

The Fugitive and the Gypsy: A Comparative Study in Pushkin's and Arnold's Poems

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I-Abstract:

The gypsies as a sociological and poetic subject have attracted the attention of many writers and poets all over the world. That is mainly due to their simple, imaginative, and carefree life- a life tinted with love and freedom.

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837), the greatest Russian poet and the founder of his country's modern literature wrote a long narrative poem entitled "The Gypsies" in 1824 about the life of these nice people. Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), the well-known English poet, also wrote his famous poem "The Scholar Gipsy" twenty-nine years later, that is in 1853, about the same topic.

In both poems, the gypsies and their life are viewed with admiration and respect. Besides, the gypsy community is depicted as a society in which human beings feel free, at rest and secure, and only there can man enjoy real happiness and the beauty of nature. This aspect together with the values and traditions of the gypsies as portrayed in both works will be studied in details. The research will also focus on the mentality of the fugitive protagonists who join the gypsy community. The similarities and the differences between the outputs of both poets will be the concern of this research.

II- The Fugitives and the Gypsies in Pushkin's and Arnold's Poems:

Pushkin's poem opens very dramatically with a short description of the gypsy life and the sudden appearance of a young man who resorted to their community. Aleko, the bored protagonist of Pushkin's "The Gypsies", escapes from the sordid life of the cities to join the gypsy community. He is fed up with the corrupt and stifling city life, and like most of the young people of his country, he has a wild spirit that cannot be confined within city walls. For the cities are corrupt due to the despotic system of the czars. Within these cities, Aleko feels that he is a slave and his life is pointless. All his dreams and hopes are frustrated. Consequently, he revolts and cries against the injustices of his society and the collapse of human values there. So when Zemphira, his mate asks him: "say, love, and the things you left behind you. Do you not miss them?" Aleko replies:

Nay.
I'm free of them and don't rue it.
There's naught to miss, if but you knew it.
Our towns are stifling cloisters where
Spring's fragrant breezes never carry
From flowery meadowlands and narry
A breath will reach of fresh, cool air;
Where love is scorned, like all true feeling,
Thought hunted down and freedom sold,
Where men, before their idols kneeling,
Plead shamelessly for chains and gold.
What left I there? –Betrayal and worry,
Of prejudice the damning word,
Disgrace attired in robes of glory
The persecution of the herd?⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾ Alexander Pushkin, "The Gypsies" in Selected Works, Vol. 1 (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1985) p.69 (Lines 153-166). Subsequent references to line numbers of "The Gypsies" poem will appear in the text.

The fed-up and fugitive Aleko thinks that his revolt against the city life and going to the mountains and enjoying the beauty of nature is the balm to his sick heart. Like any other Byronic hero⁽²⁾, he feels happy in his revolt. However, he can enjoy this happiness only for a short while and he can pass his time without remorse in the company of Zemphira, his beloved Gypsy. At the start, Aleko adores the simple and joyful life of the gypsies; he is enchanted with its joy, love, and blissful days that stand in contrast with the city life. In the cities, due to the corruptive role of civilization, life becomes joyless, and love becomes meaningless. Artificiality and staleness of the city life kill everything, even beauty:

Where love is not, mirth is unknown,
And life is stale and holds no relish.
As for the maids, as lifeless stone
Their beauty is beside your own
Which no rich gems or pearls embellish.

(Pushkin, "The Gypsies" lines 171-175)

To Aleko, civilization is another synonym for slavery because the individual never feels free and his spirit never knows real joy:

Civilization's fetters spurning,
Aleko is as free as they.
In him the past excites no yearning:
A nomad he and one will stay.
Zemphira's with him and her father;
Their life is his, he can no other
Recall: he loves the Gypsy ways,

⁽²⁾ According to T.B. Macaulay, the Byronic hero is: "a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart, scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection." cited in Arthur Pollard (ed.) Webster's New Companion to English and American Literature (New York: Popular Library, 1976) p.101. While according to Coles Dictionary of Literary Terms, the Byronic hero "is portrayed as egoistic rebel: proud, aloof, worldly and suffering from an unspeakable guilt. He is usually a passionate character, subject to fits of melancholy." Coles Editorial Board, Dictionary of Literary Terms (Toronto: Coles Publishing Company, Ltd. 1980) p.32.

