Thomas Moore’s Lalla Rookh: Iran and Ireland a Sororal Reflection in light of Irish Orientalism

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Abstract

The West-East love affair and especially with the Persian empire has always been the same, following one unflinching ethos: the former Hellenizes the latter and, as a result, remodeling it either by injecting an inherently western trajectory into the core of the East, or by philosophizing and then reevaluating its national, ideological and cultural grand narratives.

By exploring Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* (1817) as the main point of departure for cultural interventions in the orient, especially Persia or the land of Ēran or Aryāns as a conspicuous source of insight, and crisscross my reading of Moore’s colonial look at Iran with Joyce’s subtle reading of oriental subjects and orientalism this article examines the ways in which the West has historically been re-introducing a different East in the form of an exotic Orient to not only its local audience but those abroad. To this end, this article will introduce and then instrumentalize the concept of Essentialist Irish Orientalism to shed light on an ever-growing interest of the West to meet and re-evaluate the East in the general and Iran in particular. Hence, the paper will first engage with an Irish orientalist reading of the East, especially Iran, by drawing upon theories of Said, Deleuze, Freud and Fanon.

Keywords: Thomas Moore, Irish Orientalism, Internal Colonialism, Cultural Colonialism, Lalla Rookh, Alterity.

Nations have their ego, just like individuals. The case of people who like to attribute to themselves qualities and glories foreign to other people has not been entirely unknown in history

James Joyce, “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” 1907

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Introduction

The West-East love affair and especially with the Persian empire has always been the same, following one unflinching ethos: the former Hellenizes the latter, remodeling it either by injecting an inherently western trajectory into the core of the East, or by philosophizing and then reevaluating its national, ideological and cultural grand narratives. The latter tendency has become the very conceptual impetus that lodged at the crux of such postmodern theories of, for instance, Linda Hutcheon’s ‘transcontextualization’, or Jahan Ramazani’s ‘translocal poetics’. While Hutcheon conceives this Hellenic affair as being heavily rooted in creating a retrospective leeway to look back at a nation and its sacred moments, Ramazani understands it in light of how one State decentralizes a national notion such as national identity by turning it on its own, and stripping it of its cultural, ideological, and geopolitical values. As a result, national identity and culture, once national artifacts, emerge as concepts which are neither local nor international; nor are they a hybrid of any form, but rather unknown objects of non-desire for the public.

As Bianca Devos and Christoph Werner understand, an Iran ruled by Reza Shah should be seen as the exemplar of a culturally colonized nation wherein the tendency to import and impose foreign values on the one hand, and exporting that which constituted national heritage to the West on the other, reached its apex. This paper, however, contends one should not limit the depth and breadth of cultural colonialism to a Pahlavi Iran. Rather, the West has always conceived Iran as not just a source of cultural excitement, a postcolonial concept that at once flirts with Edward Said’s ‘the mysterious East’ and the exotic Orient, but also a land that transcends national and geographical demarcators, at once resisting and inviting certain level of change. It is this animate dichotomy that has attracted and repelled curious westerners who had found untouched opportunities in, for instance, ideological resistance of the people as much as their openness to experimenting with new cultural artifacts. In other words, where the former appears in the form of a national resistance to foreign religions, the latter manifests itself as a meta-culture to welcome new and harmless beliefs in the form of superstition, creating what Chima Agazue claims in The Role of a Culture of Superstition (2013) as a “culture of superstition” (Agazue 2013, 21).

This transnational love affair, however, diverges into creating a new form of colonial interest when Ireland represents the west: a country with some 800 years of colonial history under the British empire, now emerging as a cultural colonizer; hence, as Carol

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2. All references to Iran in this study targets a pre-1935 Iran where it was called as Persia, bearing an ancient sense of cultural, national heritage.

Loeb Shloss understands, the birth of “Irish orientalism” (Schloss 1998, 264); or in Victor Kiernan’s terms, feeding “Europe’s collective day-dream of the Orient” (Kiernan 1996, 131). The affair, in this respect, between Iran and Ireland has not only further complicated the Saidean dichotomy but expanded such fixed definitional polarities by introducing a new form of Western Oriental infatuation wherein, as Shloss argues, Ireland “play[s] a central role in bringing disparate parts of the world into intellectual harmony” (Schloss 1998, 264). As Rasha Maqable claims, this role as an intermediary, however, was only a foyers for a much deeper objective, namely, pursuing an oppressed colonial desire of “liberation from the English dominant culture”, by channeling this desire through a cultural medium and seeking “affinity with that the Orient” (Maqabel 2013, 16). In this paper, I shall read Thomas Moore’s Lalla Rookh (1817) as the main point of departure for cultural interventions in the orient, especially Persia or the land of Ēran or Aryāns as a conspicuous source of insight. To this end, I will crisscross my reading of Moore’s colonial look at Iran with Joyce’s subtle reading of oriental subjects and orientalism, and a present conception of Irish orientalism and then Essentialist Irish orientalism by drawing upon theories of Edward Said, Eduardo Glissant, Gilles Deluze and Franz Fanon.

