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**Romantic Orientalism in Byron’s Grecian Verse:
Discovering the Self in a Decadent Orient**

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Abstract

In Lord Byron's Grecian verse, Greece is presented through a combination of Romanticism and Orientalism. In such poems as the "The Curse of Minerva," "The Isles of Greece," and "January 22nd, Missolonghi," Byron neither idealizes nor emphasizes Greece's negative aspects. Instead, inspired by his personal experiences from his travels, the poet acknowledges the contribution of Greek antiquity to European culture, but at the same time cannot ignore its historical reality. By the early 19th century Greece had been reduced to a decadent country which, under Ottoman occupation, had lost its identity. In poems such as *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, and *The Age of Bronze*, the poet's interest is focused not so much on Greece as a country, but on Greece as the locus of ideas, values, and sentiments which Britain sorely needed to reconstruct its future and through which the individual was enabled to rediscover his own inner self.

Byron presents an image of Greece from both a Western and an Eastern perspective. On the one hand, it appears as an Other—a mysterious and undiscovered place to European travelers—and on the other, due to its natural beauty, a familiar place for the Romantic poet, providing him with the means to find himself and escape, even in his imagination, from modern industrial society. Besides its exotic character, the Eastern environment enhances the feelings of nostalgia and melancholy in the poet's mind, revealing the spiritual unity between Nature and Man, while also embodying various philosophical concepts.

The use of enslaved female characters to personify Greece highlights its political weakness, while prefiguring the colonization of the Orient in the colonization of the female body. At the same time, the feminization of the Orient facilitates the transition from the poet's unfulfilled Romantic love to his struggle for political ideals, specifically that of freedom against tyranny. Byron also uses the Orient as a vehicle to express his political opinions on current debates such as the question of Greek independence and Britain's foreign policy in the region. The introduction of political thinking in Romantic poetry gives voice to the poet's concerns over national issues while enabling him to offer clear answers to these issues so as to finally find the spiritual salvation he needs.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze Lord Byron's view of Greece in relation to the theories of Romanticism and Orientalism. Byron employs Romanticism and Orientalism in his poems in order to express his opinion on Greece from both a positive and a negative perspective. Our purpose is to show that, besides being presented by Byron as an idealized place of romantic landscapes, imagination, and historical significance, Greece is also viewed as a decadent, colonized Orient, deprived of identity.

Chapter 1 presents the historical background and criticism concerning the theories of Orientalism and Romanticism. Orientalism existed from antiquity in Plato's and Aristotle's doctrines, where for the first time the concept of Otherness is introduced in the reference to the major enemies of the Greek city-states, the Persians as "barbarians" (Kalmar 31). In contemporary criticism, Orientalism is defined as the representation of the Orient by European visitors, writers and philosophers. The Orient according to Said was a European construct, being established in the European mind as a place of mystery, romance, and exotic settings (Said 2). This theory is based on the distinction between the West, or "Occident," and the Orient which is considered an area of peoples and civilizations that remain inferior to the Occident (203). For Said, although the Orient and the Occident are presented as two opposite cultural identities (332), they become closely associated as the existence of the former presupposes the existence of the latter. David Kopf, in "Hermeneutics vs. History" subverts Said's approach by proposing the concept of "Historical Orientalism" (Kopf 199) which he defines as Orientalism viewed in relation to historical reality. This critic argues that the Orient, rather than constituting a Western construct, represents a legitimate historical entity because it was affected by numerous changes occurring throughout time. Diego Saglia also argues that Romanticism was a crucial factor in the development of Orientalism, as it expressed the European interest and fascination for unknown foreign lands and civilizations (468).

Inspired by the spirit of the French revolution (Curran 21), the Romantic Movement began during the late 18th century in Britain, when a new poetic generation emerged (Jones 5). Among its acknowledged figures was Lord George Gordon Byron. The key themes of Romanticism are nature, imagination, and emotion. More

specifically, nature and imagination are dominant in the poems; nature expresses the poets' struggle for personal freedom and desire to reunite with the natural landscape as a refuge from the industrial environment (Curran 12), while creative imagination enables the individual to form his own view of the real world (Greenblatt 8). The simultaneous presence of nature and imagination in this poetic genre became fundamental for the poets' reception of the world. Actually, the Romantic poets' interest was mainly focused on the spiritual world and the individuals' feelings (12). In the critique of Romanticism, Terry Pinkard interprets the idea of nature incorporating Hegel's philosophy of nature (Pinkard 19), while other theorists like Meyer Abrams (Day 97) adopt a religious approach to the relation between nature and reason.

The combination of Romanticism and Orientalism in Byron results in the creation of "Romantic Orientalism," showing the great influence Orientalism had in the field of Romantic poetry. However, despite the presence of Orientalism in Byron's poetry, at the same time, Byron can be said to move towards anti-Orientalism, adopting a postcolonial perspective. The poet narrates his personal experiences and thoughts from his travels to Greece during 1800s, shifting from his admiration of antiquity to his disillusionment about the present. Byron's achievement is the creation of a new kind of Romantic Orientalism where not only does he express the Western view of the East but also as, can be seen in the tales *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, presents Greece as an enslaved part of the Ottoman Empire (Cochran 12).

In Chapter 2, the analysis of the poems "The Curse of Minerva," "The Isles of Greece," and "22nd of January, Missolonghi" focuses on the image of Greece as a decadent, Romanticized Orient. Here the poet marks the transition from the idealization in the descriptions of nature to the disillusionment while encountering the real conditions by introducing his personal and in some cases political comments. In "The Curse of Minerva," the romantic imagery of the Greek landscape observed from the Acropolis is quickly replaced by the poet's feelings of anger, melancholy and despair. The figure of the goddess Minerva, the representative of Greek antiquity, plays the role of the poet's alter ego. Emphasis is given on the curse which constitutes the poet's attack against the aristocrat Elgin and Britain's politics for the violation of Greek culture. Byron here makes efforts to defend the moral values of the past against corruption that commercialism promotes, accusing Britain for the cultural erosion of Greece and also reminding it of its responsibility to preserve the cultural wealth of

antiquity. In Cantos 2 and 3 from “The Isles of Greece,” the Byronic character of Don Juan comes in contact with the natural beauty of a typical Greek island. Nature is automatically transformed into a familiar space for the protagonist, giving him the opportunity to develop his thoughts on love, marriage, and other related themes. Whereas Don Juan associates nature with freedom, at the same time he expresses romantic melancholy. In “22nd of January, Missolonghi,” the dominant theme is philhellenism. Byron identifies himself with the Orient—in this case, the area of Missolonghi—becoming a part of it and speaking in a more heroic tone. This poem highlights the poet’s change in his political beliefs concerning the debate on how political change should be brought about.

The third chapter brings into the discussion the idea of Romantic Hellenism divided into two topics: firstly, the view of Greece as a feminized Orient in *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, “Maid of Athens ere were part,” and “I enter thy garden of roses;” and secondly its relation to the issue of freedom also discussed in the poems *When a Man Hath no Freedom* and Canto 6 from *The Age of Bronze*. The portrayal of Greece through the characters of Oriental women who are enslaved in a harem—Leila in *The Giaour* and Zuleika in *The Bride of Abydos*—reflects Greece’s current inferiority while also provoking the sympathy of the West (Roessel 60). Also, the extensive use of Oriental vocabulary and the references to Islamic traditions add mystery and exoticism to the stories. What is more, the Giaour’s and Selim’s rebellious acts against the tyrannical rulers, instead of being seen as a fight for the love of their paramours, is conceptualized as having ideological motives to overthrow despotism and re-establish Greece as the ideal Orient. What must also be noted is the darker side of Romanticism which can be seen in the violence of the Turks and accompanies the mystery and exoticism of these oriental tales.

Continuing with “Maid of Athens, ere were part” and “I enter thy garden of roses,” the poet turns his confession of love into nostalgia and melancholy due to the impossibility of return. The female figures of Teresa Makri and Haidee signify symbolically as the poet’s unfulfilled love for the Orient. To be specific, the definition of love in these two poetic works focuses on the spiritual through which the poet declares his emotions, thoughts and anxieties in an attempt to reconsider his own identity.

The object of analysis of the last two poems, “When a Man Hath No Freedom” and Canto 6 from *The Age of Bronze*, is Byron’s marriage of Greece with

the value of freedom, which is intended to encourage philhellenism. Influenced by Voltaire (Roessel 15), Byron clarifies his political position concerning the debate of Greek independence. Finally, Greece for the poet is more than a Romantic Orient; it is a set of values and ideas linked with national and individual freedom.

