Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi
Hacettepe University Journal of Faculty of Letters
Aralık/December 2023 – *40*(2), 531-539
doi:10.32600/huefd.1232254

Araştırma Makalesi – Research Article
Geliş Tarihi / Received:10.01.2023 Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 03.04.2023

The Divine Mandate of Colonialism: Orientalism in Wilkie Collins's *The Black Robe*[1]

Sömürgeciliğin İlahi Emri: Wilkie Collins'in *Kara Cübbe* Eserinde Oryantalizm

Yakut AKBAY[*]

Abstract

In postcolonial studies, the missionary is inevitably associated with colonialism. This is explained by the fact that the missionaries' main task was to spread Christianity by preaching the "blessings of civilisation" and implementing "the white man's burden". This study adopts Edward W. Said's Orientalist discourse to critique the construct of the representation of indigenous peoples in Wilkie Collins's (1824-1889) *The Black Robe* (1881). Said's ideas are particularly instrumental in critically analysing the Western (mis)representation of Native Americans as savages who need to be civilised. *The Black Robe* is a partly epistolary novel revolving around a series of unfortunate events by Lewis Romayne, whose remorse for the accidental murder of a young man haunts him for the rest of his life. This research reveals inconsistencies regarding the author's religious views in the novel. It is argued that while Collins's anti-Catholic sarcasm aims to expose the corruption of religious orders, this attitude does not apply to colonial discourse. Rather, Catholicism is purposefully used as a divisive imperialist tool in the novel, and therefore the missionaries serve as colonial agents who "bless" discriminatory acts of British imperial policy, hence the image of the black robe that represents the colonial legacy consolidating the influence of British imperial power through religion. In *The Black Robe*, indigenous peoples are described as "bloodthirsty savages" and it is believed that their souls can be saved under the influence of Christianity. This enforcement also represents colonial hegemony, through which American Indians are subjected to social and cultural assimilation. The ideology of white racial supremacy manifests itself in the justification of the colonial missions, which claim that they have legitimate and religious rights over the land and culture of the natives.
***Keywords*:** Christianity, colonialism, indigenous peoples, missionary, Orientalism, Said.

Öz

Sömürgecilik dönemi sonrası çalışmalarda, misyonerlik kaçınılmaz olarak sömürgecilikle ilişkilendirilmektedir. Bu, misyonerlerin asıl görevinin "medeniyetin nimetlerini" vaaz ederek ve "beyaz adamın yükünü" uygulayarak Hristiyanlığı yaymak olduğu gerçeğiyle açıklanmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Wilkie Collins'in (1824-1889) *Kara Cübbe* (1881) adlı eserinde tasvir edilen yerli halkların temsili yapısını eleştirmek için Edward W. Said'in Oryantalist söylemini benimsemektedir. Said'in fikirleri, Batı'nın Kızılderilileri uygarlaştırılması gereken vahşiler olarak

[1] This article is an extended version of the paper entitled "The Divine Mandate of Colonialism: Orientalism in Wilkie Collins's The Black Robe" presented at the 26th METU British Novelists International Conference, Ankara, Turkey, 2022.

[*] Assist. Prof. Dr., Ankara Science University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, English Translation and Interpretation Dept., E-mail: yakutakbay@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-1557-232X

görmelerinin eleştirel analizinde özellikle etkilidir. *Kara Cübbe*, genç bir adamı kazara öldürdüğü için pişmanlığı hayatının geri kalanında peşini bırakmayan Lewis Romayne'in bir dizi talihsiz olayının etrafında dönen kısmen mektuplardan oluşan bir romandır. Bu araştırma, yazarın romandaki dini görüşleri konusundaki tutarsızlıkları ortaya koymaktadır. Collins'in Katolik karşıtı alaycılığı, dini tarikatların yozlaşmasını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlasa da bu duruşun kolonyal söylem için geçerli olmadığı; daha ziyade romanda Katoliklik amaçlı bir şekilde bölücü bir emperyalist araç olarak kullanılmaktadır ve dolayısıyla misyonerler, İngiliz emperyal politikalarının ayrımcı eylemlerini "kutsayan" kolonyal ajanlar olarak hizmet etmektedirler. *Kara Cübbe* romanında yerli halklar "kana susamış vahşiler" olarak tanımlanmakta ve Hristiyanlığın etkisiyle ruhlarının kurtarılabileceğine inanılmaktadır. Bu yaptırım aynı zamanda Amerika yerlilerinin sosyal ve kültürel asimilasyona maruz bırakıldığı sömürgeci hegemonyayı da temsil etmektedir. Beyaz ırk üstünlüğü ideolojisi, yerli halkların toprakları ve kültürü üzerinde meşru ve dini haklara sahip olduklarını iddia eden sömürgeci misyonların kendini haklı göstermesinde ifade edilmektedir. Romanda, kara cüppe imgesi, İngiliz emperyal gücünün din aracılığıyla etkisini pekiştiren sömürge mirasını temsil etmektedir.
Anahtar sözcükler: Hristiyanlık, sömürgecilik, yerli halklar, misyonerlik, Oryantalizm, Said.