Irish Orientalism: The Land of Aryāns as the Source of Cultural Inspiration

The Ireland-Iran affair can be seen as an invigorated colonial desire that conceives freedom in cultural colonization, and in flirting with a romanticized variety of Said’s conception of the Orient as “a European invention”, namely, a land inhabited by exotic human beings with an even more exotic culture (Said 1979, 1). The concept of exotic, which itself can be seen as a tongue-in-cheek outcry of non-identarian rules and values in an aloof, uncivilized region, emerges as the very notion that had attracted the Irish author to pay imaginary visits to such far-reaching lands of exotica, to embrace a fresh air of cultural freedom by assimilating that which had made Iran and its culture as the hallmark of cultural independence. The end product of original Oriental perspective, therefore, is a phantasmagoric narrative of dwelling or visiting a land being ruled by seemingly barbarian ethics, and inhabited by uncouth natives. What makes an Irish variation of orientalism different from, say, a British variety lies in this very cultural dimension of the desire. An Irish orientalism, I contend, is neither about appropriation nor internal deconstruction of a given culture; rather, being built on years of colonial oppression, the discourse emerges as an impulse that conjures a colonial suppressed desire of familiarization, and at once functions as a bridge that connects independent nations by way of cultural affinity.

To deal with such feral ‘exotica’ the westerner needs to demythologize the state of affair, as Said suggests, by “making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (Said 1979, 3). In other words,

to make the inherently non-identarian aspects of the Orient more tangible and more European, the west must Hellenize and hence employ a descriptive approach, injecting a familiar concept that would enable the European subject to identify with that which is barely intimate. This appropriation of a descriptive language, and to make an uncanny a palpable concept is what makes the crux of Said’s discussion of European’s psyche. Said quotes Franz Fannon’s criticism of Freud’s understanding of the non-European, namely, a “world [that] contains only natives and the veiled women, the palm trees and the camels make up the landscape”, and the oriental subject then would fall to the categorical abyss of thieves or “killers who kill for no reason” (Said 2003, 21). To describe the orient and the oriental subject set against the backdrop of such a hauntingly exotic setting, the discourse should appropriate a certain level of candidness, which at times can give way to what Ezra Pound calls as “phantasy”, namely, crafting fact out of imagination (Pound 1914, 29).

To Hellenize, in this respect, is to transcend the rudimentary ethos of the term, namely, to create and normalize by way of deconstruction. For the west to Hellenize the orient and the concomitant oriental subject, I contend, is not just maintained in its traditional trend, namely, to rid the subject of its national and cultural values, or as Said claims, to introduce “force or violence” to and install concepts which are essentially foreign by way of direct or indirect intervention (Said 1993, xii). Rather, what Said as well as other critics even Ziauddin Sardar had failed to notice is the way in which the colonial force advertises or provokes opposing cultural impulses from within the colonized nation that function as countercurrents, working against the accepted political and cultural patterns of that nation.

For Said, even the meaning of culture is twofold,

First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy form the economic, social and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic form […]. Second, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society’s reservoir of the best that has been known and thought, as Matthew Arnold put it in the 1860s (Said 1993, 45).

It is the second definition which informs my reading of Moore’s Lalla Rookh, namely, an artifact from within a nation’s inherent belief systems which would allow for political, ideological as well as national causes to clash, compete and eventually give birth to new forms of understanding which comes from without the nation. In Said’s terms, therefore, culture can lose its pacifying and unifying nature, emerging as a “theater” or a “battleground wherein causes expose themselves to the light of the day and contend with one another” (Said 1993, xiv). One, however, should note the natural ways in which a culture in its national capacity could compete with one another and distinguish the natural end result from colonial interventions and the concomitant synthesized byproducts. For the latter is neither a sub-branch of the nation’s culture, nor a cultural catalyst that could improve the nation’s understanding of such new forms. Rather, the result, as we shall
find in Moore’s oriental romance appears as a western socio-political subject of colonial interest in an oriental land that had never been colonized before: Iran.

Thomas Moore drafted his penultimate version of *Lalla Rookh* in 1815, a work of romantic poetry commissioned by Longman for “three thousand guineas”, namely, three thousand British pounds. Not only was the offer “the largest price that [had] been given in [their] day, for such a work”, as noted by Moore’s confidant known only as Mr. Perry, but it pushed Moore out of his comfort zone of writing paid-autobiographies to indulge in what seems to have been a trend in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century: “the design of writing a poem upon some Oriental subject” (Moore 1861, ix). It might just be a result of a haphazard writing style, nevertheless the presence of ‘some’ as a weak determiner in the Preface while addressing his “quarto” on an ‘oriental subject’ might reveal the attitude of Moore’s generation towards the Orient and his Oriental adventure: a financial incentive, and a pleasure-oriented look at the Persian empire, the land of exotica. For Moore like many other British contemporaries such as Robert Browning who crafted *Ferishtab’s Fancies* (1884), Byron’s eastern poems, and his Irish compatriot James Clarence Mangan’s controversial pseudo-translations of Hafiz between 1837-1846, the orient initially appears as something more refined than a personal rendezvous with freedom; however, what eventually permeates from their works resonates with Haideh Ghomi reverberating Mangan’s claim, that “Hafiz pays better than Mangan” (Ghomi 1993, 153).

