

Eastern Themes and Topics in the Classical Dramatic Literature of France

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

One of the most important periods in French literature is the classical dramatic literature movement in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries in which outstanding dramatic works (either comedy or tragedy) were produced by great French play writers using the principles and rules of the ancient Greek and Roman classicism literary schools. In this study, the authors take into consideration the different themes, anecdotes, stories, and legends of the East which have been extracted from several cultural and literary sources and ancient civilizations of the East in order to create a new concept, especially Persia (Iran), Ottoman (Turkish), India, and China. In this paper, we briefly investigate the Eastern themes in classical French drama.

2. Research Methodology

In each section, we briefly review a number of classic dramatic works by famous French play writers. These literary works would be analyzed in terms of their political, social, and cultural representations and themes of contemporary society as well as the way they have expressed their thoughts and ideas.

Section I - The East and Renaissance Drama

Due to the conflicts and religious clashes between Catholics and Protestants during the pre-mentioned time period, the majority of the plays written by French writers have used the Eastern themes of the books of Bible, especially Esther and Aman stories, to denounce injustice and prejudice in religion, criticize the existing political conditions and promote religious coexistence.

Section II – The East and the Classical Tragedies

Classical tragedy French writers have used the latest dramatic works of ancient Greek, ancient Roman times, and new eastern themes in the following ways:

1. Historical accounts of the kings, princes, and famous captains of the Eastern Empires, especially ancient Iranian history and tragedies such as *Rodogune*, *Suréna*, *Corneil*, *Mithridate*, and *Racine*. The life story and glories of Iranian kings such as *Cyrus*, *Darius*, *Xercès*, *Artaxercès*, *Cosroès*, and *Sapor* have been presented in

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various on-the-scene tragedies. In these tragedies, several themes such as Iranian glory, courage, valor, truth, purity, and generosity have been exhibited.

2. Stories and legends of Turkish and Arab figures such as Bajazet tragedy, Racine and Sadegh dramas (Zaire), Mahomet, and Voltaire. The themes of such tragedies are derived from the traditions, customs, and adventures of the courtiers' of the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman empires which implicitly reflect their philosophical ideas for combatting prejudice and superstitions, as well as promoting religious tolerance.

Section III – The East and Classical Comedies

With the publication of French travelers' writings about the East as well as the translation of popular Eastern books and stories (e.g. the translation of *Thousand and One Nights* into French), classical comedy writers found access to an abundance of pristine classic themes in order to create new comedies such as *Bourgeois gentilhomme*, Molière, *Théâtre de la Foire*, and *Le Sage*.

In such comedies, Eastern anecdotes and legends, as well as funny scenes were exhibited by presenting the customs, rituals, and ceremonies of the East and introducing ridiculous characters, buffoons, and clowns in well-written stories. These comedies were full of daydreaming, jokes, humor, irony, and criticism, and the Chinese traditions were mixed with Persian culture, Ottoman customs, Arab or Hindu religions, Italian humor, and French customs. In this way, the drama was made much more graceful and attractive. Along with the formation and spread of operatic plays or lyrical theater early in the 18th century, themes and the subject of eerie tales, disaster stories, richness of place in Eastern anecdotes as well as customs and sumptuous ceremonies, passionate and fiery and love of the extremely pathetic Asia led the play writers to use such characteristics for their cosmetic specification which had to be imaginative, surprising, stunning, and impressive to attract the spectators' attention. Such plays include *Reine de péris*, *Zorodstre*, *Cahusac* and *Ramea*, *Aben Saïd*, *l'empereur des Mongol*, and *Le Blanc*.

3. Conclusion

A brief investigation of some of the works of classical French authors indicates that they have adopted and utilized various topics and contents from Eastern sources, as well as providing new and even imaginative visuals and different aspects of civilization to entertain their audience. They also managed to increase the awareness of society members regarding the existing social, cultural, political, and religious challenges which had to undergo significant reforms.

Keywords: the topics and themes of the east, the culture and literature of the east, French classic dramaturgy, French.

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