Introduction

The European colonial powers owed a lot to religious missions carried out for the sake of their territorial gains and natural resources. Therefore, religion, or more precisely Christianity, has always been considered an inseparable part of colonialism. The pervasive influence of these missions was carried out under the pretext of 'saving the souls' of those who needed to be civilized. Christianity was primarily a means to an end, the spread of which would help Western imperialism establish and maintain its legacy in the conquered lands. However, because the colonizers were unfamiliar with the various cultures of the natives, they viewed the practices of indigenous peoples as inferior and cruel. Similarly, the British colonization of the Americas pursued its expansionist policies with a rather condescending and discriminatory attitude toward indigenous peoples, ignoring their rights and identities to establish its dominance in the New World. In this regard, Christianity served as one of the most persuasive and authoritative means to achieve this goal. Using Wilkie Collins's *The Black Robe* (1881) as a case study, this paper argues that despite his anti-Catholic stance, the author contradictorily appears as a religious representative who approves of and justifies the colonial missions of the British Empire. The study adopts Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* as a critical concept in the construction of the representation of Native Americans to examine the hypocrisy and cynicism of colonial missions portrayed in the novel. In literary studies, Orientalist discourse has typically been used to examine the societies and peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, while the American continents with similar colonial histories have been largely ignored, not to mention the fact that very few Orientalist studies have been conducted based on Wilkie Collins's work[2]. The significance of this study, therefore, is that the Orientalist approach based on Wilkie Collins's *The Black Robe* (1881) reveals the racist and biased attitude of the British colonial missions towards the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Orientalism as a critical concept is introduced and extensively discussed in Edward Said's eponymous book *Orientalism* (1978). Orientalism deals with the West's disdainful and humiliating portrayal of the East. E. Said (2003) describes Orientalism as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (p. 1). He states that the Orient is "the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (p. 1). Edward Said points out that Europe, or the West, in its turn, is "its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (p. 2). This critical approach tries to find answers to such questions as why Europe/the West has a preconceived notion of the East and what kind of people live there or what they believe. In a broad sense, Orientalism is a framework that the West uses to understand the unfamiliar and strange and to make the people living there appear different and threatening. This way of stereotyping is also observed in the representation of the East through art: in the paintings of famous artists and literary works about the Orient. In this respect, the representation of the Orient is particularly notable in the works of 19th-century French artists such as Jean

[2] For some of these works, see Al-Neyadi (2015), Nayder (2006), and Williamson (2011).

Auguste Dominique Ingres's *Grande Odalisque* (1814), Anne Louis Girodet-Trioson's *Portrait of an Indian* (1807), and Eugène Delacroix's *Natchez* (1834-35). On the other hand, Orientalism deals with the affiliation of knowledge with power and as such, it is "a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (p. 2). Said notes that "the name Orientalism suggests a serious, perhaps ponderous style of expertise" to produce knowledge and to see in expert eyes things that the natives themselves cannot see (p. 19).

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said also discusses the spread of Christianity and colonial missions initially performed by travellers and merchants. Christianity was introduced to American indigenous peoples as a superior religion since "Britain felt that it had legitimate interests, as a Christian power, to safeguard" (Said, 2003, p. 100). Indeed, to British society, Christianity represented the morality of the Anglo-Saxon culture. However, religion only served as one of the justifications that the British Empire used to colonize and exploit the New World. By promoting Christian doctrines, Great Britain supposedly aimed to educate and reform Native Americans. Generally speaking, "religiosity in Britain" especially "in what is historically known as the 'second' era of British imperialism (approximately 1784—1867)", made sure that "Christianisation was seen as a crucial part of the colonising and civilising projects of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Johnston, 2003, p. 13). The British public's fascination with "savage races" and exotic climates was fuelled by imperial expansion into America (Johnston, 2003, p. 17). Correspondingly, early imperial views about the "noble savage" and the "childlike" nature of colonized races justified the deployment of missionary personnel to territories where local peoples were seen as capable of "raising up" to a civilized, Christianized society (Johnston, 2003, p. 17).