The trend, moreover, easily lends itself to a psychoanalytical reading, emerging as an incestuous affair between lovers on the one hand, and subjects of love on the other; the latter highlights a Freudian post-oedipal condition mediated through a colonial discourse. In *Poetic Intention* (1969), Édouard Glissant claims, “We were not born; we were deported from [the] East to [the] West. A sailor’s knife cut the umbilical cord. Slave fetters staunched the blood” (Glissant 1969, 191). The present interplay between the symbolic and the actual state of signifiers and signifieds such as the ‘umbilical cord’ the phallic ‘knife’ and the deportation from the East to the West provokes not only the image of a repressed subject returning to its roots but also the reversal of repressed colonial binaries of colonial and colonizer, where the latter seeks affinity and solace with its colonized roots. In other words, the interest of a western subject such as Moore in Iran or the Orient as a whole, can also be seen as the return of a historically repressed interest in a maternal ‘home’ which interesting enough is known through a feminine name, Iran. This feminine destination is not only exotic and intrinsically different for the masculine European subject, who is interested in exploring and possessing that mysterious object petit *a*, but also allows the western subject to understand his desires of knowing the Other without exercising force of any kind.

In *Caribbean Discourse* (1989), Glissant explicates how the western mind can become and appropriate the Other(ness) without imposing force; For Glissant this possessive sense of appropriation can be achieved by “establish[ing] a sequence and measure[ing] it

5. Byron’s eastern poems such as *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812-1818), *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1813).
according to his own time scale, which is determined by his affiliation (73). In this respect, by way of description of measuring that which is originally ours, the western mind will create a matrix of affinities, allowing for them to experience, if not live, a life in a remote land like Iran. Therefore, their life will become our concern, and their plights our source of contemplation. “We know that the Other is in us”, claims Glissant in *Poetics of Relation* (1997); and that it, say, the Orient “has an impact not only on our development but also on most of our ideas and on the movement of our sensibility” (Glissant 1997, 27).

*Lalla Rookh* begins with an imaginary visit to a romanticized Persia so much so that it would appear less exotic and wild, and more familiar to Moore’s audience who were thirsty for a cultural revival. As Moore notes in his preface, the main theme of *Lalla Rookh* is not a repetition of Persian grandeur, rather “the cause of tolerance was [the] inspiring theme; the spirit that had spoken in the melodies of Ireland soon found itself at home in the East” (Moore 1861, xviii). To achieve a tolerable understanding of the East and Iran in particular, Moore sets Barthélemy d’Herbelot de Molainville’s *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697) at the core of his extensive studies simply to compensate for his non-existent actual oriental and specifically Persian experience. Although textual exploration would never replace the real experience, Moore’s breadth and depth of reading were rich enough that as Sir James Mackintosh claimed quoting a British historian of British India, it “shows me that reading over D’Herbelot is as good as riding on the back of a camel” (Moore 1861, xviii).

What one should not ignore in the context of a western study of the orient especially produced in the nineteenth century is the degree of self-confidence that at times verges on pretentious arrogance with which an author like Moore would express his knowledge vis-à-vis a country or an empire. While research and contextual studies pave the path for a better understanding of the location, the empty authoritative claims westerners such as Moore and Jean Baptiste Bourguignon D’Anville make can be considered as cheap colonial, imperious appreciation of the exotica. For instance, Moore claims that, “we know that D’Anville, though never in his life out of Paris, was able to correct a number of errors in a plan of the Troad taken by De Choiseul, on the spot; for my own very different, as well as far inferior, purposes, the knowledge I had thus acquired of distant localities, seen only by me in my day-dream, was no less ready and useful” (Moore 1861, xix); or that he quotes Sir John Malcolm, praising his poetry of nothing short of “the truth of historian” (ibid).

For the Victorian pseudo-orientalists like Moore, the Orient, be it Persia or India, either resembles something which is exciting and inviting or a culture that promises freedom and originality; yet in either case it also masks a coveted unknown. To show that one has understood the concept and that he has been able to tame this unknown subject, one would have to highlight what had made the zenith of his quest led by desire: to possess by way of naming the unnamable. Such a vague description matches a proto-Freudian description of the Other. As Said notes in *Freud and the Non-European* (2014), the Other for the European is neither an uncanny nor a complete stranger; rather, it is “always about an Other recognizable mainly to readers who are well acquainted with the
Greco-Roman antiquity and what was later to derive from them in the various modern European languages, literatures, sciences, religions and cultures” which again must be very familiar to them in its entirety (Said 2003, 16).

