نحو يتسم بالموضوعية والعدل ليسهموا في الفهم الثقافي الصحيح المتبادل بين الثقافات، خاصة في عهد العولمة، وفي أوقات يحتاج العالم فيها للتعاون والتعاون.

البحث الذي بين أيدينا يتناول إشكالات التمثيل وسوء التمثيل الثقافي في قصيدة الأديب والشاعر الإنجليزي الشهير اللورد بايرون المعنونة بـ "الجاور" وهي تعني الكافر بالتركية. "الجاور" هي قصيدة سردية (سماها بايرون حكاية تركية) تحكي قصة نصراني

أقام علاقة غير شرعية مع فتاة عثمانية من الإماء اسمها ليلي. أُعتبرت العلاقة غير مقبولة اجتماعياً لأن العاشقين ينتميان إلى ديانتين مختلفتين. الطريقة التي تناول بايرون بها القصة توحى بعدم معرفته وفهمه لثقافة الشرق وإن كان الباحث يرجح أن ذلك لم يكن متعمداً من الكاتب بل لنقص معرفته غير المبرر فشهرة الكاتب وإقامته قريباً من المشرق لا تبرران جهله بثقافة الشرق. ومن ذلك أنه خلط بين الحياة الاجتماعية للعثمانيين وتعاليم الإسلام وجعلها هي الإسلام! كما حكم على أنماط الحياة الاجتماعية لدى الآخر بناء على مفاهيمه الشخصية.

خلص البحث إلى ضرورة الفهم الصحيح لثقافة الآخر منعاً لحدوث سوء التمثيل الثقافي، وإن كان هذا يسوغ من العامي وغير المتعلم فلا يسوغ من كبار الكُتّاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستشراق، العثمانيون، الاستشراق الرومانسي، التمثيل الثقافي، التعصب الثقافي.