2. Orientalism and Romanticism: Affinities and Divergences

2.1 Orientalism: Historical background

According to Hegel, Orientalism begins in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle (Haldar 28). Hegel argues that the exotic fantasies and desires found in Orientalism are rooted in the Platonic concept of pleasure, while the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is modeled on the master-slave relationship mentioned in Aristotle. In Plato's philosophy pleasure is a component of the physical state of happiness and related to the ability of the individual to attain bodily self-mastery, self-discovery, and prudence (29). For this philosopher, the body provided the fundamental pleasure necessary for the individual soul, while at the same time preserving the order and well-being of the city, what Plato calls the *agathon*. The human body is perceived in ancient Greek philosophy as fundamental to self-awareness, and therefore had to be discovered and colonized. However, excessive enjoyment was thought to result in the establishment of tyranny (36), defined as the political system in which the ruler, through the use of force, aims at maintaining absolute authority over others, in order to satisfy his desires. Tyranny, connected by Plato with the inability to control feverish desires in the individual soul or in the city, is implicitly associated with the Orient.

Also, in his references to the Persians, the main enemy of the Greek city-states, Aristotle alludes to the cultural Otherness that Orientalism assumes (Kalmar 31). This otherness is expressed with the derogatory term "barbarian" which highlights Oriental inferiority. For Aristotle, the distinction between Athenian and Persian depended on the issue of freedom, with the former representing the ideal of the free citizen, in contrast to the latter who was identified with subservience and slavery. As a consequence, freedom was viewed as the pivotal concept in the political life of antiquity, producing anti-tyrannical sentiment in Greece and Rome, in stark contrast to the East where tyrannical governments were the norm and held absolute power over their people. Aristotle's assumptions regarding the Persians' Otherness led him to conclude that Greece ought to rule over barbarians due to the fact that the

latter were slaves by nature. This Aristotelian view of the Persian East is viewed by Ivan Kalmar as a fundamental component of Greek imperialism which was to later pave the ground for the development of European imperialism and Orientalism. For the Romans, on the other hand, the Orient was associated with the Hellenic East, whose language and culture were seen as a model for their own Empire (34). Thus, rather than being imagined as an exotic and foreign land, Greece was viewed as Rome's historical counterpart, while the Orient was imagined as a familiar civilization that flourished in the past and needed to be revived in the present.

In English literature, the Orient and the Occident are mentioned for the first time in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*, one of the 24 *Canterbury Tales*. During the English Renaissance, this concept can also be found in Shakespeare's *Othello*. According to Debra Johanyak in "Turning Turk: Modern English Orientalism, and Shakespeare's *Othello*," the phrase "turning Turk" reveals the importance of Asia in the European imaginary. It is associated with the protagonist of the homonymous tragedy who, as a converted Christian lieutenant in the Venice militia and simultaneously an African Moor, is riven by a deep cultural conflict (77). Othello's experience in foreign lands is typical of European travel narratives in which the Orient is figured as a dangerous and animalistic place inhabited by cannibals (79). Turks are presented in the play as a threat for the sovereignty of Venice, representing otherness, violence, and barbaric behaviour. However, given that Othello is himself a former slave trying to integrate into Venetian society and rise socially by marrying Desdemona, his inner conflict can be said to reflect the larger cultural conflict between East and the West, Christian Europe and Islamic East (81). For Johanyak, Shakespeare's use of the term "Turk" implies both the religious Other of Christendom and those who were against the values of the Enlightenment (82). Thus, Othello's suicide signals the tragic hero's resignation to his cultural heritage and, by extension, to his destructive Other, as he proves unable to define his selfhood and fully integrate into his adopted culture.

Although Orientalism, as a concept, existed from antiquity, the division of East and West along geographical and religious lines was established in the European imagination only after the fall of Constantinople and the subsequent rise of the Ottoman Empire (Kalmar 40, 41). The Christian European West was named the "Occident" while the term "Orient" was used to refer to the Muslim East. Moreover, as Kalmar notes, the emergence of Protestantism transformed the Orient from a

familiar space to an exotic imaginary in keeping with the Biblical doctrine of divine grace and the objective of recovering the idea of the sublime (55). Just as Protestantism promoted the individual's ability to read the Bible independently of any religious authority, so Orientalism allowed Renaissance thinkers to construct their own view of unknown places through the power of the imagination.

Besides offering a demonic image of the Ottoman Empire, literary texts also provided evidence of the political, cultural and economic interactions between England and the Ottomans (Lim 4). As Walter Lim suggests, in the Elizabethan era the creation of an alliance between England and the Ottoman Empire was seen as a possible counter to Spanish imperialism. Thus, economic and other exchanges between England and the Ottomans increased the West's interest in the East so that Orientalism gradually developed into colonialism. This came about as a result of the expansion of the British Empire eastwards in the early 17th century (Bulman 45). William Bulman suggests that Britain's military and mercantile presence in the Mediterranean and the Eastern Atlantic facilitated cultural exchange with various colonies, while England's colonial aspirations proved crucial in the exploration of the Islamic empires of the East.

2.2 Postcolonialism as “Anti-Orientalism”

Orientalism is defined by Edward Said as the way the Orient is traditionally represented by European visitors, writers and scholars. The Orient according to Said is a European construct and became established in the Western mind as the place of exotic and romantic landscapes and experiences (Said 2). Orientalism constitutes an integral part of colonialism due to the fact that the Orient represents the cultural and geographic locus of Europe's colonies; it therefore becomes the image of the Other, the image through which Europe can redefine itself (3). Consequently, a binary opposition between the two concepts is created with the West, or “Occident,” defining the East, or “Orient,” in contradistinction to itself (3). Said claims that the Orient constitutes an area of knowledge of places, peoples, and civilizations provided by Western narratives which presents it as inherently inferior to the Occident (42). The Orient is moreover viewed by the West as a cultural and political Other as well as a

fixed geographical locale to be judged and defined by European civilization (109). Walter Lim also analyzes the idea of the East as a recurring image projected by Europe that helps establish its cultural identity: in order for England to be viewed as the centre of civilization, Asia must be seen as the epitome of savagery at the periphery (9). Raymond Schwab's explanation of the concept revolves around the West's tendency to unravel the mystery and exoticism of the East, reminiscent of Europe's enthusiasm for a return to the values of Greek and Roman antiquity (Said 52). The Orient in the European imaginary therefore becomes the space which produces fantasies, terrors, and monstrous characters, but also exotic desires, settings, and heroes (63).

On the other hand, in "Hermeneutics versus History," David Kopf argues that Said's view of Orientalism is limited and needs to be supplemented by what he calls "historical Orientalism" (199). His argument is that Orientalism is not a separate tradition with its own history and thought, but a set of institutions integral to history proper (196). Kopf's theory of historical Orientalism highlights the fact that Orientalism could not remain unaffected by historical changes, resulting in different manifestations of the concept emerging at different times and different places (199). Offering the example of the Bengali Renaissance (201), he explains that without British Orientalism it would have been impossible for India to have raised its self-awareness and established its cultural identity in the modern world. In opposition to Said's view of Orientalism as a species of cultural imperialism, Kopf considers it as the means of recreating a new self-image by the East (206).

In "Orientalism in Reverse," Sadik Jalal Al-Azm proposes an extra-historical type of Orientalism which he calls "ontological Orientalism" (230) and which he describes as a metaphysical concept that responds to the view of the Orient by the modern West. Arguing that this kind of Orientalism is an ideological issue he offers the Arabs as an example, in which the mind of the Orient is revealed through its language and its scientific achievements which swept through the Occident (232). Bernard Lewis in "The Question of Orientalism" views the concept in historical terms as a series of imperialistic conquests between empires (252). The source of the terms "Orient" and "Oriental" is seen by Lewis to be the Mediterranean, where the British and the French viewed the neighboring Ottoman Empire as a possible threat to their hegemony at a time when Asia was the only "East" in the Western imaginary. Lewis places Greece at the fulcrum of European Orientalism due to the geographical area

opposite the Aegean Sea being named “Asia Minor.” However, Europe’s interest did not remain restricted to Asia Minor; the need to discover distant and richer parts of Asia led to its geographical division between “Middle” and “Near” East (253).

Finally, Diego Saglia argues that Romanticism had a great impact on the development of Orientalism (468). He speaks about the tendency of colonial powers like Britain and France during the Romantic period to discover, explore, and take control of the new Oriental territories due to their geographical and strategic importance. From Saglia’s perspective, the idea of discovering the new lands of the East was an extension the Enlightenment’s fascination with other civilizations, which later incorporated the Eastern mind itself as a geographical and cultural space that needed European representation.

1.3 Romanticism: Historical background

Romanticism is an artistic and literary movement which began in Europe in the late 18th century and has dominated Western culture ever since. In medieval times, romance signified a tale of chivalry written in verse and taking the form of a quest while in the Renaissance it was defined as the free expression of imagination in the arts (Heath & Borenham 3). In 18th century England though, the term was synonymous with the revival of Elizabethan literature and the Gothic element, hence it was considered as a “renaissance of the Renaissance” (4). A new generation of poets appeared replacing the Augustan canon that Pope, Swift, and Johnson had set up, leading to the development of a new poetic canon. The main themes of Romanticism are nature, feeling, imagination, and the sublime (Jones 5).