**Khorassan: The land of The Rising Sun**

Moore begins his romanticized narrative by leaving behind the dark world of Ireland under a British colonial shadow, and by visiting those aloof and sunny lands of Persia which promise, at least metaphorically for the Europeans, a rising hope; and by depicting a prophet, albeit false, who in the westerners’ eyes embodies a rising resistance vis-à-vis the dominant culture of Arabs. The prophet is Hakim Ibn Hashem known to Moore as “Mokanna”, also known as Ibn Moqanna. Moore’s metaphor reaches its apex in its very beginning by recreating a geo-political warmth, hope and shedding that which promises darkness, “In that delightful Province of the Sun,/ The first of Persian lands he shines upon”, known as Khorasan (Moore 1861, 11).6 In their third chapter, “Metaphorical Systematicity: Highlighting and Hiding”, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue for systematic way of understanding a concept which metaphorically has been concealed by an authoritative agent such as culture, the State, or Politics. They claim,

> The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another […] will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept […], a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor (Lakoff et al. 2003, 10).

Lakoff and Johnson, in this respect, neither block nor refute the essence of metaphor; rather, they confide in the lenient power of language whereby metaphor emerges as an instrument to camouflage or emphasize any cultural notion. For Moore, to highlight the promising nature of alluding to an untrodden land of Sun and independent Hope, he needs to hide those other notions which are not real, or at least remain unknown to him such as the very ideological falseness that Ibn Moqanna represents. The only concept that matters to Irish, Victorian Orientalists such as Moore, in other words, who had been struggling with decades of oppressive British colonial reign has to highlight the sense of freedom, resistance, and hope that was at least metaphorically incorporated into the prophetic character of Ibn Moqanna and his seemingly divine rebellion as “The Great Mokanna, o’er his features hung / The Veil, the Silver Veil, which he had flung” (Moore 1861, 12). To hide Moqanna’s false divinity or perhaps his blatant lack of knowledge, Moore masks the reason behind Moqanna’s veil. In the metaphorical world of Lakoff and Johnson it can be argued that Moore believed Moqanna wore the veil as he had to cover “His dazzling brow, till man could bear his light” (Moore 1861, 12). To Iranians,

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however, what Moore’s metaphor hides is clear: the reason for his wearing a veil was neither to protect mankind nor to care for his false divinity; rather, it was simply to cover for his biological imperfection, namely, a blinded eye.

Moore’s metaphorical reference to Moqanna as a starting point for his narrative serves two purposes, one cultural and the other political. The political justification for suddenly embarking on an oriental quest while highlighting the false divinity of a rebel is to shed the mask of political figures such as Lord Castlereagh, British Foreign Secretary, and the Irish aristocrat Lord Moira, who supported Moore’s literary and cultural adventures as a personal patron. Yet, the most important figure who met with Moore’s most severe lampoons was Daniel O’Connell, an Irish political rebel, who divided the island into those who considered him a prophet, like Moqanna in the land of the rising Sun, calling him the liberator, and those like Moore who believed O’Connell “and his ragamuffins have brought tarnish upon Irish patriotism” (qtd in Kelly 2008, 504). While for The Irish O’Connell stood as the first impetus towards an independent Irish identity, for Moore, O’Connell’s patriotic agenda was akin to Moqanna’s false divinity in being fragile and wrong at best, manipulating concepts that had made the very foundation of nationhood such as religious and ideological differences. The metaphor here in Moore’s reference to Moqanna as the opening chapter of Lala Rookh, therefore, is to hide his Irish actual nationalism and to trade them in the form of an oriental fairytale of a land in which false prophets like Moqanna are glorified just as much as O’Connellite patriotism is being falsely praised.

As for the cultural aspect, Moore had found in Moqanna that very patriotic vigor and messianic strength that the Irish found some 40 years later in another political-cultural activist called Charles Stuart Parnell. As Saeedeh Soltani Moghadam notes, what made Moqanna a favorite socio-political figure for a portion of people was his seriousness in upholding his Iranian identity at the forefront of his rebellions and wars against Arabs and other sects who had not only occupied the land but rejected his false divinity. “Wherever Moqanna’s army known as the Army in White would enter the battlefield”, notes Soltani Moghadam,

Their opponents would have to leave the arena; the Arabs and their army too weren’t comfortable with him either. ‘Mahdi’, the Abassid Caliphate, found Moqanna’s rebellion too harmful for his reign, and had tried anything at his disposal to suppress his rebellion. He also found Moqanna’s rebellion dangerous to the foundation of Islam […] as he was informed that people in Bokhara, Saghd, Nakhshb, and Kash have neglected Islam as their religion, and Chose Moqanna’s faith as their faith” (2014).

