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THE PARADOXICAL IMAGERY OF ARAB WOMEN IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S *DIDO QUEEN OF CARTHAGE* AND *TAMBURLAINE THE GREAT*

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores the paradoxical imagery of Arab women in two plays by Christopher Marlowe, Dido Queen of Carthage (1594) and Tamburlaine the Great (1590). These Renaissance plays focus on gender and identity questions which are highly contemporary and relevant to Oriental culture. The Orient is the scene of action and the cast consists of oriental characters. The Orient was also one of the main sources of inspiration in the Renaissance. This paper highlights and compares the interrelationship between Arab male and female identity in a context of hyper-masculinity. Elizabethan playwrights were interested in dramatizing the Orient in their dramatic writings (Al-Olaqi, 2012: 1767). They depicted the Orientals as warlike, lustful and bloodthirsty. (Wann, Louis,1915:427). Marlowe's Tamburlaine and Dido Queen of Carthage echo the Elizabethan interest in Arab women with an Orientalist discourse focusing on vilifying Arab characters as patriarchal and immoral beings. A feminist reading of Marlowe's Dido Queen of Carthage, reaffirms the image of a seductive East peopled with subversive and lustful Arab women, while in contrast they are depicted positively in Tamburlaine the Great as adamant, determined, loyal, and adherents to traditional values. In order to understand this contradiction in the depiction of Arab women in two plays by the same author, it seems necessary to trace out the traditions of Elizabethan Orientalism in relation to the religious, cultural, historical, and political context of that epoch.*

KEYWORDS: Marlowe, Elizabethan drama, Tamburlaine the Great, Dido Queen of Carthage, Arab women, Orientalism

INTRODUCTION

England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I was a period of increasing Western interest in oriental trends, Arabian figures and their culture. This is noticeable in dramatic writings that depict Orientals and their cultures, such as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Dido Queen of Carthage* (1594), and Philip Massinger's *Renegado* (1624), *The Songs of Geste,* and *The Song of Roland*. Indeed, the Elizabethan portrayal of Arab women conforms to the traditional description of Oriental women at large; that is Arab women were variously identified as segregated, subversive, domesticated and lustful beings. This Western inclusion of the Arab woman as a marginal ineffective identity, enslaved by a male-dominated environment is depicted in Thomas Newton's book, *A Notable History of Saracens* (1575) which was a great source of misinformation for the Elizabethan media. The general tendency in constructing the image of Arab women in Western consciousness has been binary producing the apparent contradictions in different Western literary works. C. Meredith Jones points out that Elizabethans used to portray Muslim women in the context of sexuality (1924; 219). For example, in Peele's *The Whore of Babylon*, *Philip Massinger's Renegado* (1624), Muslim women are identified as prostitutes and adulterous.

Furthermore, the sixteenth century was a period of many victories for the Ottomans in their struggle against the Europeans. *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part I and Part II, was written for the Elizabethan audience with the purpose of dramatizing the prevalent feeling of hatred against the Ottoman Turks, who were considered the "whip of the Christian World" and "scourge of Christendom" (Knolles, 1603:42). Among Elizabethan writers, Christopher Marlowe "presented to his Elizabethan audience a picture of the East they desired to see, an Orient filled with treachery, brutality, an Orient that was destroyed by its rulers" (Oueijan, 2011: 17). Both plays under discussion consider the Orient as savage, merciless or masterless/subversive. Edward Said (1978: 63) argues that Marlowe's Orientalist stage helped fabricate the stereotype of Islam as Christendom's other. Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage* echoes the Elizabethan interest in the Orient with an Orientalist discourse focusing on the Orient as the abode of pleasures and passions, while the West is portrayed as the site of duty and reason. However, Arab women in *Tamburlaine* are portrayed as adamant, determined, loyal and adhering to Islamic values, which is very different from the depiction in *Dido Queen of Carthage*. The core argument of the current study, therefore, is mainly concerned with evaluating and critiquing the paradoxical imagery of Arab women in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Dido Queen of Carthage*.