The term “Romantic” was later used by historians to refer to the poetic generation that included Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelly and Keats. These were later divided into the “Lake School” of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey; the “Cockney School” of Hunt, Hazlitt, and Keats; and the “Satanic School” of Byron, Shelley, and their followers (Greenblatt 6). For Stephen Greenblatt, the element that made Romanticism an innovative movement was the shift it promoted from collective identity to individual consciousness (7). The key element that enabled

this shift was the creative imagination which emphasized the power of human consciousness to recreate reality (8).

In Stuart Curran's *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, the evolution of Romantic poetry is connected with the development of the Petrarchan sonnet (10). Curran also argues that the influence of the French Revolution on British poetry contributed to the rediscovery of a new poetic tradition based on the revival of the medieval romance and the lyrical ballads of the Renaissance (21). The main theme of Romanticism in general is the constant struggle between the body and the soul reflecting, not the peace of being and knowing, but the anxiety of becoming and wondering (21). The turn from the medieval romance to 18th century romantic poetry is marked by the change in the poetic persona from the 'I' which used to be associated with the Petrarchan or Elizabethan lover to a speaker who shares similarities with the poet himself, especially in terms of his experience.

A further theme around which Romanticism revolves and which helps establish "natural poetry" is the natural landscape (Curran 11). Wordsworth along with other writers of his time expressed the need to "return" to nature through poetry in order to obtain distance from city life and the effects of urbanization. Nature is said to have played a crucial role for the Romantics: it was both a creative leisure activity and a source of inspiration which provided the poet with the stimuli to develop his imagination. In the descriptions of the natural scene, the poet-observer incorporates his personal experiences and emotions. Thus, for Curran, natural objects are not viewed by the Romantics as physical entities, but as parts of the spiritual world transforming the physical eye into the eye of the mind (12).

Due to its focus on individual vision, Romantic poetry was perceived as the product of solitude (Curran 15). Consequently, nature was idealized as a locus of freedom, where the individual could avoid being oppressed by social laws transforming nature from a place of cultivated fields but a cultural value in itself. As Yves Abious points out in "Philosophy, Politics, Sensation" the landscapes mentioned in Romantic poems are nothing less than utopian lands that dominate the poets' life (135).

2.4. Romanticism as cultural critique

Dowden performs a political reading of Romanticism from a Wordsworthian perspective as the transformation of external revolutionary energy into internal or spiritual (Day 89). Meyer Abrams suggests that Romanticism has its roots in the French Revolution and its promotion of individual feeling and imagination in opposition to industrial and commercial society (94). Specifically, in *Natural Supernaturalism and Tradition*, Abrams refers to the important role which nature plays in Romanticism by reference to Schelling's idea of the unity between man and nature (181). Through nature, the poet experiences a spiritual rebirth, while at the same time rediscovering his self and developing consciousness. Abrams adopts Hegel's explanation that through nature the human spirit succeeds in regaining the consciousness of the imaginary world which it has become alienated from (182). Hegel's conception of nature is also discussed by Terry Pinkard in *Hegel's Naturalism Mind, Nature and the Final Ends of Life*. Here, Pinkard argues that the experience of nature is an integral part of Hegel's philosophy as it introduces the metaphysical perspective that is necessary, for the philosopher, to give us a clear understanding of the world (19). However, nature alone cannot contribute to this understanding; only when human beings acquire self-consciousness by applying the natural sciences can this happen. Even from a religious perspective, Abrams declares that nature and reason are bound together through the imagination which facilitates the experience of the spiritual world that the poet struggles to discover in order to rethink the human world (Day 194).

However, Abrams' understanding of Romanticism focuses on its development during the 19th century, where it is viewed as a symptom of disillusionment with historical reality (Day 97). Additionally, the word "revolution" in the Romantic era is given a new meaning both by Abrams (100) and by Harold Bloom (104). Shifting the context from the social realm to the human subject itself, revolution becomes synonymous with cognition and the power of individual consciousness. Day also reads Abrams's view from a poststructuralist perspective, defining Romanticism as the "marriage between subject and object, mind and nature, which creates a new world out of the old world sense" (105). Abrams traces the idea of the Romantic imagination to Coleridge who viewed it as the means for artistic creativity. This

opinion is elaborated in Day through the reference to Wordsworth's idea of freedom of the mind that gives the poet the opportunity to interact with the world (133). In *The Truth About Romanticism*, however, Richard Rorty presents a different aspect of Romanticism. Focusing mainly on pragmatism, he proposes that the truth of Romanticism is made rather than investigated (Milnes 22). Rorty, moreover, agrees with Hegel that the eternal truth can be discovered through empiricism (Rorty 98) and is therefore dependent on our view of the natural world.

For Eric Dayre, in *Romanticism and Philosophy: Thinking in Literature*, the roots of Romanticism are to be found in philosophy and in the Enlightenment (40). In the chapter "The Poetic Turn: From Godwin to Coleridge" Dayre presents Friedrich Schlegel's explanation of the term as an attempt to surpass the rational concepts of philosophy in order to create a universal poetry (42). Referring to English Romanticism, Dayre cites William Godwin's thesis that Romanticism was a necessary movement that helped advance the understanding of history (42). Following Godwin, Dayre argues that an imaginative history gives us the opportunity to integrate unexpected, incredible, even unlikely events, while also incorporating the interplay between "fate" and "invention" in our understanding of historical processes (43). The presence of a fictional character, for example, allows for a connection between rational and imaginative history, actual and fictional events, resulting in the discovery of inner truths and meanings (44). Dayre further supports his argument concerning the "historical necessity" of Romanticism by referring to the Aristotelian theory of catharsis, seen as a positive means of transforming the emotional life. Commenting on the idealistic component of Romanticism, Dayre claims that this kind of poetry represents Coleridge's and Wordsworth's thoughts on how things should be, as opposed to how they are (45).

Peter Kitson in "Byron and Post-colonial Criticism: The Eastern Tales" argues that the development of Romanticism paralleled the emergence of British imperialism (106). For Kitson, Eastern travel inspired poets like Byron to incorporate the representation of the East into their writings, resulting in the union of Romanticism with the idea of the Orient (107). Thus, although they appear as distinct categories, Romanticism and Orientalism are closely associated.

2.5 Romantic Orientalism: Imagination and the imaginary

The difference between Romanticism and Orientalism can be understood in the way in which the natural scene is created. While the Romantic poet consciously creates an imaginary landscape or nostalgically recalls a place from his past, in Orientalism the Orient is for the most part unconsciously constructed. In the first case, the poet himself creates a setting where he is inspired to express his feelings and desires to reunite with nature. In the second, the Orient reflects an exotic setting that Europe has invented. As Kitson argues, the East in the European imaginary was structured as both magical and cruel, often resulting in a confusion in its reception (107).

Byron has successfully included Orientalism in his romantic poetry, making the Orient, in this case Greece, an integral part of his works. The Orient has become a constituent of Romanticism in all the poems discussed here. It symbolizes both the exotic colony the traveler encounters and the place of imagination that prompts the poet to rediscover his inner self and, by extension, motivates Europe and Britain to reconsider their own identity. Considering the fact that Romanticism relies heavily on the imagination, the Orient is related to it as an imaginative construct. There are several examples of this kind of association between Romanticism and Orientalism in the poems under consideration. Concerning the East as a recurring projection of the West, as mentioned by Said, the poet for instance warns Britain in “The Curse of Minerva” (line 309) about the tragic fate that will follow Elgin’s violation of the Parthenon antiquities. As for the struggle to define his inner self, Byron in “22nd January, Missolonghi,” (line 22) celebrates the spirit of the individual who now feels that his duty is to participate in the war for the independence of Greece in order to fulfill his desire for self-liberation. The presence of Leila in “The Giaour” is another example of Orientalist elements in Byron’s work, but also reflects the importance of feeling in Romanticism as a whole, suggesting an alliance between the two terms.

However, despite the marked Orientalist elements in Byron’s poetry, the poems can also be said to express an anti-Orientalist attitude. In Orientalism, the West is regarded superior to the East and consequently to other non-European cultures, maintaining the position of the dominant power (Said 24). In Byron, Greece is not presented as a state inferior to England, but a decadent country as a consequence of a

series of wars by different conquerors. Besides its contribution to the romance and exoticism of the oriental tales, Byron's purpose in using Greece in his poetry is to raise the broader political issue of freedom. In so doing, he intends to critique the West, in particular Britain, for abandoning the values of the past that he sees as having the power to revitalize the present. Matthew Green and Pal-Lapinski in their essay "That lifeless thing the living fear: Gothic Body in *The Giaour*" discuss the political aspect of Byron's poetry. They find that, in Byron, Athens becomes the symbol of freedom and the bond between the community and individuals, while Leila becomes a representative figure of the individual's struggle for freedom (Green, Pal-Lapinski 15). Both from a gender perspective and an account of her role as a slave in Hassan's harem, Leila has been denied her freedom (18). Her presence is viewed as the vulnerability of the body under patriarchal authority, implying that the struggle for freedom provokes persecution and violence, as in Leila's execution which symbolizes the fate of a rebellious Greece against Ottoman rule (19). This poetic work does not restrict itself to the enlisting of exotic elements in a Romantic tale, but shifts into an indirect political statement about the problematic issues of slavery, violence, and the desire for freedom in the East. Stephen Minta explains the shift in Byron's attitude towards the Orient in his works in terms of its significance for the poet's life and, in particular, his shift to republicanism from his Whig past (156). The Whigs' political position was that the world could be quietly and gradually reformed. However, Byron's travels to Greece completely changed his beliefs, making him more concerned about regional and humanitarian issues that required more direct and urgent political intervention.