The interest of British society in foreign cultures also paved the way for missionary writing. Unavoidably, the stereotypic characterisation of the missionary narrative is directly related to the imperial discourse, whose features are "those of indigenous depravity — hence the urgent need for Christian intervention — and the action required is the religious conversion by keen evangelicals" (Johnston, 2003, p. 35). Indeed, "maintaining this powerful missionary public and disseminating the mission's influence was the task of missionary writing" (Eyre, 2022, p. 4). Moreover, biographies of missionaries were best-sellers in the Victorian literary market since Christian publishers maintained the strong position they had earned as part of the evangelical movement in the early decades of the nineteenth century (p. 4). On the other hand, there was a group of Victorian writers with liberal religious views whose literary works were indirectly engaged with missionary writing propagating the idea of Evangelism as part of the British colonial expansion. Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) is one of the Victorian writers who, in his portrayal of religious characters and themes, "veils his personal beliefs" leaving a reader to infer "a distrust of organized religion and a loathing of clerics who use their offices to abuse the rights of others" (Lawrence, 1989, p. 389). Indeed, "the major Collins biographies emphasize the difficulty of assessing Collins's spiritual beliefs" (Lawrence, 1989, p. 389). Furthermore, this ambiguous stance suggests a discrepancy between the author's missionary discourse and his religious liberalism, particularly illustrated in *The Black Robe* (1881). This standpoint constitutes the argument of the present study. Based on ~~Said's~~ Orientalist approach, the study reveals a representation of indigenous peoples that denies them agency and ascribes to them savage attributes that are different from their true "selves".

Orientalism in Wilkie Collins's *The Black Robe*

Wilkie Collins's career spanned most of the late nineteenth century. He authored more than twenty novels, countless short stories, and insightful pieces of journalism (Taylor, 2006, p. 1). His reputation as a fascinating storyteller, a master of suspense who pioneered the sensation novel and played a crucial role in the development of the detective novel has endured to this day (Taylor, 2006, p. 1). Collins was a contemporary of famous writers such as Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Charlotte Bronte, who "were at the height of their powers" (Taylor, 2006, p. 1). His work was a particularly productive subject for many of the most important theoretical and critical concerns of the 1980s and 1990s. These include his exploration of the ways in which social identities and relationships are enforced and maintained, his fascination with the unstable boundary between the normal and the deviant, and his rewriting of Gothic

conventions to examine power relations in the Victorian family (Taylor, 2006, p. 1). Collins's multivocal, self-reflexive narratives, with their use of testimonies, letters, and buried writing, along with secret, illegitimacy, doubling, and disguise, have been examined by many literary critics during the 1980s and 1990s as dramatizing covert or overt power conflicts within Victorian society (Taylor, 2006, p. 1). Indeed, for researchers studying Collins's work, his ideology has become one of the most debatable issues. Moreover, the debate continues as to whether his writing represents a radical critique of Victorian orthodoxy or reinforces it (Taylor, 2006, p. 1).

One of these debates is related to the author's viewpoint concerning Britain's colonial policy. According to Lilian Nayder (2006), Wilkie Collins addresses both directly and indirectly the moral and political significance of imperial aspirations in his writings, addressing various issues raised by empire-building: the rationale and meaning of racial identity and difference, and the relationship between the civilised and the primitive (p. 140). Moreover, Collins often draws attention to imperial crimes as "lawless acts committed in the name of the empire" (Nayder, 2006, p. 140). In his 1858 article "A Sermon for Sepoys", Collins even argues that "Indians can and should be reformed - not by Christian sermons, but by the study of 'their own Oriental literature' and its 'excellent moral lessons', a Muslim equivalent of Christ's parable of the talents", that is, by recognising the moral value of Oriental literature (as cited in Nayder, 2006, pp. 145-146). In *The Moonstone* (1868), he contrasts the faith and self-sacrifice of Hindus with the hypocrisy of Christians who use their religion for their own benefit. Nevertheless, the discrepancy behind Wilkie Collins's oeuvre lies in the fact that the author is not committed to a consistent standpoint regarding the colonial policy of his country. If it served his purposes, Collins suggested that "empire-building dissolved class divisions and transformed common men into masters" (p. 145). In the 1830s and 1840s, when Tahiti offered English writers a place to "imagine a Christian triumph over barbarism or preach the civilising gospel of free trade", Collins wrote *Iolani; or, Tahiti as It Was* (1845), in which he described Tahiti as a primitive society devoted to the gratification of men and in which women are portrayed as "inferior creatures" with little or no claim on their children (Nayder, 2006, p. 142). Clearly, Collins's colonial approach, based on the ideas of the inferiority of the colonised and white supremacy, was no different from that of his contemporaries.

