

Abstract

The subject of this BA thesis are plays set in the Orient, a new genre that started to gain popularity in the Restoration period. These plays, commonly inspired by the popular travelogues to the Orient and historical accounts, are characterised by their collection of stock characters, repeating topoi and orientalised images that represent the Orient more as a conception created by the West than an actual place. Nevertheless, in analysis of some of the plays I shall argue that these works also offer possible commentaries on the British society of the time and that they can be used as arguments criticizing or reinforcing the contemporary perception of women by dealing with such otherwise rather inaccessible themes as women stepping out of their social boundaries, femininity or female sexuality.

In order to advocate my thesis I plan to use four different tragedies with Middle-Eastern settings, specifically Rhodes, Morocco, Turkey and Colchis (located mostly in present-day Georgia and Turkey). All these plays were written between 1663 and 1696 and might be considered some of the most representative examples of the genre. They include William Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes* (1663), Elkanah Settle's *The Empress of Morocco* (1673), Mary Pix's *Ibrahim, the Thirteenth Emperour of the Turks* (1696) and Delariviere Manley's *The Royal Mischief* (1696). My choice of works was influenced by the fact that in all these plays female heroines are central to the text and yet they offer quite a wide range of strategies the playwrights availed in their attempts to transform the Oriental settings into a means of argument in the gender debates of the late seventeenth century.

The introductory chapter gives a quick overview of the historical background, concentrating first on the contemporary position of women, discussions concerning these changes and the reflection of these debates on the English stage. It also offers a summary of the various factors that played a role in the British representation of the Orient, introducing Saidian Orientalism, British relations with the Orient and finally its representation. In the following analytical part of the thesis each of the examined plays will be given a chapter on its own, that is enough space to demonstrate the individual approach each of the plays chooses to represent women both in the Orient as well as to discuss their British foils.