For Moore, Moqanna’s primitive Pan-Iranism is tantamount to Parnell’s ferocious Irish nationalism and anti-British unionist, which later in 1885 that is (circa) 30 years

after Moore’s death formed the body of Home Rule presented by Parnell. For the Irish and Moore, Parnell and his home rule were every bit as dangerous and at once necessary as Moqanna’s character and rebellion for an Iran being reigned by Arabs. Moqanna, in this respect, emerges as a veiled prophet whose tenets and teachings transcend Khorasan and even the Middle East, sympathizing with other nations betrayed by their fellow countrymen and oppressed by ideologies of the Other and at once haunting an innocent feminine abstraction of Iran.

Where Parnell stirred a new literary wave in the form of draculas and vampires, especially lampooned in Punch cartoons (Figure 1, 1885), Moqanna’s righteous trend of nationalism wedded to such inherently false claims of divinity and corrupt ideology had
given life to a plethora of demonic folktales from Shahrzad’s *1001 Nights* to Jorge Luis Borges’ *The Masked Dyer* (1934) wherein a mysterious humanoid demon exercises his supernatural powers on innocent beings, mostly women (Figure 2, 1833).

As discussed earlier, the west has always demonized the East for its unknown cultural, social and especially religious differences. The intermediary nature of Irish orientalism has tried to reduce the defamiliarized aspect of colonial discourse, creating one which glorifies the most apparent aspects or concepts such as glossing on the presence of a veiled prophetic figure who ignores local values and embraces radical traits. The Orient for the Occident, according to Said, is “irrational, depraved (fallen)” (Said 1979, 40); nevertheless, Moore’s Irish orientalism resists such definitions, reverses the colonial

*Punch, or the London Charivari*, London: British Library, October 24, 1885.
binary of existence and portrays an ideologically virtuous, albeit superficially, image of the East. The Veiled Prophet of *Khorassan*, in this respect, can be read as a veiled, revisionist representation of a pious orient wherein ideology had already been an unshakeable conceit, albeit rebellious and wrong as it was translated for Moqanna. The result is still patronizing and interventionist at best, if not colonial; yet it has tried to succeed in its messianic role of cultural intermediary.

Creating affinity rather than seeking one with an all culturally inspiring Iran, was the other feature of Irish orientalism. To bind with a geo-politically aloof land of Aryāns one must create the necessary environment and the concomitant agents. Therefore, Moqanna and his articulately long romantic narrative emerges as the very agent that could bring the two separate nations closer. Moqanna’s ideological rebellion against a fraternal betrayal, and the eventual murder of Abu Moslem matches Parnell’s, O’Connells’, and Swifts’ socio-cultural critiques of British colonial reign and an Irish non-identarian existence of unionists and anti-treaty rebels. Creating affinities and ties with other socio-culturally oppressed nations is not a novel effort materialized in Moore’s poetics; nevertheless, *Lalla Rookh* should be seen as the work that pioneered such an argumentative critique of betrayals, and politically motivated ideological rebellion.

Creating affinity can materialize in a variety of forms. Portraying an Other that in itself is nothing but a blend of Others, be they minorities or a hegemonic blend of other races and ethnicities, emerges as a notable factor in *Lalla Rookh*, especially his depiction of Iran at the time of a Veiled Prophet in *Khorassan*. The foundation that had led to the formation of such a multitudinous racial mixture is Lacanian, as the object of desire is not just a different skin-color but also racial and cultural properties that can’t be had by the desiring subject, for instance, Moqanna. This very concept materializes in Moore’s depiction of Moqanna’s Harem as a chamber that is every bit as private as one’s unconscious desires, which hosts women as objects of desire with multiple ethnicities;

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Well hath the Prophet-Chief his bidding done;
And every beauteous beneath the sun,
From those who kneel at Brahma’s burning founts,
To the fresh nymphs bounding o’er Yemen’s mounts;
From Persia’s eyes of full and fawn-like ray,
To the small, half-shut glances of Kathay;
And Georgia’s bloom, and Azab’s darker smiles,
And the gold ringlets of the Western Isles;
All, all are there; - each Land its flower hath given,
To form that fair young Nursery for Heaven (Moore 1861, 14).
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This labyrinthine form of Other as depicted in Moqanna’s harem introduces multiplicity as a western foundation of colonialist ethos. I contend, multiplicity in the context of colonial discourse is defined as a colonial tactic whereby the colonizer conceptualizes the colonized, as Homi Bhabha understands, “as a population of degenerate types on the
basis of racial origin”, allowing for an orderly ruling system to dominate this colonized mess for the sake of order and organization (Bhabha 1994, 23). For Gilles Deleuze as the modern progenitor of the term, however, multiplicity is defined as a labyrinth in itself with no acknowledgment of prior existence. The labyrinth includes all variations and forms, reducing the need of borrowing any other form of external existence, if any, from other entities. In other words, the Deleuzian conception of multiplicity can be simplified as the emergence of an intuitive impulse that allows the individual to appreciate the uniqueness of each creation, and to contribute to the creation of such unique concepts. In the context of colonial discourse, multiplicity as depicted in Moqanna’s harem, for instance, can be considered as Moore’s colonial effort, albeit unconscious, to appreciate the multi-dimensional array of singularities presented in the form of individuals that had contributed to the formation of Moqanna’s socio-cultural domain.