The greatest political upheaval during the Romantic era was undoubtedly the French Revolution. However, as Minta explains, besides the inevitable political changes that ensued, the French Revolution showed that change cannot take place without human agency (156). Especially in "Missolonghi, 22nd January," Byron reveals his commitment to the idea of liberating Greece through active participation in revolution, thereby subverting the stereotypical Orientalist preoccupation with exoticism and romance. Byron's willingness to sacrifice his youth for "honour" (33-34) and a "soldier's grave" (36) indicates that Greece has acquired a political and ideological dimension, motivating the poet to fulfill his spiritual awakening (26). This awakening is related to Byron's change of identity from the nobleman to a heroic figure like those of the ancient past he idealized and which he desired to emulate by

participating in the war. In his post-colonial critique, Kitson has argued that the East constitutes Byron's projection of self-awareness as well as his social and political concerns (Kitson 111). Moreover, Byron's interest, it is claimed, is not limited to the fascinating aspect of the Orient, but includes the raising of awareness towards the pressing political problems faced by Eastern peoples. Kitson therefore characterizes the Byronic view of the East as "truly authentic" (111), because alongside the imaginary aspect of this exotic world, the Orient is seen to include darker elements such as oppression and autocratic violence that can lead even to death. This darker side of Byron's East which recalls the barbarism of the Gothic novel (Wein 37) is particularly evident in *The Giaour*, which contains many references to the violence of the Turks. Therefore, we could say that Byron's brand of Romanticism differs from Orientalism because it goes beyond the West's fascination with the East to explore the political aspect of the Orient, its impact on the poet-traveler's perception, and its effects on European politics as a whole.

3. Greece as the Decadent Romanticized Orient

3.1 Orientalism from Said to Byron

The understanding of the East that Byron presents in his Oriental poems differs from Edward Said's theory of Orientalism in various ways. As Peter Cochran argues in *Byron and Orientalism*, the boundaries between the "Oriental Other" and the "Occidental Self" are abolished in Byron's work which views the Orient and the Occident as virtually identical entities (Cochran 2). The Orient does not exist solely in the realm of the imagination for Byron but has been transformed into a place of romantic disillusionment and lost innocence. Moreover, the poet's adventures in the East become an object of satire, and although the romantic element is involved, the focus is turned instead on real life, disappointing the reader's expectations. The above elements create what Cochran characterizes as "Byronic Orientalism" (3) which, as it is argued here, involves the fusion of Romanticism and Orientalism.

What primarily distinguishes Byronic Orientalism from Said's version is its authenticity, as the image of the East shifts from the imaginary construct to the actual geographical and cultural space that Byron encountered while travelling through Greece with Hobhouse (20). The Christian Greeks and Muslim Turks which the poet met there are viewed as the glorious and gloomy aspects of the Orient, respectively (24). Furthermore, in contrast to Said who omits discussing Eastern imperialism and focuses solely on the Western variety, Byron's explores the Orientalism of the Ottomans, together with that of his fellow Europeans (188). Cochran argues that Said critiques imperialism only as a Western practice while ignoring Eastern imperialism, as manifested for example in the Arab conquest of Spain and North Africa in the 9th century and the Ottoman threat to Europe from the 17th century onwards. In addition, he argues that the Orient is exploited aesthetically by writers like Byron and treated as "a roomy place full of possibility" (189).

Although, as in Said's theory of Orientalism, the Orient is regarded as opposite to and inferior to the Occident, Cochran argues that the poet attempts to find some "relativity" between the two and even to discover the "English self in the Asian otherness" (Cochran 191). In order to achieve this, Byron is said to invest and

participate in the actual East (Cochran 192), what Said has named the “Real Orient” (Said 2). The interpretation of otherness in Byron differs from what we find in Said as his aim is to present the East, not as an imaginary construct, but rather as a reflection of the feelings and thoughts provoked in him by his contact with early 19th-century Greece. This involves the romantic convention of the importance of nature for human life through descriptions of the landscape. What is more, Byronic Orientalism incorporates David Kopf’s notion of “Historical Orientalism” (Kopf 199) according to which the ideology and set of social institutions which we call Orientalism forms an integral part of historical reality rather than a distinct cultural phenomenon (196).

3.2 Nature in Hegelianism and Romanticism: “The Curse of Minerva” and “The Isles of Greece”

In Romanticism, the presence of nature is fundamental to the poetic life, both as a leisure activity and as a means of inspiration. Thus, Byron is inspired by the ruins of the Acropolis and the landscape to produce “The Curse of Minerva.” Nature in the Orient functions as foil to the radical industrialization of England, becoming symbolic of the freedom that has been lost and needs to be regained by individuals. Through the use of natural imagery, the poet expresses his need to return to nature (Greenblatt 11).

The concept of Nature is also crucial for Hegelian philosophy. First of all, for Hegel the notion of the world as home (Pinkard 8) was borrowed from Greek antiquity, as was the Romantic world view as a whole. Taking his cue from Aristotle, Hegel creates his own philosophy of nature, stating that the origin and formation of philosophical thought has the experience of nature as its precondition (32). In some cases, it can be perceived as a Spirit (*Geist*): a distinct entity which becomes the means of achieving a new understanding of ourselves (21). Hegel distinguishes the spirit of nature from the spirit of religion because the former, in contrast to the latter, needs to be investigated so as to provide the new understanding of the human self. Thus, the conceptualization of nature requires constant empirical work via the natural sciences in order for it to become present to self-conscious creatures. Self-consciousness is explained as the distinction between the self and its animal powers, giving the individual agency for his/her actions (89). Following the Aristotelean

approach, the individual is regarded as having the freedom and awareness of his actions, being able to distinguish between an action that is good and one that is not. The purpose of choosing the good relates to the term Aristotle describes in *The Ethics* as *eudemonia*, defined as the presence of contemplation and self-sufficiency in human life along with participation in political life (Urmson 119). Contemplation here is explained as the activity of acquiring and exercising theoretical knowledge (121). Apart from the choice of goods, desirable things, and one kind of life over another, *eudemonia* is considered by Aristotle as the final goal of human life *per se*. Instead of happiness, Hegel's understanding of the final end of life is self-sufficiency, through which the individual would be "at one" with his or herself. However, Terry Pinkard argues that there is gap in the Hegelian idea of "being at one with oneself" (91). He claims that it is the nature of the rational agent that enables it to recognize its actions and to determine what is good for its life, in order for it to be in harmony with its environment.

In "The Curse of Minerva," Byron begins with detailed descriptions of the Greek landscape during the sunset, which he watches in astonishment from the Acropolis (lines 1-15). Similarly in canto 2 of "The Isles of Greece," there are references to the rocky coast, the waves, and the skies during Juan's adventurous journey to Greece, as the elements that form the romantic landscape (line 793). The descriptions of the "wild shore without a trace of man" (line 825), "an unknown barren beach for burial ground" (line 872) and "the rocks... which the sun had never seen" (lines 918-19), reveal the otherness of the Orient, depicting it as a place of danger. The poet's first impressions of the new land he encounters are inspired by nature which, like the Homeric muse, motivates him to compose poetry.

In Romanticism, nature, like reality as a whole, acquires a spiritual dimension which has a great impact on the poet's emotions. These are usually articulated by Byron through various figures of speech, such as the extended simile where the sky symbolizes the emotional instability of the heart (line 1708). Thus, the abrupt transition from heaven/happiness to darkness/sadness is compared to clouds and thunder appearing in the sky causing rain. In Canto 3 (lines 13-14) the flower is symbolic of Juan's melancholy, representing both love and death. The Byronic hero recognizes in the image of the flower the impossibility of the coexistence of love and marriage. Juan's voyage in "The Isles of Greece" can be read as the struggle to rediscover his own truth, recalling the way eternal truth for Hegel could be discovered

through empirical vocabulary which gives power to the human imagination to speak about undiscovered things (Rorty 121).

The landscape in “The Curse of Minerva” and “The Isles of Greece” provides the poet with the freedom he needs to escape the urban environment of England in order to write about his feelings. According to Stuart Curran, nature as an image and as a value symbolizes freedom in the form of the individual’s loneliness in the world and his/her escape from restrictive social norms (Curran 15). In these poems, the poet feels free to share his feelings of happiness and melancholy with the reader, responding to Wordsworth’s idea of freedom of the mind that gives the poet the opportunity to interact with the world (Day 133). To specify on this, the narrator is in nature, where freedom apart from an external situation is internal, enabling him to feel free to see beyond the external world the existence of an invisible one (134).

