

**BANDIT QUEENS AND EASTERN SISTERS: BYRONIC HEROINES
AND BRITISH NATIONALISM, 1770-1840**

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SHARIFAH AISHAH OSMAN

Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2004

Major Professor: Charles J. Rzepka, Professor of English

ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that Byron's portrayal of his Oriental and orientalized Greek heroines in his verse romances rehabilitates the abject figure of the Oriental woman by endowing her with self-possession and dignity, an outlook that provides a popular model of female heroism for second-generation women authors like Mary Shelley, Felicia Hemans, and Letitia E. Landon. Byron's heroines ranged from passive victims to assertive warriors, and embodied the poet's own ambivalence towards the East. Thus, they were frequently characterized as members of a weak and colonized race--unknown yet dangerously intriguing, invoking distrust but also sympathy. As liminal figures, they could be used strategically to promote or overturn racial and cultural stereotypes about Eastern peoples, and to endorse or denounce prevailing patriarchal attitudes toward women at home. This dissertation shows that Shelley, Hemans, and Landon refigure the Byronic Oriental heroine's earlier oppositional role as colonized "other" by appropriating her as a convention in a more inclusive nationalist ideology based on the primacy of the domestic affections. This

ideology not only emphasizes a feminine bond of sympathy, but also the notion of the British Empire as maternal and nurturing toward her colonies.

The Introduction explores the treatment of the heroine in various popular Romantic Orientalist texts, and establishes how male and female authors exploited the Oriental heroine as abject other to consolidate English national identity. Chapter One examines Byron's portrayal of the assertive, orientalized Greek heroine to demonstrate how the poet challenged racial and gender stereotypes of the passive Oriental woman. Chapter Two examines Mary Shelley's sympathetic depiction of the Byronic heroine in *Frankenstein* and two Greek tales, one that is ultimately undercut by her ambivalence towards the Oriental woman. Chapter Three examines Felicia Hemans's Byronic heroines, arguing that she humanizes the Oriental woman by linking the latter's psychological rebellion with the domestic affections. Chapter Four suggests Letitia Landon's Byronic heroines reflect a similar emphasis on the nobility of the female spirit, regardless of race and class. The conclusion examines the presence of the Byronic heroine in post-Romantic period literature, one that reinforces Byron's cultural legacy in popularizing the sympathetic portrayal of the Eastern woman.