Their poor but tuneful tongue, the glowing
Nights 'neath the stars, the swiftly flowing
Yet indolent and blissful days.

(Pushkin, "The Gypsies" lines 232-241)

This gipsy paradise will not last forever for Aleko; because he cannot adapt himself completely to their lives and therefore he will never understand them fully. Aleko does not know the fact that the two words of 'possession' and 'duty' have no meaning in the lexicon of the gypsies. Instead, "the gypsies replaced the two words 'duty' and 'possession' by two other words; 'love' and 'freedom'... the freedom of love and the love of freedom⁽³⁾.

It seems that Aleko has jumped from hell into paradise without passing through the purgatory. In other words, Aleko had not been completely purged of the evils of his 'civilized' society when he decided to join the gipsy community. Even after joining them, his 'civilized' society lives in him. Therefore, it prevents him from becoming a real gipsy. Still, he has a very strong sense of possession, and this makes him think and behave selfishly in the selfless and promiscuous society of the gypsies.

As a result, Aleko appears a restless, unsure, and an immature character when compared to the gypsies. The civilization viruses of jealousy, possession, and selfishness still haunt his perplexed mind. Therefore, he behaves contrary to the codes and traditions of the veritable gypsies. Needless to say, Aleko himself ran away from suppression and the lack of freedom, but later on he himself becomes a tool for suppressing the freedom and ever-renewing love of Zemphira and her new gipsy lover. This is due to Aleko's being an individualistic romantic character that wants freedom only for himself.⁽⁴⁾ This possessive mentality urges him to kill Zemphira and her new lover in the final scene.

In spite of Aleko's heinous unspeakable crime against this female gipsy in particular and the gipsy community in general, the gypsies are not ready to revenge upon him. Instead, they ostracize him. That is, they are not ready to fight him with the same destructive weapon of Aleko's corrupt

⁽³⁾ Konrad Bercovici, The Story of the Gypsies, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930) p.45

⁽⁴⁾ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, vol.15 (1974) "Alexander Pushkin" p.310

society that festered his mentality with the values of “duty” and “possession”. They do not let their community be diseased with such maladies. Therefore, they purge their community by ostracizing him. Though Aleko is cruel and selfish, the gypsies are kind and humble. Zemphira’s father, at last, pronounces the judgement of the gipsy community thus:

Go, proud one, leave us! We are led
By different laws and want among us
No murderer...Go where you will!
By your black deeds and foul you wrong us
Your love of freedom-how you flaunt it!
Yet for yourself alone you want it,
This freedom, and a stronger dwell
Here in our midst. We’re kind and humble;
You’re hard; where you dare tread, we stumble
So go in peace and fare you well.

(Pushkin, “The Gypsies” lines 537-547)

As such, one concludes that, in this poem, Aleko does not represent himself alone, for he represents all the young generation of his age. Besides, his revolt and his diseased mentality are not his alone, but they are found in most of the modern societies.

Matthew Arnold, too, in his well-known elegiac poem “The Scholar Gipsy” created a protagonist very identical with Aleko. Like Aleko, the scholar of Arnold’s poem revolts against the corrupt values and dogmas of his feudalistic society. He escapes the city life and heads towards the rural areas, until at last he becomes a gipsy. The world from which Arnold’s nameless scholar escapes is the world of “‘light half believers’ of their ‘casual creeds’, the world of ‘sick hurry’ and ‘divided aims’, of ‘heads o’ertax’d’ and ‘palsied hearts’”.⁽⁵⁾ This world stands in complete contrast to the world of the gypsies who live harmoniously in the bosom of nature. Arnold thus describes the life of the scholar-gipsy comparing it to the

⁽⁵⁾ J.D. Jump, “Matthew Arnold” in Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol. 6 (ed.) Boris Ford (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966) pp.310-311.

civilized life. The poet admires and envies the life of the scholar-gipsy; since he does not feel the slow lapse of hours that “wears out the life of mortal men.” In addition, because he had “one aim, one business, one desire,” he remained ever active; otherwise, he would have turned into a living corpse. As such, his life was different:

O life unlike to ours!
Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,
And wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope.