3.3 Romantic Politics: “The Curse of Minerva”

Byronic Orientalism differs from Said’s Orientalism due also to the former’s recognition of Greece’s political significance for the West. Thus, Byron’s poetry is not limited to the Romantic element and adopts a political perspective in order to comment on the situation of Greece under Ottoman occupation. An interesting contrast is created within the poems: on the one hand, Greece’s past is idealized through historical references while, on the other, the poet’s expectations are disappointed as a result of his first-hand experience of the country. In “The Curse of Minerva,” Byron, while standing on the Acropolis watching the sunset, has a vision of the goddess Athena. Athena is the poetic persona used to articulate Byron’s complex view of contemporary Greece as a decadent Orient, deprived of its own identity and culture and finally commodified. The West, however, cannot remain unaffected by these changes in the Balkan region while Britain is also seen to bear some responsibility for Greece’s current plight. Although Byron’s main objects of attack are Elgin and England, British imperialism is also implicated in the Ottoman occupation of Greece.

In lines 89-90, Athena addresses the narrator, commanding him in line 94 to look at the ruins of the present. From this command, Athena offers a historical review

of Europe's current predicament which suggests that history inevitably repeats itself. The word "tyrannies" in line 96 has not only a political reference, but also applies to the erosion of human culture as a whole. Thus, in her review of tyrannical States of the past, Athena adds the example of Elgin to that of Adrian in line 102 and Alaric in line 104. The "Scot" (line 128) is associated with these historical figures through his vandalism and looting of the Acropolis, which is viewed as a tyrannical violation of culture, implied in the phrase "Elgin did the rest" (line 104). For Minerva, and by extension for the poet, one must be judged not on the basis of one's social status, but on the basis of one's deeds. Thus, Elgin's aristocratic status does not prevent him from usurping the marbles, something characterized as shameful (line 122) and criminal (line 117). This is also a deed which is seen to have led to the loss of his honour (lines 118-119), one of the prime values of antiquity that is absent from modernity. In addition, Byron verbally abuses Elgin with the use of animal imagery (e.g. "wolf," "filthy jackal," line 114), suggesting that Elgin's treatment of culture can only be characterized as savage. Moreover, in Athena's opinion, Britain cannot remain unaffected by Elgin's deeds, as the shame for the theft of the marbles extends to the nation as a whole (line 124). Elgin is presented again as a thief through the use of the word "plunderer" (line 128). At the same time, the poet begins a dialogue by responding immediately to Minerva's critique of England's position on the issue of the marbles (127) and pointing out that Elgin also comes from Scotland (line 128). In this way, Byron extends his attack on Elgin to include not only England, but Scotland too, his own birthplace.

From line 164, Minerva articulates her curse against Elgin as a means to punish the nobleman for stealing the marbles, transferring them to England, and selling them. Besides cursing Elgin, Minerva also curses his entire family and progeny to come. For Byron, this curse is more than a figure of speech because Elgin's family was known to be suffering from syphilis at the time. Minerva continues by referring to "Wisdom's hate" (line 169) which can be read as a pun on the goddess of Wisdom herself, whose curse will be Elgin's undoing. At the same time, Elgin's "noblest, native gusto is—to sell; To sell and make" (lines 171-172): something which is seen to provoke the hate of an entire civilization, with the repetition of the verb "to sell" highlighting his treatment of the Greek antiquities as commodities. Thus, the poet comments on Elgin's lack of respect for ancient culture (line 164) while also implicating the English Prime Minister, Spencer Perceval, who negotiated

with Elgin the purchase of the marbles. Byron emphasizes the fact that Elgin, like other aristocrats of the era, treated antiquities as mere pieces of decoration, suggesting that Greece and the Orient as a whole, besides being culturally colonized, was little more than a commodity for the West.

The goddess' anger towards the nobleman reaches its peak when she distinguishes between the values of the past ("then," line 188) and those of the present ("now", line 188): a distinction heightened by the statement, "Those Greeks indeed were proper men!" (line 189) Along with her anger at modernity, the goddess is also seen to "mourn" (line 188) the ethics of an era in which morality has been replaced by personal gain. Byron's attitude towards the Orient in this scene is reflected in the description of the sunset in which the emphasis is placed, not on the idealization of the past, but on the despair and dismay which the speaker feels about Greece's present decay. This constitutes an admission on the poet's part that he has discovered a world completely different to the one that existed in his imagination and contrary to his historical knowledge.

Minerva's curse reappears again in line 201, but the word now used is the even angrier "vengeance" ("Shall vengeance follow far beyond the tomb") which will follow Elgin even after death, thus making his punishment eternal. Minerva justifies her vengeance against on Elgin for the violation of the Parthenon marbles by citing, once again, historical precedent, and in particular the case of "Eratostratus" (line 202). Herostratus, mentioned in the poem as "the fool that fired the Ephesian dome" (line 200), is associated with Elgin in terms of their common hubris against civilization and culture. It is for this reason that they are eternally cursed.

Again, "The Curse of Minerva" does not fall on Elgin alone (line 208), but includes the whole of Britain, foreshadowing her doom ("But fits thy country for her coming fate"). The goddess accuses Britain of allowing corruption to engulf her people (lines 211, 243). Corruption, meaning here to prioritize profit over morality, is capitalized and given attributes similar to the goddess in the poem to show its great influence in Byron's times. Another word used to refer to Britain's moral corruption is the financial term "bankrupt" (line 246). Thus Western politics are seen to corrupt the Orient, resulting in geographical locales like Greece falling off from their former selves.

3.4 Orientalizing the self: “January 22nd, Missolonghi”

Naturalism is associated in Hegel’s philosophy with the concept of freedom, understood as the rational necessity of human action (Pinkard 102). However, according to Pinkard, Hegel’s interest is on “ideal freedom,” the freedom an individual can be said to possess when he or she acts on the basis of his/her own motives and independently of others. This is connected to the notion of “inner” freedom, which, as Pinkard argues, is close to self-determination and represents an ideal sense of autonomy (103). This critic concludes that, whereas an individual’s freedom is limited by the social sphere, Hegel believes that it is possible under certain circumstances for human beings to fulfill the final end of their lives on the basis of their will alone. In “January 22nd, Missolonghi,” Byron narrates the changes occurring in his own nature when he speaks about the freedom of his inner self and sees this reflected in the freedom of a rebellious Greece.

“January 22nd, Missolonghi” was written at the homonymous place during the Greek War of Independence, and shortly before the poet’s death. From the first stanza Byron declares his transformation from a Romantic lover to a hero (line 19). This change is confirmed by the use of military terms (e.g. the sword, the banner and the field, lines 17-18) instead of natural imagery related to the landscape. The idea of freedom is clearly the main theme of the poem, both in relation to Greece and to the poet’s inner self. The lines “Awake (not Greece—she is awake!) Awake, my Spirit!” (21-22) become the poet’s alarm for a revolutionary awakening. However, since Greece is already at war, it is the poet’s turn to struggle for his spiritual freedom. Viewed from a Hegelian perspective, Byron aims at achieving the “ideal freedom” to fulfill the final end of his life by acting on the basis of his own conscious motives, even to the point of sacrificing his other desire, such as love, youth (lines 6, 29), and even life. At the end of the poem, it appears that the speaker has completed his inner transformation, as his goal has become an honourable death and the glory of a soldier’s grave (line 33). This change also marks the shift in Byron’s political position. In contrast to his former Whig beliefs that the world could be changed by peaceful means (Green, Pal-Lapinski 166), Byron in this poem calls for revolution and war.

From the view of Byronic Orientalism, the setting of Missolonghi and the theme of freedom create a unity between the poet and the Orient, leading to the Orientalization of the self. Byron plays the role of observer and participant in the historical events before and during the Greek War of Independence, thus becoming a part of the Orient himself. In contrast to Said's differential concept of the East, Greece in "January 22nd, Missolonghi" is not presented as an Other, but is equated with the poet's inner Self, thereby reflecting his subjectivity and most pressing concerns.

Here, Romanticism is also seen to be powerfully inked to philhellenism. Thus, as part of Romanticism's agenda to revive the values of the past, its philhellenic component aims at reviving the very fount of civilization and honour in Greece herself. On the other hand, Greece as Orient also contributes to the inner change of the speaker, enabling Byron at the same time to become the hero of his own poetry. The oriental element in this work is thus represented by Greece as the epitome of the forthcoming historical changes that will have a direct impact on the entire political life of Europe.

4. The Feminized Orient and the Concept of Freedom

4.1 The Female as a symbol of colonized Greece: *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*

Byron also combines the Orientalist element with Romanticism through his representation of the female characters Leila and Zuleika in *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, respectively. Although throughout these poems the female figures remain silenced, their presence is significant as they reflect the emotions of the narrator. At the same time they can be characterized as representative symbols of colonized Greece, being transformed into an Other within the Orient. In a comparable way to Greece under Ottoman oppression, the female gender appears to have been conquered by male authority, becoming enslaved in the harem. The descriptions of veiled women in Ottoman harems suggest their social inferiority. Inspired by his adventures and experiences in the Ottoman Empire, in these two works the poet attempts to enter the private sphere of its inhabitants along with the inner world of its protagonists. Incorporating Romantic elements in these poems, Byron plays on the fascination of the forbidden as well as the appeal of the terrifying hero. The poems also showcase the 19th century penchant for exploring exotic and historical landscapes as well as the Romantic interest in the mysteries of mental life, particularly psychological extremes (Greenblatt 14).