The Black Robe (1881) is one of Wilkie Collins's novels written in the last years of his life. The novel opens with Major Hynd's narration based on letters, in which he recounts a series of events in the life of his friend, Lewis Romayne, whose repentance for the accidental murder of a young man haunts him for the rest of his life. The book is built around the correspondence and narrative of characters, diaries, documents, newspapers and an omniscient point of view, combining 18th and 19th century styles of fiction writing. Collins purposefully based the structure of his books on the epistolary form as well as other documentary devices such as diary excerpts, written accounts of events, and confessions (Emrys, 2014, p. 3). The author described this kind of experimentation as a "novel in documents" by which he claimed to have invented a new structure (2014, p. 2). He asserted that "his fiction was character-driven rather than plot-driven", later summarizing this as "the effect of character on circumstance, not its opposite" (2014, p. 2). *The Black Robe* opens with the main character Romayne, accompanied by his friend, Major John Philip Hynd, visiting his dying aunt in France. While there, Romayne becomes involved in an incident that leads to a duel and kills his opponent. Romayne is subsequently haunted by the plaintive cries of the murdered Frenchman's younger brother. Upon his return to London, the confused and vulnerable Romayne develops a relationship with Stella Eyrecourt, a young woman he meets while visiting another old friend, Lord Loring. Meanwhile, Father Benwell, a Catholic priest who serves as spiritual advisor to the Lorings, intends to return Romayne's Yorkshire home, Vange Abbey, to the Church. To help him implement this plan, he hires the young priest Arthur Penrose, who, as requested, becomes a frequent visitor to Romayne's home trying to establish a genuine friendship with him. Despite Father Benwell's determined attempts to prevent Romayne and Stella's subsequent marriage, the two marry. Benwell also fails to convince Romayne to leave his property to the Church in his will. At the end of the novel, on his deathbed, Romayne gives his entire inheritance to his wife and child, defying the will of the church. The novel ends with the last narrator, Stella's former husband Winterfield, hinting that Stella will fulfil Romayne's last wish and marry Winterfield.

Even though, as Griffin (2004) argues, Wilkie Collins is rarely regarded as a novelist of religious polemics, in *The Black Robe* (1881) the author displays an irony directed against the Roman Catholic Church that closely parallels the patterns of anti-Catholic narratives (p. 56). This is explained by the fact that the Victorian age, in addition to its moral views and values, was also marked by religious turmoil between evangelicals and liberals who found the harsher doctrines of Christian fundamentalism unacceptable (Oulton, 2002, p. 1). Among these liberal Christians, there were also writers who "engaged imaginatively with what they saw as the flaws in evangelical thought" (Oulton, 2002, p. 1). While "Collins's contemporaries habitually referred to England as a Christian country", he personally "felt a deep aversion towards evangelical doctrine", seeing it as incompatible with the sympathetic feelings based on the teachings of the New Testament (Pykett, 2005, p. 59; Oulton, 2002, p. 2). One reason for this attitude could be that Collins did not believe in the sincerity and openness of the philanthropic activities of the evangelical movement, which "became both fashionable and influential in high society and the upper middle class in the early nineteenth century" (Pykett, 2005, p. 59). According to Pykett, most of Collins's biographers find it difficult to pinpoint where Collins stood in terms of religious questions. Consequently, up until the late twentieth century, they have concluded that "it is difficult to make definitive statements about Collins's religious and spiritual beliefs or to infer them from his fiction"; hence, they have tended to suggest that he had no religious convictions or that "he actively rebelled against 'his father's piety' and developed an 'aversion to religion'" that intensified as he grew older (2005, p. 63).