Rationale

The purpose of this study is to investigate the imagery of Arab women in two plays by Christopher Marlowe. More specifically, this study seeks to find out how Marlowe portrayed Arab women in *Tamburlaine* and *Dido Queen of Carthage,* and why he portrayed them in such a paradoxical way. The data used in this research was gathered, organized, coded and analyzed, and the related literature was reviewed in order to highlight existing interpretations of the topic under investigation.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study stems from the observed contradiction in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and *Dido Queen of Carthage,* regarding the representation of Arab women. This paradox in Western literature was left without being addressed appropriately or solved academically which might have contributed negatively to the work of other playwrights and consequently impacted the wider depiction of Arab women in the West if not beyond. Therefore, the problem that this study addresses is identifying the nature and contradictions in the portrayal of Arab women in Marlowe's works and the occurrence of these representations in related literature.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the fact that insufficient research has previously been conducted on the contradictions or contrasts in the representation of Arab women in Western culture. The findings of this research would encourage conducting further research on the representation of Arab women in Western literature. Most importantly, the study addresses a deeply controversial issue related to the hypothetical clash of civilizations and literary depictions of the "Other" that might help in understanding this controversy.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes descriptive, comparative and analytical methods. Edward Said's theory has been employed to provide deeper understanding of the structure of Orientalism as a western tactic for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. Some proposed reasons for implanting the negative image of Arab women in Western literature are also described. For the purpose of demonstration and identification of the phenomenon under investigation, some negative and positive examples quoted from Marlowe's plays (*Dido Queen of Carthage* and *Tamburlaine the Great*) are cited and critically evaluated. Employing a comparative approach in dealing with Marlowe's two plays would assist readers in understanding the obvious contradictions in the representations of Arab women.

DISCUSSION

Christopher Marlowe's Dido Queen of Carthage

The argument of this play suggests negative images of oriental female identity subsumed by hyper-masculinity. The play is an exploration of both East-West gender boundaries and a failed female ruler, who allowed her passion consume her very thought. The oriental Dido is presented as passive, over-emotional and hysterical. Her position of monarch is depicted as in tension with her femininity. Her sincerity and emotional directness is contrasted with Æneas. Dido has remained "free from all" (III.i.153) previous suitors, but her desire for Æneas directs her towards silence, and reduces the certainty with she can speak: "I love thee not- and yet I hate thee not" (III.i.172-3). After having set sail, Æneas and his team land at Carthage. Dido graces the Trojans with" gifts and honors "(Allen, 1963:65). Dido receives them with a warm welcome, she speaks words of deep humanity, and immediately fallen in love with Æneas. Their relationship soon grows intimate and Dido falls madly in love and emotion prevails. As the plot develops, she lets her desire for sensual gratification get the better of her. The weakness of Dido serves to emphasize Aeneas's apparent strength. Dido's gendered discourse clearly and straightforwardly embodies obsessive desire and worldly appetite. Dido draws attention to the masculinity of the "warlike Æneas" (II.ii.79) and places him in the role of lover by dressing him in the robes of her husband.

Dido conforms to a type, identified by Mario DiGangi in a number of late-sixteenth-century texts, most notably the plays of Fletcher and Lyly, wherein "a male character forgoes women, redirecting his social and erotic energies back into orderly–and potentially homoerotic–military relations. By making Æneas her equal, Dido places Æneas in "a superior position to herself simply because of his gender" (Jankowski, 1992, 134). Æneas "struggles to maintain his manly shape in the face of what he perceives as Dido's potent effeminizing power" (Deats, 2008: 123). In later scenes, it becomes clear that Dido's self-assertion is an expression of excessive desire rather than reason, as Æneas's departure seems to her to be worse than the downfall of her empire. The identity of Dido, thus, wavers between masculine action and female destructive carnal desire for Æneas. "Duty-bound Æneas", on the other hand, favours the Roman Republic over his passion. Indeed, Æneas's romantic affair with Dido of Carthage forces him to make the difficult choice of duty over love (p.107). It has been argued that Dido's voice becomes gendered and feminine when she "talks directly to Æneas about her desire for him" (Kinney, 2000: 1-13). This is evidenced by the romantic scene in the cave which threatens Æneas's creation of Rome. He challenges Dido's efforts to contain his future behind the walls of Carthage.

Dido offers him the "golden scepter" and "jewels' of her dead husband and Æneas finds himself torn between Carthage and Italy, but decides on "a sword, and not a scepter…" (4.4.40-43). Thus the relationship between Æneas and Dido is represented in obviously gendered terms, the feminine "scepter" of a queen versus the masculine "sword" of a warrior. In a lengthy appeal Dido is unable to persuade her lover to stay, and is left watching helplessly as Æneas departs with his men for Italy **(**Dunham, 2015:6**)**. Dido calls out: "O, how a crown becomes Aeneas' head. / Stay here, Aeneas, and command as king" (3.4.38-39), but despite this Æneas escapes from Carthage to Italy in masculine company in opposition to the intolerable "female drudgery" of Carthage (4.3.46-56).