In *The Giaour*, a narrative that belongs to the *Turkish Tales*, Byron introduces the female character Leila who is placed as a slave in a harem (line 441). The harem is an example of the Eastern customs the poet had encountered during his travels. The only description given of Leila's appearance is the veil covering her face. The veil represents both the Eastern tradition, and at the same time enhances the sense of mystery and exoticism of the foreign land (Said 1). The poem features various instances of oriental discourse, containing vocabulary from the Turkish language (Kada-Wafaa, 37-39). Through the use of this kind of discourse, Western readers are introduced into a previously unknown world. Instances of such discourse include the word "Giaour" which means one who is unfaithful to his religion, "Serai" (line 443) which is a palace; and Allah (line 482), the Muslim word for God. These use of such

vocabulary in the poem testifies to Byron's familiarity with Eastern traditions and customs due to his friendship with Ali Pascha whom he encountered in his travel with Hobhouse in 1810 (Cochran 30). Compounding these Orientalist elements, instead of having a traveller narrating his adventures, Byron employs a local narrator who is himself a part of the Orient. As Peter Cochran observes, this choice of narrator means that the story is told from the Islamic perspective (12), while Edward Said claims that it reflects the need to absorb the "foreign" and the "different" (Said 152).

From a Romantic perspective, Leila—and by extension Greece—symbolizes the oriental paradise that has become ruined and despoiled by modernity (Cochran 50). According to Butler, Leila's imprisonment in the harem reflects the way Greece is also under the control of patriarchal powers, either Christian or Muslim (73). Although Leila throughout the poem remains silent, she represents a turning point in the protagonist's life, bringing him to a liminal position between life and spiritual death. Greece itself is perceived as a kind of oriental tale: it is the place of lost innocence and romance (Cochran 2) while also becoming the means for the narrator to express in an Oriental setting his personal romantic drama (160).

The protagonist expresses his love for Leila by comparing her to light from heaven (line 1131) and immortal fire (line 1132). She is also described as the valley (line 1220) which, for the Romantics, represents an imaginary setting connected to emotional serenity and love (Cochran 158). However, Leila's drowning by Hassan means the loss of the oriental paradise the Giaour had constructed in his mind, thus leading to his spiritual death when he takes revenge on her murderer, Hassan (line 1302). For the Giaour, Greece symbolized a powerful spiritual ally in his struggle with himself, so that the loss of this Romantic idyll turns Hassan from the Giaour's friend to his enemy. The killing of Hassan by the protagonist transforms the Orient into a "wound that time can never heal" (line 921), because, besides representing the Other from the perspective of the poem, it also symbolizes the Giaour's other half. Following Leila's death, and even after his revenge against Hassan, the Giaour is reduced to a state of solitude, being unable to accept the main principles of Christianity which are forgiveness and redemption.

In fact, Leila becomes herself the symbol of the Orient in the Western mind (Cochran, 49), thus promoting the ideal of liberation from tyranny (line 87) which leads to her death. Similarly, Greece is transformed from an expired state (line 91) to the political ideal of freedom achieved through love and self-sacrifice. Byron

emphasizes the political dimension of the situation by reminding the readers that Greece has been the home of freedom (line 105) from the time of the Thermopylae (line 109) and Salamis (line 113). Regarding the historical setting of the poem (1813), Leila can be linked to the struggling for independence from Ottoman oppression (Roessel 56).

Furthermore, the motif of death in Leila and Hassan's case underlines the Western perception of the Orient as a place of violence (2), producing a connection between Orientalism and the Gothic element. Ian Duncan, in *Modern Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens*, observes that the roots of Gothicism are inherited from the East which constitutes a strange origin we have lost contact with and an oppressive force that suddenly invades our lives (23). Viewing this kind of opposition from the Romantic perspective, the poet constantly has the hope of uniting with nature, a familiar place for him, even in the sphere of the human imagination in order to escape from the industrial environment in which he lives.

In *The Bride of Abydos*, we find the female figure of Zuleika, a slave in the harem whose fate is fixed (line 41). The love between her and the Byronic hero of the poem, Selim, seems forbidden owing to the fact that she is supposed to be his half-sister, however the protagonist is determined to achieve his goals by obtaining the harem key (line 67) so as to liberate her beloved one. However, Selim is denied the key by the Pasha, who regards him the "Son of a slave" (line 81,112).

Similar to *The Giaour*, the protagonist here expresses his feelings for Zuleika by applying the standard Romantic discourse. In the extended simile she is presented as something unique in his mind (lines 158-160). The lines "heart meets heart in dreams Elysian" (line 164) and "lost on Earth revived in Heaven" suggest that love remains eternal. In the next lines, the hero continues his confession, characterizing Zuleika as "Beauty's heavenly ray" (line 171), "light of love, purity of grace" (line 178), "Music breathing from her face" (179), and "that eye was itself a soul" (181). There is an emphasis on spiritual love which reflects the protagonist's emotions and desires. Love is presented as a means of salvation for the narrator's spirit and, as the above lines suggest, it will continue to accompany him in the afterlife. Further references to Zuleika are the "fairest flowers of Eastern land" (line 280) and the "Rose" (line 284) which ended up being "plucked" (line 284). Besides symbolizing Zuleika in her confinement, the plucked rose metaphorically refers to the poet's feelings of despair and disillusionment at the fate of Greece under Ottoman rule. As in

Leila's case, in spite of the fact that the female figure of this poem is one of the main characters, she is denied of the right to speak ("forbade to speak" line 262), appearing mute (line 973) because she is a woman and therefore inferior in Eastern society. As the poem proceeds, Selim appears eager to fight Giaffir for the sake of Zuleika's freedom, to the point of sacrificing himself (line 392). The revenge plot prepared by the Byronic hero of *The Bride of Abydos* fails, however, resulting in his death (line 1204).

The juxtaposition of positive and negative adjectives ("mute, motionless," "plucked rose") in the references to Zuleika are intended to reflect the poet's contradictory view of Greece. Greece as an Orient is represented as a place with picturesque landscapes, rich history, and culture (Said 2), but it is also seen by the West as a place whose identity has been partially lost as a consequence of several historical factors, one of them being the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. This contradictory image of the Orient is also reflected in the description of the female protagonist using a combination of extravagant vocabulary taken from Romantic discourse and realistic depiction. Thus, although Byron idealizes Greece in Orientalist fashion by presenting her as a bride, still he cannot ignore her current fallen state.

Seyed Marandi in his article "The Bride of the East" criticizes Byron's Orientalism in this poem (Cochran 215). He questions how authentic Byron's works can be when they contain ideologies, discourses, and settings which sustain the Western reader's lack of objective understanding of the Orient. However, the critic acknowledges that the poet had personal knowledge of the political realities of Eastern countries and his reliability as a witness is not denied. Marandi argues that it is not necessary to know why Byron uses a hated Giaour to enter the private sphere of Oriental women, when the poet's presentation of these women's social inferiority in the harem is realistic (216).

Taking into account that the theme of freedom is central to *The Giaour* and *The Bride of Abydos*, the poet does not focus on the women protagonists from a purely gender perspective. Rather, Leila and Zuleika are given an ideological dimension by being used as symbols of the freedom of Greece. The dramatic heroes that Byron creates in his writings view the female not as a prize to be won, but as a counterpart of their own selves as well as a part of their ideology. For instance, Selim's phrase "I have a love for freedom too" (line 869) suggests that his acts must be understood in the context of this ideal. As a result, the two women protagonists

represent more human idylls and desires, while Selim's and the Giaour's revolutionary acts are imbued with the abstract spirit of freedom expressed through the struggle against despotism. The male protagonists' ultimate goal in both cases is to "restore" the Orient of their imagination, reflecting Byron's admiration for the magnitude of Greek antiquity in *The Curse of Minerva*.

According to David Roessel's reading of the feminized image of 19th century modern Greece in the *Turkish Tales*, Byron's portrayal was an effective means evoke sympathy towards Greece in the Western reader (60). The image of an imprisoned European woman in an Ottoman harem mirrors Europe's own fears and anxieties. Moreover, the feminization of Modern Greece can be interpreted as the threat of sexual domination by the Turks and the Romantic attraction of the Greek woman.

4.2 Unfulfilled Romantic love for the female-Orient: "Maid of Athens, ere we part" and "I enter thy garden of roses"

Greece is the setting in Byron's poems "Maid of Athens, ere we part" and "I enter thy garden of Roses," where the poet narrates his recollections and adventures from his days there hoping to return one day. There are several female figures that the poet addresses in "Maid of Athens, ere we part." This poem resembles a sonnet with every stanza ending with the Greek refrain "Ζωή μου, σας αγαπώ," which can be translated as "My life, I love you." The autobiographical element is an important factor here as it was written in 1810, when Byron and Hobhouse left Athens in order to avoid possible conflicts that could be created in the Makri household. The reason is that Byron had become the familiar of Teresa and her younger sisters, Mariana and Katinka, as well as their half-sister Dudu Roque, who became Byron's source of inspiration for the female characters in *Don Juan* (Cochran 14).