Since *The Black Robe* (1881) is one of the novels written in the late years of Collins's career, it can be argued that here the author tends to openly display his anti-Catholic stance in order to expose the corruption of the Church. In the novel, Collins describes two religious functionaries who wear the black robes of the priesthood: the expedient Roman Catholic priest Father Benwell, who is determined to convert Romayne to Catholicism and return his property to the Church, and Arthur Penrose, who is commissioned by Father Benwell as Romayne's secretary to persuade him to convert. The author's anti-Catholic stance is evident in the piercing Gothic voice of Father Benwell, who is portrayed as a Machiavellian character who argues that "poor human nature has its right to all that can be justly conceded in the way of excuse and allowance" (Collins, 1881, p. 127). To achieve his ends, he abuses the mandate given to him, even attempting to interfere in Romayne's marriage. A cunning, manipulative man with a practical mind, Father Benwell embodies all the Machiavellian traits, aptly expressed in Romayne's dramatic irony: "Father Benwell, did you part with your humanity when you put on the black robe of the priest?" (Collins, 1881, p. 128). The characterisation of the Jesuits as dangerous enemies of England is consistent from the sixteenth to the twentieth century (Moran, 2007, pp. 30-31). By "embedding the Jesuit in a web of verbal and narrative excesses that evoke both outrage and shock", Father Benwell represents "an uncanny figure" in Victorian literature, "at once frighteningly alien and disturbingly familiar" (Moran, 2007, p. 31). On the other hand, Romayne himself sees religion as a means of purification which he uses only for his own benefit, to rid himself of his sins. It is noteworthy that the "saturation of nineteenth-century culture by Christianity and its denominational variants makes religion always and everywhere a presence" (Moran, 2007, p. 3). This also explains the socio-cultural role of Catholicism in the formation and articulation of the Victorian self-image. It is evident that religious omnipresence enabled Victorian writers to endow the literature of the period with a "dynamic frame of reference" and "rich imaginative resource" by literarily representing the Catholic Church characterised by "extravagance and excess" (Moran, 2007, pp. 3-4).

Remarkably, in addition to Wilkie Collins's sarcasm towards the Church, *The Black Robe* also features a tolerant treatment of Catholicism tied to missionary discourse, which itself represents a contradiction between the author's religious stance and his view of colonialism. Consequently, Collins's ironic anti-Catholic stance is juxtaposed with the colonial effort to spread Roman Catholicism in Central America. Clearly, the author does not refrain from the colonial politics rooted in Western society. This attitude is particularly evident in the reports and diaries of the young priest Arthur Penrose. After Penrose fails to convert Romayne, he is sent on a dangerous mission to Central America. Arthur Penrose represents the younger generation of religious authority. As a black-robed monk overseeing the missionary expansion of the British Empire, he is empowered to spread and consolidate the teachings of Christianity in the colonial territories. In trying to persuade Penrose to implement the supposed sanctity of the imperial mission, Father

Benwell praises him as a good Catholic, "worthy of better things" and a man with "a strict sense of honour", "an intellect of high aspirations" and "personal charm and influence" like him should not be "allowed to run to waste" (Collins, 1881, p. 124). Benwell further adds, "I say it with authority; an enviable future is before you" (p. 124). This approach concurs with Said's designation of Orientalism as the language of a "spiritual hero, a knight-errant bringing back to Europe a sense of the holy mission" (2003, p. 115). Moran (2007) states that Evangelical belief in authentic religious experience "as a matter of the heart" is an example of the "Victorian confidence in the 'tender feelings' as a reliable authority for moral decision-making" (p. 22). It follows that the Orientalist discourse is in harmony with the emotionalised discourse of Roman Catholicism. It is in this sense that the sacredness of the colonial mission is later described by Arthur Penrose, who experienced first-hand encounters with the indigenous peoples of Central America. He describes a failed attempt by Catholic priests to convert the natives from their indigenous religions and thus, "their mission-house and chapel are now a heap of ruins, and the ferocious Apache Indians keep the fertile valley a solitude by the mere terror of their name" (Collins, 1881, p. 145). Penrose's depiction of Native Americans is based on a stereotypical Orientalist discourse. He characterises the places where the spread of Christianity has failed as "ill-omened" and that "his companions have made their daring pilgrimage" risking their lives "in the attempt to open the hearts of these bloodthirsty savages to the influence of Christianity (Collins, 1881, p. 145).