By appreciating the diverse yet independent singularities in Moqanna’s harem, it can be postulated that Moore’s botched western orientalism again served one old purpose: to analyze and hence to gain knowledge over the founding element of a culturally exotic Iran, also known to him and his contemporaries as a geo-ideologically land of unknown. Multiplicity for the colonizer, in this respect, appears as an agent that empowers the author to examine the Orient as a multi-verse, populated by a variety within which each carries a variety, be it cultural, political or even religious. Nevertheless, this very perspective also would allow the West to subtly appropriate a domineering discourse that could introduce, for instance, Iran as multi-dimensional construct, and eventually implement its colonial nature by inviting the west to criticize than to harmonize culturally.

Oriental multiplicity, I contend, as appropriated in Moore’s Lalla Rookh in general and his depiction of Moqanna in particular appears as an occidental look at the East and its cultural heritage, glorifying an authentic multiplicity at the expense of forsaking its ideological and cultural solidarity and racial singularity. In other words, Moore’s Irish orientalist perception of Iran portrays Iranian singularity as a sum of multiple races, brought together by way of force embodied in Moqanna’s harem and its multi-verse sex slaves, or by way of necessity, be it emotional or national, as presented in Moore’s other cultural references to Iran. Multiplicity in its original conception, in other words, is nothing but a false look back at a nation’s cultural and racial diversity. Moore’s Oriental perception of multiplicity resonates with what was echoed in later generations of British cultural explorers of the unknown, such as Aldous Huxley’s roman à clef, Point Counter Point (1928) wherein multiplicity is perceived as a multitudinous perspective coveted by the authoritative voice of onlooker: “the essence of the new way of looking is multiplicity. Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen [...]. What I want is to look with

8. Deleuze is known as the founder of a modern definition of multiplicity, while he had developed the term based on his reading of Henri Bergson, and Spinoza.

all those eyes at once” (Huxley 1928, 266). Not only is Moore’s multiplicity autonomous and possessive, but it includes a subtle level of colonial idiosyncrasy while portraying that which is unknown, namely, Iran.

Moore’s depiction of Moqanna’s harem marks the existence of an internally colonizing discourse in an all independent, non-colonial Iran, and can also be read as his western, albeit Irish and thus more lenient, approach towards reconstructing essentialism in the East, especially in a land the name of which suggests such inherent, essential homogeneity: Persia, Iran or the Land of Aryāns. For Moore and his contemporaries, Iran oozes racial, cultural, ideological and historical unity; it is a land, moreover, that had been and is being ruled by Aryāns. For the sake of affinity and departing from British rule, one needs to examine the ways in which national essentialism in the form of national solidarity can be defined to the extent that can be understood by a foreign mind. However, Moore’s critique of essentialism neither historically predates modern multiplicity nor challenges it. Rather, it stands as Moore’s socio-politically essentialist effort to familiarize an already colonized, namely, the Irish with Iran as an independent unknown and at once an object of desire.

Moore’s reference to multiplicity in *Lalla Rookh* has nothing in common with what later became the founding element of Deleuzian multiplicity; for instance, Moore’s emphatic reference to a multitude of races in Moqanna’s harem is a pseudo-dialectics based neither on an essential model of identity (Plato), nor a regulative model of unity (Kant), nor a dialectical model of contradiction (Hegel); rather, as suggested earlier, it is simply an Irish variety of orientalism aimed at bringing two geo-politically aloof nations together for the sake of affinity and independence. In this respect, Moore’s heuristic colonial attempt at debunking Iranian essentialism and introducing a libertarian image of a fallen Empire by highlighting the existence of diversities and racial minorities on the one hand, and privileging those seemingly minorities and advertising plurality on the other proceeds inasmuch as a metaphor would, and stops when one examines the actual root of such western Oriental adventures.

**An Irish fascination with Fire-Worshippers and Gabr**

Moore’s next self-inflicted blow to the body of his Irish orientalist adventure occurs when he explores the ideological realm of Iran by visiting “Ghebers”, and “Fire Worshippers” (Moore 1861, xvii). This, informing most of the chapter entitled “Fire Worshippers”, leaves behind nothing but a pejorative colonial heritage of crafting alterity expressed through oppressively descriptive words and failed metaphoric attempts at highlighting the seeming “struggle […] maintain between Ghebers or ancient fire-

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10. The author aims for the following concepts when discussing Plato, Kant and Hegel as the forefathers of Deleuzian multiplicity: Platonic mimesis, Hegelian dialectics, and Kantian transcendental deduction and the unity of consciousness. Deleuze established his conception of multiplicity against the backdrop of these concepts mentioned above and the famous post-kantian trio of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich W. J. Shelling and Hegel.
worshippers of Persian, and their haughty Moslem masters” (Moore 1861, xvii). In critiquing essentialism in Persia, and the dominance of an essentialist ideo-political oppression in this land, Moore himself falls prey to his own contraption and repeats colonial essentialism by disparaging his self-set libertarian rules of disavowing (British) colonialism, and by identifying Persia and its inhabitants solely by their inherent ideological attributes. This unconscious recreation of colonial essentialism apparent in Moore’s discourse is what Lakoff warns against in Women, Fire and Dangerous Things (1987), as a metaphorical reconstruction of essentialism in light of the seemingly non-essentialist, subversive dialectics of Orientalism.