Dido's words ("command as king") signals her renunciation of the throne for the sake of worldly pleasure and the deserted lover throws herself to her death on a funeral pyre. As various critics have argued, certainly, masculinity triumphs over femininity, insofar as it is Æneas, and not Dido, whose desires prevail (Knox, 2006: 8). Marlowe's Dido, once she falls in love with a foreign guest, "neglects her subjects and leaves her kingdom to fall apart" **(**Caro-Barnes, 2008:1**).** Dido conforms to Western stereotypes of the oriental woman because she fails to control her "appetites. The hysterical Dido can come to terms with her life only by ending it. Dido loses her independence by giving up everything for Æneas and the thought of losing Æneas's love is too much for her to tolerate. She was "so broken in mind by suffering, Dido caught her fatal madness and resolved to die" (4.656-57).

The despairing Dido is depicted as a victim of burning love. As she gradually becomes a slave to her passions, Aeneas concurrently becomes more courageous, rational and determined. As Aeneas leaves Dido and Carthage for the last time, Dido reminds Aeneas that "all the world calls me a second Helen," (5.1.144-45) Chedgozy sees both Dido and Helen as examples of troublesome and destructive desire. (Chedgozy, 2004: 245, 254). Aeneas could not succumb to an illegitimate love which will keep him from his duty, the founding of Rome. Indeed, as Goldberg notes, "Aeneas is not allowed any desire except to heed the imperial call" (Goldberg, 1992: 126). Findlay identifies a "narrative of abandonment in Dido, Queen of Carthage…where women are left behind in favour

of expanding male horizons" (Findlay, 2013:250). The rational control of the passions is depicted as Aeneas's most admirable quality. The establishment of what would become The Roman Empire earns him little joy other than the ability to conquer fear.

Deats concludes that *Dido, Queen of Carthage* "interrogates binary opposites such as love versus duty" (Deats, 2002: 109). This can be seen in how feeling defeated and full of agony at her loss, Dido commits suicide. After preparing a bonfire in her room, she takes the sword that Æneas gave her as a gift and stabs herself in the breast. She then jumps onto the fire. In doing so, she is moving towards personal destruction (as represented by her emotional failure as a lover) as well as political destruction (as represented by her failure as a ruler as embodied in the decline of Carthage. Æneas' subordination of desire emphasizes the sharp contrasts with the Oriental Queen Dido. Dido's sensual indulgence, passivity and subservient identity contrasts with Arab women's rebellious spirits challenging excessive masculine and patriarchal society in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great.* Certainly, in *Dido Queen of Carthage*, masculinity triumphs over femininity, insofar as it is Aeneas whose desires prevail whereas Aeneas is depicted as a close model of masculine control resisting uncontrollable feminine passion.

Tamburlaine the Great: Masculinity and its Connotations

Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* is a tyrant "monster turned to manly shape" (Part I, II. vi. 16). Cunningham notes that Marlowe's audience is captivated "not only with what can be done by a willful ruler but also with what can be done to another's body" (Cunningham, 1990: 209). Tamburlaine's patriarchal tyrannical regime is haunted by his quench for corpses and live bodies to satisfy his thirst for sovereignty. Power must be earned by means of conquering lands and taking power from others. Greatness, thus, seems to be very closely linked to the implementation of atrocities; "Nor will care for blood when wine quench my thirst." (110). The soldiers' yielding bodies are the key to Tamburlaine's tyranny. The play also hints at the embodiment of an extreme, passive, subversive masculine world (Scarry, 1990: 873) in which Tamburlaine's power is evidenced by the corpses of his victims (Butler, 2000: 17). At the end of Part I, Tamburlaine explains how dead bodies legitimate his sovereignty as he crowns his wife in a field of slaughtered corpses, saying "[e]mperors and kings lie breathless at my feet … All sights of power to grace my victory/And such are objects fit for Tamburlaine" (Part I, V. I. 469, 474-475). This suggests that the corpses in *Tamburlaine the Great* are material testimony to his ardent desire for power (Žižek, 2000: 217).