Referring to Flaubert's illustration of the re-creation of the Orient, Edward Said argues that the idea of Orientalism is not limited to Islamic countries and that it leads to the "European exploration of the rest of the world" (2003, pp. 116-117). Said (2003) points out that the idea of Orientalism is more than just discoveries. Rather, Orientalism must be seen in a broader context created by the accounts of explorers, traders and Jesuit missionaries who reported exotic places inhabited by "giants, Patagonians, savages, natives and monsters" (p. 117). The European documentation of exotic places and people has placed the West, "in the privileged centre as main observer", thus reinforcing its "sense of cultural strength" and securing its "ethnocentric perspectives" (p. 117). The Orientalist discourse in *The Black Robe* is based on the Western (mis)representation of the Apache Indians, who are portrayed as ferocious and bloodthirsty savages whose souls need to be purified under the influence of Christianity. The term 'savage', derived from the Latin word for "a person of the woods", was one of the fearful interpretations of indigenous peoples and customs (Samson & Gigoux, 2016, p. 29). North American colonists deliberately used the word "as a point of semantic contrast with civilization, a quality associated with Christianity, agriculture, machine technology and social institutions, which Europeans believed that they possessed in greater abundance or complexity" (p. 29). In this sense, Said points out that the West portrays the Orient as "a place isolated from the mainstream of European progress in the sciences, arts, and commerce" and regards the people living there as uncivilised and savage (2003, p. 206). He further explains that the "theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the West" gained prominence in the nineteenth century with the racial classifications in the works of Western scholars (2003, p. 206). In Western thought, the savage diverged considerably from civilisation in ways of life, practises and customs (Samson & Gigoux, 2016, p. 30). Moreover, based on Western indigenous scholars, Native Americans were portrayed as "stunted and inferior types of humans" whose environment is so harsh that they can only degenerate and that "the temperate climate and landscape of Europe produce a more robust civilisation" (2016, p. 32). Obviously, this (mis)representation of the indigenous "self" is due to the racist legacy of Western scholars who are highly influenced by a deep attachment to colonialism enabling them to articulate the identity of 'indigeneity' outside its anthropological construct thus transforming it into a "tainted artefact of colonialism" (2016, p. 39).

In *The Black Robe*, Collins also demonstrates Victorian women's views on indigenous peoples and Britain's colonial expansion. Stella, who has harboured serious reservations about the intentions of Father Benwell and Arthur Penrose since their first encounter, enthusiastically advocates the so-called religious obligation of Jesuit missions to foreign lands. Referring to Arthur Penrose's dangerous mission to Central America, Stella describes Christian missionaries as "soldiers of the cross" who willingly "go to save the souls of the Indians, at the peril of their lives" (Collins, 1881, p. 110). At this point, it is worthwhile to mention the role of missionary propaganda, whose role, combined with a widespread local network of

support groups and regular mention of missionary issues in newspapers and magazines, "ensured that missionary figures were not only well known to contemporaries" but also represented respected role models for Victorian society (Rowbotham, 2000, p. 82). Moreover, the idea of heroism was an attribute of profound importance in the Victorian period as it "encouraged a popular perception of the Victorian British army as a Christian force" and "opened the way for men yielding up life in the patriotic cause to be described as martyrs as well as heroes" (p. 85). On the other hand, Stella's support for the Christian missions is the result of internalised racial inequalities stemming from the prevailing perception of gender roles in the Victorian political and social milieu. This can be explained by the fact that throughout the Victorian period, imperial racialisation coincided with new attributes of British masculinity (Linsley, 2013, p. 2). In this context, "nobleness, bravery, and an adventurous spirit" became basic norms of the "loyal, male, imperial subject" and the British "colonies served as a playground to exhibit this new masculine identity through the exploration of dark continents, administration of savage cultures, and numerous other exhilarating imperial activities" (p. 2). Consequently, the ideal role of the English woman was to "raise females who would consume from the empire and males who would administrate it" (p. 3). Similarly, Stella's mother's language and behaviour also reinforce this attitude, emphasising the masculinity and superiority of the British Empire, as shown by Mrs Eyrecourt's plans to entertain guests at her daughter's wedding with "dances, squaws" and "scalps" of natives (Collins, 1881, p. 74). This also shows the racist attitude of Mrs Eyrecourt, who stereotypes the non-white natives and treats them as objects of ridicule and public entertainment. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, people in the West also had the opportunity to see the natives in the flesh as they were brought to Europe to be exhibited at fairs and circuses as exemplars of novelty and exoticism. This widespread practice of displaying half-naked natives and having them perform demeaning activities "contributed to the creation of a sense of radical difference between colonizer and colonized, between European and non-European, between familiar and strange" (Putnam, 2012, p. 55). Such representations, made possible by up-close encounters with the natives, also consolidated the ideological position of Western superiority, reaffirming its power and prestige in the world (2012, p. 55). Indeed, "human zoos served ideological and propagandist purposes" to show European audiences that "the colonial adventure was working and that it was worth the cost" (2012, p. 56). According to Said, this attitude stems from the racist concept of white supremacy, which is a Western preoccupation "with the biological bases of racial inequality" (2003, p. 206). In *The Black Robe*, the "charming grounds for encampments, dances, squaws" and "scalps" that serve as entertainment venues for Western viewers attest to the sense of racial superiority embedded in British society (Collins, 1881, p. 74).