.....
For whom each year we see
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;
Who hesitate and falter life away,
And lose to-morrow the ground won to-day-

.....
But none has hope like, thine!
Thou through the fields and through the woods dost stray,
Roaming the country-side, a truant boy,
Nursing thy project in unconcluded joy,
And every doubt long blown by time away.⁽⁶⁾

Arnold’s scholar-gipsy is more mature and cultured than Pushkin’s Aleko. In fact, the history of that scholar goes back to the 17th century, when the scholar escaped from the Oxford University to join the gipsies to understand their art of living. Matthew Arnold “drew the story for this poem from The Vanity of Dogmatizing (1661) ... written by Joseph Glanvil (1636-1680)”.⁽⁷⁾ Arnold did not copy this story without modification and he only “used the bones ...to carry his own

⁽⁶⁾ H. Alsop (ed.) “The Scholar Gipsy” in Selected Poems of Matthew Arnold, (London: Ginn and Company Ltd., 1931) pp. 113-114 (lines 166-200). Subsequent references to line numbers of the poem “The Scholar Gipsy” will appear in the text.

⁽⁷⁾ George K. Anderson et.al (ed.) Boris Ford The Literature of England, (London: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1979) p.973 (Footnote). See also: The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropaedia, Vol.5 (1986) “Joseph Glanvil” p.295.

speculation.”⁽⁸⁾As such, only the bones belong to Glanvil, and its blood and flesh belong to Arnold. Accordingly, one can assert that the scholar’s personality and his rebellious spirit are the creations of Arnold and they reflect Arnold’s own views and visions in life. Arnold’s scholar revolts against the industrial society of the 19th century and he never returns to society from which he escapes because the poet, at the end of poem, addresses him not to come back lest his soul be diseased as others that consequently will make him hopeless and defeated:

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
For strong the infection of our mental strife,
Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;
And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
Like us distracted, and like us unblest
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix’d thy powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made;
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.

(“The Scholar Gipsy” lines 221-230)

The tone of both poets, Pushkin and Arnold, is sad and melancholic. Undoubtedly, that is due to the political, social, and administrative corruption cankering their societies. They both try to present an alternative to such a type of society. Both characters, Aleko and the scholar-gipsy, resort to nature as the source of the purity of the soul, simplicity in life, freedom, and happiness:

Screened is the nook o’er the high, half-reaped field,
And here till sundown, shepherd! Will I be.
Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep,
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see

⁽⁸⁾ David Daiches (ed.) The Penguin Companion to Literature: British and Commonwealth Literature, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971) p.24.

Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep;
And air-swept lindens yield
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed showers
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid
And bower me from the August sun with shade;
And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers.

(“The Scholar Gipsy” lines 21-30)

It is clear that both poets used the gipsy way of living and the rustic life to contrast it with the evils found in their city life. There, in the bosom of nature, man feels free and happy. Besides, because both poets were committed writers⁽⁹⁾, and were directly influenced by the Romantic Movement in general and Lord Byron in specifics,⁽¹⁰⁾ they believed that if only man returns to the bosom of nature and lives a simple life, most of his problems will be solved. Furthermore, both poets believed that man's spirit in itself is pure and innocent but the city life corrupts it. Pushkin's Aleko, being an inexperienced young man, cannot fully adjust his mentality with that of the gipsies by accepting their concepts of “love” and “freedom”. In contrast, Arnold's scholar-gipsy is more mature and more cultured, he faces no problem in remaining with the gipsies and becoming one of them, as he is more than ready to accept their values and remain a gipsy forever.

The gipsies and their way of living as a “free community” not corrupted by the restrictions imposed by civilization, has attracted the attention of most of the romantic poets all over the world. For the romantic writers were much concerned with the “individual freedom”. Jean-Paul Clebert, in his invaluable book entitled The Gipsies (1963) has devoted a section to the strong relationship between “The Gipsies and the Romantic”:

⁽⁹⁾ Regarding Arnold's commitment, H. Alsop states: “He had, indeed, a message for his age, and was not only literary critic, but religious and social critic besides.” H. Alsop (ed.), Selected Poems of Matthew Arnold, “Introduction” p. xi.

As for Pushkin's commitment A. Tvardorsky, in “Soul of Our People “in Aleksander Pushkin, Selected Works, p.12 writes:

“Pushkin's poetry is the supreme expression of the noblest human emotions; of love and friendship, of awareness of the infinite value of life and courageous acceptance of its transitoriness, bitter losses and trials. For Pushkin the world didn't end with the passing from it of his own self. His soul belonged to the future as much as it did to the present...”