In the poem all these female figures unite into one, becoming representatives of the poet's nostalgia for Athens. Byron here confesses his love for the woman, but also expresses nostalgia and melancholy for Athens. This kind of love cannot be adequately expressed through words. Although the narrator is forced to abandon Athens, still his heart and soul remain there, stating that his love for the Orient will remain eternal. What is interesting in the poem is the fragmentation of the human

body reflected in the blazon which describes the woman's heart, eye, breast, and cheeks. The repetition of the phrase Ζωή μου, σας αγαπώ declares Byron's love for Makris's daughters and by extension Athens, as these women are included in his recollections of Athens.

"Maid of Athens, ere we part" combines the Romantic desire for union with the Orientalist fascination for adventures in the mysterious Eastern environment. This is confirmed in the last phrase written in English, where the poet asks the question and gives the answer himself that his love for Athens will be everlasting: "Can I cease to love thee"? No!" (line 23). Here the poet categorically declares that his contact with Greece will not be lost, even if he leaves, because it will abide with him in his memories ("my heart and soul"). These memories from Greece have a great impact on the poet, thus becoming Byron's tool to express his love for the Oriental place, a love that will remain unfulfilled.

Haidee is the female character in "I Enter thy garden of Roses," another poem that has the form of a sonnet, like the "Maid of Athens, ere we part". Byron is inspired to write this poem on account of his intellectual interest in the Greek folk tradition, and in particular the Romaic song "Μπαίνω μες στο περιβόλι Ωραιότατη Χαηδή" which is translated in the first lines of Byron's poem as "I enter thy garden of roses beloved and fair Haidee" (lines 4-5). This poem celebrates the Romantic poet's strong bonds and love for nature, as well as the regeneration of the human soul. The young Haidee is seen as the incarnation of Flora (line 6), the Latin name of the goddess of nature. Nature is given divine attributes, inspiring the poet as a Greek Muse to express his feelings in verse. Nature, also associated with love in the poem's mind through landscape imagery, is called by the poet to hear his truth (line 9). In an extended metaphor, Haidee is described as a "branch" (12-13) that adds fragrance and fruit to the tree, which implies that even the most peculiar element in nature contributes to the overall harmony.

The narrator's love for the young girl is spiritual, as is seen in the reference to the shining soul (line 15). However, in the next lines the descriptions of a natural paradise are replaced by feelings of despair at the thought of death and the brevity of youth. Melancholy is artistically created through the use of several contrasts to emphasize the shift from the ideal to the real, from the "loveliest garden" to a "hateful" one (line 16), and from love to poison ("hemlock" line 17). It is the poison coming from the chalice (line 18) that has "polluted" the poet's soul. He vainly

attempts to find respite (“my heart... to save” line 23) from his fears (“horrors” line 23) only to realize that aging and death are inevitable. At the end, although the poet remains pessimistic, he resigns himself to the idea of death (“then open the gates of grave” line 25). Understanding that his soul is deeply hurt (line 29), the narrator’s disappointment is enhanced when he asks himself the rhetorical questions whether he must perish feeling guilt (lines 30-31) and abandon every hope to be repaid in the afterlife (line 31). The poem ends in an atmosphere of sadness where nature in the form of Flora (line 33) accompanies the narrator in mourning his youth. Haidee as the ideal of youthfulness proves to be false (line 32), an idol or a ghost by which the poet was tricked, leading to the conclusion that the loss of youth has resulted in his spiritual death after having lost his own imaginary paradise.

4.3 Greek Freedom in Romanticism: When “A Man Hath No Freedom” and *The Age of Bronze*

As was analyzed above, through Byron’s representations of the female gender, Greece becomes a symbol of the Oriental Other. This is characterized, on the one hand, by Eastern exoticism, mystery and adventure and, on the other, by violence, darkness, and decay. However, the poet’s view of Greece is not limited to the presentation of the positive and negative aspects of the Romanticized Orient.

The idea of Greece emerges from the opposition between Romantic imagination and historical reality, while also being associated with the ideal of liberty for which the protagonists of *The Giaour* and the *Bride of Abydos* fight. Freedom is in fact a central theme of all three poetic works. However, instead of being associated with revolution and war, these poems present us with a different understanding of the term. As Roessel argues, the freedom which the Giaour and Selim seek is not an end itself, but a spiritual and political ideal: the regeneration of Greece (15). The Byronic heroes’ plans to liberate the female characters from tyranny express a desire to return to the values of the past as a means of escaping from the ruins of the present. In *The Giaour* for instance, the extensive use of the word “tyranny” in relations to Ottoman rule (55) interposes the Orientalist element in the Romantic discourse, conveying the political message of the poem. Thus, Leila’s freedom implies the political freedom of

Greece in a way which transforms individual freedom into a political issue and the hero's love for the female figure into the poet's love for Greece (56).

The basis of Roessel's interpretation of the idea of Greek liberation resides in Voltaire's ideal of the victory of reason and human rights, rather than merely reflecting the goal of an independent Greece (15). Also, from Byron's perspective, the renewal of Greece as a political entity can be interpreted as the renewal of the value of the individual self. Moreover, considering the Romantic view of nature as a means of escaping from the degraded urban environment, Greece can represent the solution to the cultural decay of industrial society. On the other hand, the heroes' tragic fate signals the suffering of an entire nation, acknowledging in this way that the struggle for freedom is never a simple issue. As Roessel claims, by presenting Greece as an Oriental land full of dark mysteries, Byron also succeeds in reflecting the European interest in inhabitants of primitive lands with historical significance and a glorious past (23), recalling Frank Turner's claim that Europe was in "search for new cultural roots and alternative cultural politics." The example of ancient Greece represents the achievement of artistic excellence without the presence of mechanization as in modern life. Thus, for the 18th and 19th century, Athens and Sparta were often associated with the qualities of noble simplicity and elegance (23).

Alexander Grammatikos in *British Romantic Literature and the Emerging Modern Greek Nation* agrees that, during the 19th century, the ancient Greek past was viewed by the West as an integral part of its identity and as the ideal role model of society which the Western countries should attempt to imitate (Grammatikos 11). Indeed, Greek antiquity was seen as an important constituent of the Western identity. However, the dominant impression of contemporary writers and travellers was that of a country "debased" and "degenerate". Grammatikos interprets the emergence of Romantic Hellenism as Greece's differentiation from the Ottoman world both geographically and ideologically in order to approach Western culture (11). What is more, Grammatikos assumption of Byron and other writers' portrayal of Oriental Greece is that their interest is focused on Eastern kinds of culture, presenting Greece's qualities from the perspective of the East in opposition to the standard Western imaginary, a presentation that according to author was fundamental for the revolution (13). What made Byron exceptional from his fellow travel-writers was his knowledge on Greek language, culture, education and its people (73). Byron's Greece is closely related to Europe though it is still able to maintain its cultural uniqueness (81). For

this reason, the Romantic poet praises Greeks for being able to achieve the production of a “scholarly” culture under difficult sociopolitical circumstances (85). In this debatable concept of freedom, Grammatikos believes that the movement of Phil-Hellenism promoted the idea of Greece’s transition from an Eastern colony to its “Westernization” without losing its identity (96), implying the close relation between national freedom and imperialism, thus characterizing Phil-Hellenism as a form of Orientalism (97).

Byron’s own position on the debate of Greek freedom is clarified in the poems “When A Man Hath No Freedom” (1820) and in Canto 6 of *The Age of Bronze* (1823). In the former, freedom is celebrated as an ideal that derives from chivalry (“chivalrous plan” line 5), and is not limited to any one country, but represents a gift shared by all mankind. The poem explains from the very first lines that, even if a man’s homeland is not under occupation, he has a duty to fight for freedom and should participate in the struggle for his neighbours’ liberation (lines 1-2). Greece and Rome are viewed as primary examples of free states (line 3) which embody the values of chivalry and bravery, reminding the readers that the past is of vital importance when trying to create a better present (“glories”). The fight for freedom is perceived by the poet as the ultimate duty of nobility (“nobly requited” line 6) and the final two lines constitute the poet’s advice to the readers to fight for freedom, as those who can endure its hardships (“shot,” “hang’d” line 8) will finally be crowned with honour (“get knighted” line 8). When there is a balance between two distinct themes, such as those of freedom and war (“fight,” “combat,” “battle”), the poet can be seen speaking directly to his readers, awakening their spirit with rhetorical references to glorious antiquity. At the conclusion, the use of commas in reference to death can be seen as a means of downplaying the dangers, while emphasizing the rewards of fighting for freedom.