Tamburlaine, The Great Part II explores the extent to which Tamburlaine will adhere to his own brutal discourse after he discovers that his first-born son, Calyphas, ignored the king's instructions and desisted from battle. Tamburlaine acts in accordance with his identity as "the scourge of God and terror of the world…" (Part II, IV. I.154). Calyphas does not want to perform the same forms of masculinity that his father or his brothers indulge in; he decides not to be violent. Calyphas is deliberated and referred to as an "effeminate brat" (114). It would be perhaps possible to see Calyphas as representing an alternative masculinity and that is why Tamburlaine "heartlessly murders his own son for failing to perform proper masculinity" (Merry G, 2008: 105). Calyphas is not only questioning his father but also his ideals. When Tamburlaine wounds himself, in order to show his sons how to be supposedly brave and strong, he states: "Now, my boys, what think you of a wound?" and Calyphas responds: "I know not what to think of it. Methinks 'tis a pitiful

sight." (99). Indeed Tamburlaine's murder of his own son could be read as a response to his threatening Tamburlaine's ideal (stubborn temper). The murdering of Calyphas contrasts with Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage*'s emphasis on the paternal relationship (as represented in protecting Ascanius so that he can fulfill the imperial program of Rome). John Gillies notes that ironically the killing of Calyphas has resulted in the "collapse of Tamburlaine's dynasty" (Gillies, 2006:48).

In the course of the play Tamburlaine's masculinity is challenged and questioned by Bajazeth, Zabina, Zenocrate and Olympia. Tamburlaine's treatment of Bajazeth and his wife Zabina, shows him as barbarous and bloody. He exercises mental and physical torture on both. Tamburlaine steps upon Bajazeth as a footstool for his throne. (Tam 1.IV, ii, 30-55). Tamburlaine imprisons Bajazeth and Zabina in an iron cage, tortures them with thirst and starvation. Bajazeth refuses deliberately to yield to his new position, saying his imprisoners will have to "rip his bowels" before he "submits to such slavery," but Tamburlaine "gets up on [Bajazeth] into his chair," all the same (Part I, IV. ii. 16, 18, 28). Humiliated and harshly treated, Bajazeth kills himself by "braining" himself against his cage (Part I, V. I. 303). Shortly after Bajazeth kills himself, discovering her husband's crushed remains, Zabina "runs against the cage and brains herself" (Part I, V. i. 318).

The horror of this double suicide no doubt satisfied the Elizabethan audience's appetite for blood, an appetite that Marlowe fed. As Liza Hopkins argues that Marlowe's intention is not to give "a simple transcription of the life of a historical figure"(Hopkins, 2008:35). Marlowe's deliberate intention is according to Ipek "playing up the popular sentiment of hatred against the Ottoman Turks, whose military victories in Europe had earned them the title of 'the present Terror of the World.' (Ipek, 2014:155). Al-Olaqi Fahd agrees with Ipek that "the dreaded spread of Islam in England becomes a great threat. Elizabethan writers became gradually anxious at the Turks and Islam" (Al-Olaqi, 2017:1)

Zabina is depicted as a loyal wife to Bajazeth and vows to prolong hope for their lives as long as she can. When Bajazeth asks for water, she responds, 'sweet Bajazeth, I will prolong thy life/ As long as any blood or spark of breath\ Can quench or cool the torments of my grief' (I.V.i.282-84). When that is not possible she determines to follow him in death rather than submit to further torture (EMSLEY, 2000: 169-186). Zabina, being a decisive, resistant and independent woman, chooses to commit suicide rather than continue to be enslaved. After Tamburlaine defeats Bajazeth, she rails at her captors, "Injurious villains, thieves, runagates! /How dare you thus abuse my majesty?" (Part I, III. iii. 225- 226). Zabina shows the fiercest independence and in a way, Zabina's suicide in Part I (V, i) is paralleled to Olympia's suicide in Part II (IV, iii). Each woman is driven to her death by a fierce devotion to her husband, a devotion which makes him the center of her universe. But the distinction between the two women derives from the fact that after Bajazeth's death, Zabina is still a prisoner; Olympia, on the other hand, could be a queen if she were to accept Theridamas' proposal **(**Whitehouse, 1977 :74).

One cannot help but see the distinct similarities between Olympia and Tamburlaine; each loses a spouse and kills their sons. There is a contrast, however, between Olympia's passionate desire for death and Tamburlaine's struggle against it. Her suicide indicates independence and courage; she has chosen to free herself from tyranny. She is more concerned to preserve her Islamic religious values and refuses Theridamas's offer of love because of her grief for her husband and son. She

prefers death over being empress. As with Zania, the resolution of Olympia reflects her independence and strength rather than her weakness and dependency.

