

Middle Eastern Women in James Clarence Mangan's Poetry

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Abstract

Mangan's poetry includes various women from the Middle East, each portrayed by an admirer who respectfully writes about these women. Unlike his contemporaries who tended to portray women of their times in terms of physical qualities, Mangan's Middle Eastern are depicted as pure and beautiful beings. In this paper, Mangan's Middle Eastern women are studied by analyzing his poems written in the years of 1838-1844. It is suggested that Mangan's Middle Eastern women appear as sources of beauty, admiration and respect unlike those women depicted by other poets of the West who perceived women as sources of carnal pleasure and at times as sources of danger. It is concluded that Mangan's Middle Eastern women are depicted in non-hierarchical terms which point at the originality of the poet. James Clarence Mangan differs from his contemporaries in the way he depicts the Oriental women in his poetry. His Oriental women are neither femme fatale nor supernatural beings as in the works of the other Oriental Renaissance poets. He tries to give a realistic depiction of them or he tries to depict them by following some Eastern literary traditions. Rather than establishing a hierarchy between himself and these women, he usually looks up to them with respect or they appear as objects of desire and are usually put on a pedestal. This paper aims to look at the depiction of Oriental women in his poems written between 1838 and 1844 and to underline how he departs from the cliché Western perceptions about the Oriental women.

Keywords: James Clarence Mangan, Middle East, Middle Eastern Women, West

Özet

Mangan, şiirlerinde bulunan çeşitli Ortadoğu kadınlarını hayranlıkla tasvir etmiş ve onlar hakkında saygılı bir üslupla şiirlerini kaleme almıştır. Kendi zamanlarının kadınlarını fiziksel özellikleri yoluyla tasvir etmeye meyilli olan çağdaşlarının aksine, Mangan'ın Ortadoğulu kadınları saf ve güzel varlıklar olarak betimlenmiştir. Bu çalışma Mangan'ın şiirlerindeki Ortadoğulu kadın anlatısı belirlenen yıllar arasındaki şiirleri analiz edilerek yapılmıştır. Mangan'ın şiirlerindeki Ortadoğulu kadınlar, bu kadınları cinsel hazzın ve zaman zaman tehlikenin kaynağı olarak algılayan ve betimleyen Batılı çağdaşlarının aksine; güzelliğin, hayranlığın ve saygının kaynağı olarak görülür. Mangan'ın Ortadoğu kadınlarının hiyerarşik olmayan bir şekilde betimlenmesinin şairin özgünlüğüne işaret ettiği sonucuna varılmıştır. Mangan, şiirlerinde Doğulu kadını

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betimleyiş şekliyle çağdaşlarından ayrılır. Onun şiirlerinde Doğulu kadınlar, diğer Doğu Aydınlanmacısı şairlerin şiirlerinde olduğu gibi baştan çıkarıcı, tehlikeye sebep olan ya da doğüstü varlıklar değillerdir. Şair, Doğulu kadınların gerçekçi bir betimlenişini vermeye çalışmıştır ya da onları Doğu Edebiyatı geleneklerine uygun şekilde betimlemeye çalışmıştır. Bu kadınlarla kendisi arasında bir hiyerarşi kurmak yerine, şair bu kadınlara saygıyla yaklaşmış ya da bu kadınlar arzusunun kaynağı gibi görünmüş ve baş tacı edilmişlerdir. Bu çalışma, Mangan'ın 1838-1844 yılları arasında yazdığı şiirlerinde Doğulu kadınları betimleyişine ve Mangan'ın Batı'nın Doğulu kadınları algılayış klişesinden nasıl ayrıldığına vurgu yapmak amacını taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: James Clarence Mangan, Orta Doğu, Orta Doğulu Kadınlar, Batı

1. Introduction

During the Romantic Period of English Literature, women were often portrayed as sources of danger as well as of carnal pleasure. James Clarence Mangan (1803-1849) was an Irish poet considered as the "National Poet" of Ireland by James Joyce (Elmann, 1991: 66) as an interesting figure who had never left Ireland during his life (O'Donoghue, 1897: 16).