Another poem where Byron airs his views on Greece’s freedom is *The Age of Bronze*, with Spain being used as the contrastive example. In Canto 6, for example, the poet begins by attacking the Spaniards for committing crimes in pursuing their imperialistic goals (line 6), citing the examples of Cortez and Pizarro to show that exploration was merely the alibi for conquest (lines 7-8). As in the other poems analyzed in this study, Byron again shows his admiration and knowledge of Greek antiquity with Athens (line 17), Sparta (line 19), and Salamis (line 29) considered as epitomes of glory and freedom. These are not viewed as “tyrannical victories” (line

30) which wear the “mask of peace” (line 39), but as supreme moments in a country’s efforts to regain its national independence. Again, Spain functions as a foil to Greece, being synonymous with enslavement, while Greece is seen in the poet’s mind as the birthplace of freedom. Here it is also stated that despotism is the common problem in Western and Eastern countries (line 14) which turns peoples into slaves.

As the poem proceeds, Byron carefully constructs his argument. In a war situation the danger of treason (line 38) is always present, reminding us that in such cases, the “false friend” is worse than the enemy and that nobody should be trusted. After the reference to treason, the Romantic poet summarizes his personal opinion in one sentence: “Greeks should only free Greece” (line 39), meaning that Greece alone is responsible for its own liberation and should not depend on foreign intervention (line 40). In the final lines of Canto 6, Byron, supports this argument by claiming that it is preferable for a country to remain conquered than to depend for its freedom on foreign “allies.”

5. Conclusion

In the present study we have tried to show how Greece is portrayed in Byron's poems as an Oriental land noted for its contribution to history and culture from antiquity, but also characterized by its current decadence and loss of identity. The link between Romanticism and Orientalism is found in the themes of nature and imagination, when the poet's fascination for undiscovered natural settings becomes a source of inspiration enabling him to produce poetry. On the other hand, it can be argued that the presence of a postcolonialist element in Byron's poetry makes it anti-Orientalist, as the Orient is not restricted to the sphere of imagination as a construct of the mind, but is included in historical reality (Kopf 199). As Peter Cochran suggests, Byron creates a new kind of Orientalism where Greece is described both as an Other, inferior to the West (Said 5), and a Self, equal to the West, in accordance with the poet's philhellenism (Grammatikos 96). Furthermore, Greece throughout the poems is presented in its positive and negative dimensions. This means that it is a place of romantic idylls, and exotic experiences (Said 2), but also has a shadow of degradation and violence which cannot be excluded.

After the theoretical part, each of the poems analyzed give a specific answer to the question of how Greece is viewed by Byron. Byron in "The Curse of Minerva" goes beyond the idealization of the Orient by presenting the erosion of its identity. Strong criticism is made against Elgin and Britain who are directly accused for the violation of antiquities. The emphasis on the opposition between the moral values of the past and the moral corruption in the present is the basis of Byron's political comment. The "curse" of a statue dating back to antiquity becomes the poet's means to voice his own anxieties and critique directly the politics of his own nation, reminding Britain in the conclusion that is impossible for it to remain unaffected by the decay of Greece. In *The Isles of Greece* and "January the 22nd, Missolonghi," the Orient becomes the place where the narrator is given the opportunity to discover the "Otherness" of his own selfhood, in other words to discover, even reconsider his own identity. The common element in these two works is the shift from the external to the inner world, from the romantic landscape to the individual.

The role of the female gender in Byron's poetry is explored in *The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, "Maid of Athens" and "I enter thy garden of Roses," where the

characters of Leila, Zuleika, Teresa and Haidee become embodiments of Greece. Byron's choice for presenting a feminized Orient is explained by David Roessel as a means of attracting the interest of the readers and gaining their sympathy through references to weak enslaved women (Roessel 50). Subverting the readers' expectations, these characters are not simply objects of erotic desire. Rather, they offer the poet a means of expressing melancholy over his unfulfilled love for the Orient, while inspiring the struggle of his heroic figures to return to the world of their imagination by bravely defending the value of freedom. In fact, the female characters are symbolic of the ideal of freedom, both national and individual.

In the last two poems, *The Age of Bronze* and "When A Man Hath No Freedom" the debate over the freedom of Greece is thoroughly discussed. Again, there is the assumption of the Orient as a signifier of values, especially freedom, which is crucial to Byron's political beliefs. Influenced to a great extent by Voltaire (Roessel 15), the poet's interpretation of freedom relies on reason, a factor that will lead the renewal of the individual self. The ultimate goal for the poet was not just the creation of a liberated Orient *per se*, but the re-establishment of Greece as a source of values on the basis of which Western society could be rebuilt (Grammatikos 11).

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Περίληψη

Στην ποίηση του Λόρδου Μπάιρον με θέμα την Ελλάδα, η Ελλάδα παρουσιάζεται μέσα από τον συνδυασμό των εννοιών του Ρομαντισμού και του Οριενταλισμού. Σε ποιήματα όπως "The Curse of Minerva" (Η Κατάρα της Αθηνάς), "The Isles of Greece" (Τα νησιά της Ελλάδας) και "January 22nd, Missolonghi" (22 Ιανουαρίου, Μεσολόγγι), ο Μπάιρον ούτε εξιδανικεύει ούτε υπερτονίζει τα αρνητικά σημεία της Ελλάδας. Αντίθετα, παίρνοντας έμπνευση από τις από τις προσωπικές του εμπειρίες από τα ταξίδια, ο ποιητής αναγνωρίζει την συνεισφορά του ελληνικής αρχαιότητας στον ευρωπαϊκό πολιτισμό, όμως την ίδια στιγμή δεν μπορεί να αγνοήσει την ιστορική της πραγματικότητα. Μέχρι τις αρχές του 19^{ου} αιώνα η Ελλάδα είχε μετατραπεί σε μια παρηκμασμένη χώρα η οποία κάτω από την Οθωμανική κυριαρχία, είχε χάσει την ταυτότητά της. Σε ποιήματα όπως *The Giaour* (Ο Γκιαούρης), *The Bride of Abydos* (Η Νύφη της Αβύδου) και *The Age of Bronze* (Η εποχή του χαλκού), το ενδιαφέρον του ποιητή δεν επικεντρώνεται τόσο πολύ στην Ελλάδα ως χώρα αλλά στην Ελλάδα ως τόπο ιδεών, αξιών και συναισθημάτων τα οποία η Βρετανία χρειαζόταν απεγνωσμένα για να χτίσει σε γερές βάσεις το μέλλον της και μέσω των οποίων ο άνθρωπος ως άτομο μπορούσε να επαναπροσδιορίσει τον εαυτό του.

Ο Μπάιρον παρουσιάζει την Ελλάδα τόσο από την οπτική της Δύσης όσο και από την οπτική της Ανατολής. Από την μια πλευρά, την παρουσιάζει ως κάτι διαφορετικό και άγνωστο—ένα μυστήριο και ανεξερεύνητο μέρος για τους Ευρωπαίους ταξιδιώτες—και από την άλλη, λόγω της φυσικής της ομορφιάς, ένα οικείο μέρος για τον Ρομαντικό ποιητή, το οποίο του παρέχει τους τρόπους να ανακαλύψει τον εαυτό του και να ξεφύγει, έστω με την φαντασία του, από την σύγχρονη βιομηχανική κοινωνία. Παρά τον εξωτικό του χαρακτήρα, το περιβάλλον της Ανατολής ενισχύει τα αισθήματα της νοσταλγίας και της μελαγχολίας στην σκέψη του ποιητή, αποκαλύπτοντας τον πνευματικό δεσμό μεταξύ φύσης και ανθρώπου, ενώ την ίδια στιγμή καταφέρνει να ενσωματώσει πληθώρα φιλοσοφικών εννοιών.

Με την χρήση υποδουλωμένων γυναικών ως προσωποποίηση της Ελλάδας, ο ποιητής προβάλλει την πολιτική της αδυναμία, καθώς προεικονίζει τον αποικισμό της Ανατολικής περιοχής (Orient) μέσω της εξουσίας στο γυναικείο σώμα. Την ίδια

στιγμή, η παρουσία της Ανατολικής περιοχής ως γυναικείο φύλο διευκολύνει την μετάβαση από την ανεκπλήρωτη ρομαντική αγάπη του ποιητή στον αγώνα του για πολιτικά ιδεώδη, συγκεκριμένο για εκείνο της ελευθερίας ενάντια στην τυραννία. Ο Μπάιρον χρησιμοποιεί επίσης την Ανατολική περιοχή ως μέσο για να εκφράσει τις πολιτικές του απόψεις πάνω σε τρέχοντα ζητήματα όπως αυτό της ελληνικής Ανεξαρτησίας και την εξωτερική πολιτική της Βρετανίας στην περιοχή. Η εισαγωγή της πολιτικής διάνοησης στην Ρομαντική ποίηση αποτυπώνει τις ανησυχίες του ποιητή σχετικά με εθνικά ζητήματα καθώς του δίνει την δυνατότητα να δώσει ξεκάθαρες απαντήσεις σε αυτά τα θέματα έτσι ώστε τελικά να βρει την πνευματική λύτρωση που αποζητά.