Moore’s original intentions of reading Lalla Rookh, namely, “establishing affinity with that Orient as a tool of liberation from English dominant culture”, as Maqableh understands, are suddenly trampled by the unconscious return of an individually repressed colonial mentality, projecting such internalized subjugation on that which is unknown (Maqableh 2013, 45). Lalla Rookh, or at least a large proportion of it, therefore appears as a variety of what Declan Kiberd defines as “internal colonialism”, namely, a politicized colonial structure, be it internal or external, which rejects colonial discourse only superficially, being confirmed by colonial retrospective tendencies of description and control (Kiberd 2005, 163). Moore’s examination of multiplicity by exploring the essence of Persian ideological and cultural elements, in this respect, is nothing but the reincarnation of a recursive essentialist colonial discourse whereby nationhood is defined in light of “those properties that make the thing what it is, and without which it would be not that kind of thing” (Lakoff 1987, 161).

Moore’s essentialist approach defines Persia as a Zoroastrian land, and any structural change to the essence of this national structure, for instance, the introduction of Islam is obviously rejected, viewed as an external element imposed on the nation by way of war. To reject Islam and its ‘haughty Moslem masters’ by way of western cultural intervention promises a shared sense of independence, the one which Moore and his later compatriots such as Yeats and George Russell (AE) tried excessively. In other words, For Moore and other Irish Oriental enthusiasts, rejecting and defeating anything but Zoroastrianism is like defeating British imperial rule. Moore confirms this in his preface to Lalla Rookh as he explains how he found ways to defeat his “disheartening experiments”:

Had this series of disheartening experiments been carried on much further, I must have thrown aside the work in despair. But, at last, fortunately, as it proved, the thought occurred to me of founding a story on the fierce struggle so long maintained between the Ghebers, or ancient Fire-Worshippers or Persian, and their haughty Moslem masters. From that moment, a new and deep interest in my whole task took possession of me. The cause of tolerance was again my inspiring theme; and the spirit that had spoken in the melodies of Ireland soon found itself at home in the East (Moore 1861, xvii-xviii).

This is same level of Irish interest in the East shared between other Irish writers such as James Joyce. Joyce’s Dubliners, appears as a collection of short stories with the concept of Bildung or self-formation as its crux. “Araby”, the third story in the collection, narrates a botched love story of a Mangan’s sister and a boy. The sister’s surname is an astutely homage to James Clarence Mangan, the famous Irish poet, who
translated Hafiz’s poems and published them in his college Journal as his own poems. Joyce returns to Mangan’s extraordinary literary theft and intellect in one of his lectures, and praises Mangan for his universality:

The lore of many lands goes with [Mangan] always, eastern tales and the memory of curiously printed medieval books which have rapt him out of his time [...] East and West meet in that personality (we know how); images interweave there like soft, luminous scarves and words ring like brilliant mail, and whether the song is of Ireland or of Istambol it has the same refrain (Joyce 1989, 77-78).

While Joyce shares the same level of enthusiasm and interest in the East with Mangans and Yeats and Moores, he also suffers from the same level of universal ignorance as he mistakes Shiraz, Hafiz’s birthplace, with an “Istambol”, and submits to literature’s metaphorical essentialism. For Joyce like Mangan and Moore, the East emerges, according to Ellen Shannon-Mangan, as “a realm to which all states and conditions of mankind are irresistibly attracted” (Mangan 1996, 173).

Moore begins his interventionist, fiery and ‘deep’ hope of importing independence to Iran with his chapter entitled, “Fire-Worshippers”: a romanticized tale of love and loss between Moslem and Zoroastrian families whereby the Islamic beginnings in Iran sound like a never-ending narrative of loss and defeat for Iranians:

Even he, that tyrant Arab, sleeps
Calm, while a nation round him weeps;
While curses load the air he breathes,
And falchions from unnumbered sheaths
Are starting to avenge the shame
His race hath brought on Iran's name (Moore 1861, 170).