It is worth noting that by referring to indigenous women as 'squaws', which is used pejoratively to refer to an Indian woman or wife, Mrs Eyrecourt is promoting an internalised sexism rooted in the domestic ideology of the Victorian age. Apart from their racist views, the gendered perspective of Victorian women is rooted in colonial discourse and consciousness. Indeed, Orientalism is "an exclusively male province" that views "itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders", which is particularly noticeable in the writings of travellers and novelists who view women as "the creatures of a male power fantasy" (Said, 2003, p. 207). In *The Black Robe*, Collins's reference to the word "squaw", which has historically been used to refer to indigenous American women, also sheds light on the positioning of indigenous womanhood in colonial America. King traces the history of the term 'squaw' and notes that while it originally "signifies an American Indian woman or wife, it has always meant much more" (2003, p. 3). The scholar explains that the word is directly related to the "colonial legacies and postcolonial predicaments of naming, representation, and language" in the United States today (2003, p. 2). Furthermore, "the racist and sexist stereotypes given voice through squaw, render embodied indigenous women invisible, overshadowed by the iconic insistence of the trope" (King, 2003, p. 12). Since indigenous women played a prominent role in resisting Euro-American imperial aspirations, King (2003) suggests that "the struggles over squaw" will inspire academics to reconsider "the gendered meanings of the efforts of indigenous peoples in the United States so that they may define themselves, claim historical rights, and counter colonial power relations" (p. 13). The term 'squaw' serves as a vivid example that underscores the ethnic and gendered connotations of colonial discourse upon which the vernacular language and culture of indigenous peoples are construed.

In *The Black Robe*, it is observed how British rule reinforced its colonial domination based on racial supremacy in native-settler relations, by cultivating a legacy of corruption among chiefs. This is evident in the accounts of an Englishman who travelled in Arizona, "under the protection of an Apache chief", who was "bribed to show [him] his country and his nation (instead of cutting [his] throat and tearing off [his] scalp) by a present tribute of whisky and gunpowder, and by the promise of more when [their] association [comes] to an end" (Collins, 1881, p. 149). The problem of corruption is seen as an inseparable part of colonial rule deliberately employed by British authorities to subjugate and control colonised peoples. Historically, the rise of corruption among indigenous communities led to the loss of cultural identity and assimilation. According to Said, the perpetuation of Orientalism lies in the outcome of cultural hegemony, whose dominance is based on the notion of European identity as a superior one in contrast with all the non-European peoples and civilizations (2003, p. 7). These views inevitably contributed to the dichotomy between the East and the West, through which the Oriental is defined as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childish and different", while the European is "rational, virtuous, mature and normal (p. 40).

The imperial omnipresence of cultural hegemony also manifests itself in the power of knowledge about the East constructed by the West. In the novel, Major Hynd reports that their primary source of receiving information about both "civilized and savage regions alike" depends on the English newspaper and that "the *Times* stands alone as the one public journal which has the whole English nation for volunteer contributors" collecting and publishing it (Collins, 1881, p. 148). As the representative of colonial authority, Hynd propagates Oriental knowledge as "the voice of European ambition for rule over the Orient" hence Said's quote from Marx "they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (Said, 2003, p. 196; Marx as cited in Said, 2003, p. xxvı). In *The Black Robe*, Major Hynd exemplifies the credibility of British sources based on the following reports: "the Indians have made a night attack on the new mission house" and "the building is burned to the ground, and the missionaries have been massacred" (Collins, 1881, p. 147). This religiously motivated violence against missionaries serves as a convenient explanation for the Western audience since the so-called primary goal of colonial missions in the Americas was to save the souls of heathens under the influence of Christianity. The representation of Oriental knowledge based on the savagery of indigenous peoples contributes to widening the gap between the West and the East, thus confirming Said's argument that "the opposition between the good and the bad stands for power relations of the Orient and the Occident" and the discourse they use to materialize these relations" (Zhao, 2017, p. 379). Derived from Foucault's knowledge-power structure, Said's ideas of Oriental knowledge are consistent with Foucault's studies for "it is not an objective reflection of the true Orient, it is full of power" and therefore as far as Orientalism is concerned, the Orient cannot speak and must be represented (2017, p. 377, 378).