⁽¹⁰⁾ For further information on this subject see: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, Vol. (15) p.30, and H. Alsop (ed.) Selected Poems of Matthew Arnold, p.ix

Romanticism explored the legend of the ever-roaming Bohemian children. The romantic poets, in their narrow houses and worlds, sang of their nostalgia towards the nomadic life of the past. Their love of freedom and their revolt against the traditions and the monotony of their lives and... looking forward to the unknown and acceptance of the risks has lured not only the... educated people, but also all those writers who longed for searching for an unknown new world.⁽¹¹⁾

In fact, these two great poets did not choose the gipsy life and community haphazardly, for both of them were fed up with their morbid societies. Moreover, the spirit of Romanticism, which was prevalent in their age, was interested in exploring the unknown world of the gipsies and attaining higher levels of joy in the nomadic and simple life of the gipsies. Therefore, Pushkin, being the most prominent representative of Romanticism in Russian literature at the beginning of the 20s of the 19th century⁽¹²⁾, reflected this spirit and outlook in his narrative poem “The Gypsies”. Besides, Matthew Arnold, in his idealization of nature, shares much with English Romantic poets, he was “akin to Wordsworth”⁽¹³⁾. Therefore, we come across a similar spirit and outlook in his “The Scholar-Gipsy”. If one delves into the reasons behind Pushkin’s writing this poem, one can find very easily that when Pushkin wrote his narrative poem “The Gypsies” he was completely under the influence of European Romantic poetry in general and the poetry of the great English Romantic poet Lord Byron (1788-1824) in particular.⁽¹⁴⁾ The period in which Pushkin wrote this poem is known as the “Southern Cycle” in Pushkin’s life, during which he was banished from May 1820 to the autumn of 1826. During that period,

⁽¹¹⁾ جان بول كليبر، العجر: دراسة تاريخية اجتماعية فولكلورية، ترجمة: لطفي خوري (بغداد: دار الحرية للطباعة، 1982) ص 161. (ترجمة)

النص الى الانكليزية تعود للباحث

⁽¹²⁾ س.م. پيتروڤ، ئهليكساندر سينگنيچ بوشكين: ئيان و به رهه مي شاكارى، وه رگير له روسيه وه: / د. جميل نصيف، محمدي ملا كهرىم له عه ره بيه وه كرديه به

كوردي (به غدا: چاپخانه ي الحوادث، 1983، ل 40)

⁽¹³⁾ H. Alsop (ed.) Selected Poems of Matthew Arnold, “Introduction” p.xxviii.

⁽¹⁴⁾ س.م. پيتروڤ، هه مان سه رچاوه، ل 42)

“Pushkin had fallen under the spell of Byron, and as he himself said, his southern poems ‘smack of Byron’⁽¹⁵⁾. What helped Pushkin more was his fantastic knowledge of the English language that helped him to read the texts of Byron’s poetry in the original language. A good example of this direct influence is found in his poem entitled “The Sun Light is Fading” (1820) in which he used this line from Byron as an Epigraph in the English Language: “Good Night my Native Land”.⁽¹⁶⁾ Actually, no one can overlook Byron’s influence on Matthew Arnold as well. From the beginning of his literary career, he was deeply under Byron’s influence and when he was at Rugby school in 1837, “he had won a prize for a Byronic poem 'Alaric at Rome'.”⁽¹⁷⁾

III- Conclusion:

Finally, one can sum up the following reasons for the similarities and the differences between Pushkin and Arnold’s poems in the following points:

First: it had been proved formerly in this study that both Pushkin and Matthew Arnold were strongly influenced by the Romantic poetry in general and Byron in specifics. So most likely, the similarity between these two poems is due to this fact.