Moore’s essentialist acknowledgment of differences and diversity in a neo-Islamic Iran is neither politically libertarian nor culturally homogenous; rather, as Terry Eagleton understands, such “acknowledgment[s] of difference, hybridity, multiplicity is a drastically impoverished kind of political ethic in contrast to the affirmation of human solidarity and reciprocity” (Eagleton 1998, 26). For Moore, the difference is every bit as horrific and dividing as an eventual hybrid race of Iranians and Arabs. To gain independence and glory, the defeated Iranian must ‘avenge the shame’ and slay the Arab tyrant in Moore’s metaphorical realm of existence. The affinity Moore seeks here can best be understood by examining a similar source of shame and defeat imposed on the Irish during eight hundred years of British colonialism. What the Irish had to avenge and finally did, was to cleanse the shame of tragic events in the history of Ireland such as the Irish famine (1740-1741) and the Great famine (1845-1852) during which the population was halved twice, which was exacerbated by political enmities between the colonizing Britain and the colonized Ireland. The cleansing materializes in the form of rebellions and revolts, especially by revolutionaries such as Robert Emmet in 1803.

What Moore ignores in his great romanticized depiction of Islamization of Iran, while creating a point of socio-cultural sympathy for his homeland, is his lack of historical knowledge: the Arab conquest of Persia ended in 654 whereas Moore’s Lalla
Rookh chronicles an anachronistic narrative of Moqanna (died 785). In this chapter, Lalla Rookh’s fame and beauty is replaced by Hafed, a Persian commander who falls for Hinda’s beauty and attraction, an Arab caliphate’s daughter. Where Lalla Rookh reaches her apex of symbolic characterization and emerges as a focal point for women in Ireland and the West by showcasing her insatiable taste for change, renewal and independence, Hafed metaphorically represents Iranians’ physical strengths and mental focus in obtaining whatever they desire. The theme is resistance and seeking independence; however, what distinguishes “Fire-Worshippers” as a chapter from Moqanna’s narrative is an emphatic focus laid on the colonizer in the former tale. For Moore, the shared point of departure between Gabr and the Irish is tolerance and resistance. What allows for the creation of such translocal cultural intersection between the Irish and the Iranians lies at the crux of Hafed and Hinda on the one hand, symbolizing the resistance of the colonized, and Robert Emmet’s love and affection for Sarah Curran. Emmet, an Irish independence revolutionary, falls for Sarah, the daughter of a British-Irish lawyer. In other words, for Moore, “Hafed is the Iranian Robert Emmet, Hinda is the poor Sarah Curran”, as Howard Mumford Jones understands, “Hafed is a Persian Robert Emmet, Hinda the unfortunate Sarah Curran [Emmet’s lover], and the traitor a composite portrait of government spies” (Mumford Jones 1937, 181). While Moore’s reading of Moqanna as both a character and a revolutionary was clearly a fruit of personal interests and inaccurate biographies, Hafed emerges as an ideal ideo-cultural soldier: he defends his motherland like Robert Emmet, introduces republicanism like Theobald Wolfe Tone, albeit inasmuch as his Iranian-Islamic milieu would allow, and wholeheartedly falls in love like an Oriental object proper. In this respect, it is acceptable for a colonial subject like Moore to demand independence and resistance by seeking affinity with a culture that had witnessed an apocalyptic revolt charged by Ghebers against their ‘Moslem masters’, associating it with the uprising of 1798 in Ireland, which symbolized the Irish ‘struggle’ against the English.

Conclusion

Moore as part laureate and part historian was fully aware that history is strongly political, taking side with a Kierkegaardian attitude of either / or. He was also aware that to ‘avenge the shame’ a colonial power has brought upon a nation, they must resort to military solutions; and in so doing, the rebels who overcome the power will be marked as heroes and those who fail will be historically branded by the partisan history as traitors:

Rebellion! foul, dishonouring word,  
Whose wrongful blight so oft has stain’d  
The holiest cause that tongue or sword  
Of mortal ever lost or gain’d.  
How many a spirit, born to bless,  
Hath sunk beneath that withering name,  
Whom but a day’s, an hour’s success
Had wafted to eternal fame!
As exhalations, when they burst
From the warm earth, if chill’d at first,
If check’d in soaring from the plain,
Darken to fogs and sink again;—
But, if they once triumphant spread
Their wings above the mountain-head,
Become enthron’d in upper air,
And turn to sun-bright glories there! (196)

This very selection from “Fire-Worshippers” became Moore’s fierce retort to Mary Godfrey’s examination of ‘the difference between a madman and a hero’. It also depicts Moore’s metaphorical stance vis-à-vis the many partisan attacks against the memories of revolutionaries like Emmet, and Tone represented in the form of Hafed’s love and affection for a woman greater than any Hinda, namely, their (m)otherland. Moore’s subliminal appraisal for Ireland as m(Other)land, in this respect, can be seen as not only a personal outcry for a lost sense of individual Irishness but also a national ode for a past that signified independence and authority prior to a collective fall into the abyss of British colonialism. This very ‘ode’ can be read as both a narrative of sympathy, the sort which seeks affinity with an independent Persian, and at once a reminder of a ‘history of the multitude, which could remind the Irish of their once territorial unity based on individual recollection of their collective past.

Bibliography


Thomas Moore’s Lalla Rookh