Conclusion

Significantly, the hypocrisy and expediency of British missionary activity and the colonialists' attempts to Christianise the New World under the pretext of enlightenment and civilisation is that they aimed to appropriate the land and assimilate the culture of the native peoples. In the literary sphere, despite a strong anti-Catholic stance at home, Victorian writers used the doctrines and dogmas of Roman Catholicism in favour of British imperialism to promote colonial proselytization in their writings. They thus saw themselves on an equal footing with British society and produced works that justified and endorsed the policies of imperial authority. In this respect, the Orientalist approach helps to expose the stereotypical discourse created by the West in its construction of indigenous peoples, viewing them as evil and bloodthirsty savages who must be purified through religion. In *The Black Robe* (1881), Collins treats colonial problems from the standpoint of superiority, portraying the coloniser as the rightful ruler and the natives as inferior people devoid of civilisation. This treatment is in line with the nature of Orientalism, which is based on the entrenched division between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority. In the novel, the image of the black robe embodies not only the decayed and corrupt system of the Jesuit order but also the colonial legacy of the British Empire. This is reinforced by the fact that Collins's anti-Catholic discourse is set within the confines of British society and disregards its potential extension to colonial territories. Undoubtedly, such a

literary reaction to colonialism, in solidarity with imperial ideology, reflects the zeitgeist of the Victorian age.

Conflict of interest:	The author declares no potential conflict of interest.
Financial support:	The author received no financial support for the research.
Ethics Board Approval:	The author declares no need for ethics board approval for the research.

References

Al-Neyadi, A. M. (2015). Depicting the orient in Wilkie Collins's The Moonstone. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, *4*(6), 181-189.

Emrys, A. B. (2014). *Wilkie Collins, Vera Caspary and the evolution of the Casebook Novel*. McFarland.

Eyre, A. (2022). *Women's writing and Mmission in the nineteenth century: Jane Eyre's Missionary Sisters*. Taylor & Francis.

Griffin, S. M. (2004). *The Yellow Mask, The Black Robe, and The Woman in White*: Wilkie Collins, Anti-Catholic Discourse, and the Sensation Novel. *Narrative*, *12*(1), 55-73.

Johnston, A. (2003). *Missionary writing and empire, 1800-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

King, C. Richard. (2003). De/Scribing squ*w: Indigenous women and imperial idioms in the United States. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *27*(2), 1-6.

Lawrence, K. (1989). The religion of Wilkie Collins: Three unpublished documents. *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 389-402.

Linsley, B. (2013). Feeble to effeminacy: Race and gender in the British imperial consciousness 1837-1901. *Grand Valley Journal of History*, *2*(2), 1.

Moran, M. (2007). *Catholic sensationalism and Victorian literature* (Vol. 49). Liverpool University Press.

Nayder, L. (2006). Collins and empire. In J. B. Taylor (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (pp. 139-152). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oulton, C. (2002). *Literature and religion in mid-Victorian England: from Dickens to Eliot*. Springer.

Taylor, J. B. (2006). Introduction. In J. B. Taylor (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (pp. 1-6). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Collins, W. (1881). *The black robe*. [The Project Gutenberg eBook]. Retrieved from https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1587/1587-h/1587-h.htm

Putnam, W. (2012). "Please don't feed the natives": Human Zoos, Colonial Desire, and Bodies on Display. In *The Environment in French and Francophone Literature and Film* (pp. 55-68). Brill.

Pykett, L. (2005). *Authors in context: Wilkie Collins*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Williamson, C. (2011). Scientific racism on display: Representations of indigenous cultures and societies at the turn of the 20th century. *Constellations*, *2*(2), 90-107.

Rowbotham, J. (2000). 'Soldiers of Christ'? Images of female missionaries in late nineteenth-century Britain: Issues of Heroism and Martyrdom. *Gender & history*, *12*(1), 82-106.

Samson, C., & Gigoux, C. (2016). *Indigenous peoples and colonialism: Global perspectives*. John Wiley & Sons.

Zhao, Y. (2017). An analysis of knowledge-power structure and orientalism. In *2016 2nd International Conference on Economics, Management Engineering and Education Technology (ICEMEET 2016)* (pp. 377-379). Atlantis Press.