The Egyptian princess Zenocrate, on the other hand, chooses to love Tamburlaine despite her reservations about his bloody conduct. She stands as a representation of both self-objectification and personal independence. Her first appearance on the stage in Part I sets her up to be understood as an object, rather than an independent being. When Tamburlaine tells Zenocrate that her lords must either "willingly remain with [him]"…" Or else … be forced with slavery," (22) Zenocrate submits. Tamburlaine captures Zenocrate to legitimize his campaign against the world and overcome his base background by marrying a woman of higher rank than his own (Caldwell, 1967:50**)**. Yet Zenocrate does not let Tamburlaine rush her into marriage or show herself to be easily won by his words. She answers Tamburlaine's marriage proposal with "I must be pleas'd perforce. Wretched Zenocrate!" (I, 1.2.259). In choosing Tamburlaine, Zenocrate is "putting passion before family duty" (Deats, 1997:146).

Zenocrate is frequently aware and bitterly criticizes Tamburlaine's cruelty. When Damascus is under siege, she begs Tamburlaine to cease his assault and to be merciful to her father, the Sultan of Egypt:

My lord, to see my father's town besieged,

The country wasted, where myself was born,

How can it but afflict my very soul?

If any love remain in you, my lord,

Then raise your siege from fair Damascus walls.

(1, IV, iv, 63-69)

With only a little gentle pleading from Zenocrate, Tamburlaine finally gives in:

Content thyself; his person shall be safe

And all the friends of fair Zenocrate,

If with their lives they will be pleased to yield.

(85--87)

For much of the action Zenocrate is silent but present. She is portrayed as a rebellious voice against 'Tamburlaine morality' (Stean, 1964: 82). In fact, some of Zenocrate's speeches reflect a resisting spirit. She accepts Tamburlaine's love but never accepts his genocide. Zenocrate is the only character in the play who strongly asserts the existence of an "ethical code" of right and wrong (Whitehouse, 1977:65). Tamburlaine, then, discovers that Zenocrate is ill. The doctors can do nothing to save her life, and she dies. Tamburlaine, very sad over his wife's death, burns the city in which she dies. He orders that her body remain with the company wherever they go in battle. With a trembling finger, Tamburlaine directs his sons' attention to the countries that they will be expected to conquer. Tamburlaine then calls for Zenocrate's hearse, beside which he stretches out to die.

CONCLUSION

Orientalist writings had a considerable influence on English literature in general and on Elizabethan drama in particular. English Renaissance theatre showed a real interest in exploring the Orient and its culture. Many of the renowned Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, including Marlow and Shakespeare, were concerned with Orientals and their customs. However, sexualizing the Orient was the main object of Western curiosity that influenced the development of Renaissance drama as well as the 19th century Romantic culture. This paper pointed out how the portrayal of Arab women in Marlow's *Dido Queen of Carthage* builds upon the traditional description of Oriental women. In contrast, Arab women are depicted positively in Marlow's *Tamburlaine the Great*, where they are represented as adamant, determined, loyal and adhering to traditional values. Tamburlaine's Oriental women, for instance, challenge and question the male narrative voice. They also critique patriarchy and the traditional notions of masculinity. Meanwhile, Marlowe offers his audience the simultaneous opportunity to valorize, accept, or critique patriarchy as well as the traditional notions of masculinity training and the politics of gendered subjectivity. As pointed out earlier, Marlow's female characters in *Tamburlaine* are represented as resistant to the male-orientated social structures. This, however, is not the case in *Dido Queen of Carthage* where Arab female characters are mostly depicted as conforming to the traditional patriarchal values and, hence, as being silent, subservient and inactive. Moreover, Arab women in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* are portrayed as active and striving to attain individual aims. In Marlow's *Dido Queen of Carthage* Dido, when overcome and full of agony at her loss, commits suicide by burning herself alive. This act of burning may be taken as a metaphor that suggests that Dido is consumed with passion. It may also be taken as a symbol of how this Carthaginian Queen, who is stupefied by unruly desires, displayed the expected feminine readiness to sacrifice everything she has in return for passion. The Oriental female presence is effectively subsumed by the submissive male body in Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage* while in the two parts of *Tamburlaine the Great* martial military masculinity is challenged mainly by Oriental women. This paper also suggests the impact that Marlow's sexualization of Oriental women had on the Renaissance writers as well as on later Romantic culture. It raised serious questions about the relationship between gender and power, manly women and womanly men, gender confusion, territorialzation and deterritorialization of gender and sexualitywhich have come to fascinate postmodern sensibilities.

NOTES:

Note 1:
All citations are from Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage*, *The Complete Plays*, ed. J. B. Steane (London: Penguin English Library, 1969). Douglas Cole, Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.

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