O'Donoghue (1897) states that Mangan looked upon the fair sex as essentially cruel and malicious by citing one of his poems "Man at most is made of clay—/ Woman seems a block of granite!" Despite this note, in Mangan's poems, his perception of Middle Eastern (ME) women differs from his depictions of the western ones. In this paper, it is argued that Mangan's ME women are depicted in a praising and elevated way as he describes these women by comparing them to the rose, cedar, or peri.

In Mangan's poems, ME Women are associated with mystery and uniqueness. Furthermore, they are seen as sources of admiration. His ME women are non-erotic, free, and omnipotent beings who serve as ideal rulers, padishahs, and sultans. Hence, this paper aims to take a closer look at Mangan's depictions of ME women by focusing on his poems written between 1838 and 1844.

2. How ME Women were represented in Mangan's Poems?

In Mangan's poems, one of the most common features attributed to women is being and remaining mysterious. In one of his poems, "To Mihri" (Martin, 1996: 7), Mangan exclaims:

My starlight, my moonlight, my midnight, my noonlight

Unveil not, unveil not, or millions must pine. (Martin, 1996: 7)

In this poem, Mangan begs Mihri so that she remains mysterious by continuing her veiling. If she unveils, Mangan further exclaims, millions of people will suffer. In the following lines, it is said that if she shows your beauty, her hair will be seen darker than night and her body will shine so bright that it will be seen brighter than the sun. In "To Amine, On Seeing Her About To Veil Her Mirror" Mangan writes "Veil not thy mirror sweet Amine" (Martin, 1996: 174). Unlike many of his contemporaries who

consider women as a source of carnal pleasure, Mangan's approach to ME women is exclusively respectful and in full admiration.

In "A Nondescript" Lulu is also described as a peri, a non-erotic and supernatural being. Similar to various Ottoman poets, the words rose, cedar and peri-spirit are used by Mangan to portray Lulu's appearance:

To give my LULU's form its merit;
For when she sits, she seems a rose
And when she stands, a queenly cedar,
And when she moves, a Peri-spirit! (Martin, 1996: 11)

In "A Trophy Taken From Love" (Martin, 1996: 67) the reader is exposed to Gülnare's powerful control over Mangan's existence. Gülnare's existence is prioritized as she has a higher status than Mangan. In this elevated tone, although her physical features or emotions are not mentioned, the reader experiences the impact of Gülnare's powerful love on Mangan. In "To Amine" (Martin, 1996: 70) Amine is portrayed in non-erotic terms as for Mangan, Amine's eyes are the main reason for his admiration of Amine. In "To Amine, On Seeing Her About To Veil Her Mirror" (Martin, 1996: 174) Mangan confesses that Amine's beauty creates jealousy and despair. In these depictions, Mangan continues to treat these ME women by departing from the overused, worn-out Orientalist descriptions.

Being an omnipotent figure such as a sultan or a padishah are some features attributed to ME women by Mangan. In "A Trophy Taken From Love" (Martin, 1996: 67), Mangan's painful experience against Gülnare's sugar-like love is expressed. It is articulated that Gülnare can control the poet even with her one single hair. It can be inferred that the title "creator" is given to Gülnare by Mangan. This image of the powerful woman is also expressed in "To Rayab Ana Sherehemiz, The Female Traveller" (Martin, 1996: 69) in which Rayab Ana can change the situation of the world by her single decision. Similarly, this omnipotent ME woman reappears in "To Zelica" as follows:

Come, Zelica, and be my bosom's one tenant
Its Padishah and Sovereign of Sovereigns:
Peace cannot bless that country or that continent
In which no Sultan or Sultana governs. (Martin, 1996: 72)

Although having a female padishah has never been a historical reality in the Middle East, this title is given to Zelica by Mangan who cannot find peace without her rule.

3. Conclusion

It can be inferred that unlike his contemporaries, Mangan's treatment of women and especially ME women does not stem from a strong sexual desire or erotic hunger. In contrast, similar to the findings of Arıkan and Birlik (2018), the poems analyzed in

the study depict women's unique existence as a proof of God's greatness with their unique physical features and their status as padishahs and sovereigns.

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