Second: It is a well-known fact that at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, which is during Pushkin’s lifetime, there was a strong cultural relationship between the Russian and the French cultures. Most probably, Matthew Arnold became familiar with Pushkin’s poem through French translations of Russian literature. What supports this idea is that Arnold, consequent to his appointment as the inspector of schools in 1851, frequently traveled to France and other European countries on special missions to bring direct experience of educational methods.⁽¹⁸⁾ Moreover, he wrote “The Scholar Gipsy” in 1853, that is, only two years after taking over this post.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia (vol.15) (1974) p.309

⁽¹⁶⁾ س.م. پیتروؤف ، هه مان سه رچاوه ، ل(44)

⁽¹⁷⁾ A. Alsop (ed.) Selected Poems of Matthew Arnold, “Introduction” p.ix.

⁽¹⁸⁾ David Daiches (ed.), The Penguin Companion to Literature: British and Commonwealth Literature ,p.24

Third: It is a well-known fact that Joseph Glanvil's book The Vanity of Dogmatizing (1661) was a very famous book at its time and after, and that Russian literature of that period and Pushkin were under the influence of European Romantic literature.⁽¹⁹⁾ Knowing that Pushkin was a very well-read writer who knew English very well, most probably he had obtained a copy of that book and could have benefited from "the story of a seventeenth century student who left Oxford and joined a band of Gypsies,"⁽²⁰⁾ which was the main source of Matthew Arnold's "The Scholar Gipsy". So the similarity could be attributed to the sameness of their sources.

Fourth: Through comparison and contrast of both poems, it is clear that Pushkin's poem is more dramatic than Arnold's is. In Pushkin's poem, the reader becomes familiar with the reality of the city life and gipsy life through the visions of various characters such as Aleko, Zemphira and the old Gipsy. For that reason, Pushkin's poem is more objective. Whereas Arnold creates a protagonist in his poem, though more cultured and more self-opinionated than Pushkin's Aleko, he remains a nameless character. Most probably, he reflects Arnold's view and vision of life. Accordingly, the life of the cities and the gipsy community are presented subjectively. Generally speaking, Arnold's poem is pastoral and elegiac, but Pushkin's is narrative and dramatic. This makes Pushkin's poem more successful and more powerful than Arnold's does.

⁽¹⁹⁾ م.م. پیتروفا، ھەمان سەرچاوە، ل ل 22-23.

⁽²⁰⁾ M.H.Abrams et al. (ed.) The Norton Anthology of English Literature (New York: Norton and Company, 1978) P.2125

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پوختەى لىكۆلىنەوۋەكە

راكردوو و قەرەج:

لىكۆلىنەوۋەيەكى بەراوردكارىيە لە شىعرەكانى پۆشكىن و ئارنۆلدا

قەرەج وەكو بابەتلىكى شىعرى و سۆسىيۇلۇژى سەرنجى گەلى شاعىران و نووسەرانى لە سەرانسەرى دونيا راكيشاوه و بۆتە ھەويىنى شىعرى گەلىك شاعىران، بەتايبەتيش شاعىرە رۇمانسىيەكان. چونكە ئەوشاعىرانە لە ژيانى ناوشار بىزار بوون، بۆيە ئەوان لە دەست گىروگرفتە جۇراوجۆرەكانى كۆمەلگەكەيان رايانكردووۋە پەنايان وەبەر ژيانى سادە وساكارى قەرەجان بردووۋە بۆ ئەوۋە بگەرپنەوۋە ژيانى بى خەمى ناوباوۋەشى سروشت.

ئەم لىكۆلىنەوۋەيە بەراوردىكە لە نيوان شىعرى "قەرەج" ى پۆشكىن (1799-1837) و شىعرى "فىرخوازى قەرەج" ى ئارنۆلدا (1822-1888). جا چونكە ھەردوو شاعىر كاريگەرى بزوتنەوۋە رۇمانسىيەت بەگشتى و شاعىرانى رۇمانسى ئىنگليزىيان بەسەرەوۋە بوو، شىعرەكانىيان لە گەلى لايەنەوۋە لە يەكترى دەچن. بەلام لەبەرئەوۋە ھەريەك لەو دوو شاعىرە لە كۆمەلگەيەكى جياوازدا ژياون، بۆيە شىعرەكانىشيان لە ھەندىك رووۋە جياوازن. جا ئەم لىكۆلىنەوۋەيەش ھەولدانىكە بۆ دەستنىشانكردنى ئەم كاريگەرى و لىكچوون و جياوازيانەى لەم دوو شىعرەياندا بەدى دەكرىت.

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↑ (1837-1799) ↑ ↑ * (1888-1822)

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