

## ORIENTAL THEME IN ENGLISH LITERATURE OF THE XVIII-XX CENTURIES

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**Abstract:** In art history, literature and cultural studies, Orientalism is the imitation or depiction of aspects in the Eastern world. These depictions are usually done by writers, designers, and artists from the Western world. In particular, Orientalist painting, depicting more specifically the Middle East, was one of the many specialisms of 19th-century academic art, and the literature of Western countries took a similar interest in Oriental themes. Since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, much academic discourse has begun to use the term "Orientalism" to refer to a general patronizing Western attitude towards Middle Eastern, Asian, and North African societies.

**Key words:** orientalism, orientalist, literature, depiction, occidentalism, culture, architecture, East, West.

The first travel literature about the Orient gave English readers distorted and fanciful descriptions of far-Eastern countries, and one of the popular notions that emerged from this body of literature was that the Oriental person was grotesque and savage, completely unaccustomed to the level of civilization enjoyed in Europe. Until the eighteenth century, when communication with the Orient strengthened and the picture of Oriental life became more accurate, such exaggerated conceptions were represented in literature.

More Englishmen than ever before visited the Orient, trade with the East developed significantly, and a wide range of Eastern goods were available on the English market. Even Augustan poets like Alexander Pope and John Gay, who aren't

known for their fascination with the exotic and distant, show an understanding of Oriental culture and etiquette in their poetry.

During the eighteenth century, English interest in the Orient grew, and Orientalism became a significant cultural phenomenon, influencing architecture, gardening, and interior décor, as well as literature. It appears in most of the genres used by English writers throughout this time period in literature. The general shift in taste from neo-classicism to romanticism was reflected in this Oriental craze. During the first half of the century, Oriental fiction and poetry writers tended to exploit the material as a means of moralizing or satirizing their own culture's faults.

On stage, Oriental plays exposed mankind's faults and brought attention to disagreeable habits in modern civilization. However, prose authors in the second half of the century were increasingly fascinated by the exoticism and strangeness of the Orient. Similarly, the Orient gave a new mythology in poetry, as well as new pictures and illustrations to enhance those already employed by poets. On the stage, oriental dramas, with a strong interest in pantomime and melodrama, provided the audience with wonderful performances with gorgeous costumes and magnificent scenery. The general contribution of the East to English literature is to provide a means of escape, a new perspective.

In the late eighteenth century, when Sir William Jones began academic studies of the Orient, writers began to look at the Orient more realistically, so some of the romance and wonder associated with it disappeared. The Romantic Sultan and elves were replaced by more mundane and real characters. Romantic poets like Byron and Moore still wrote about the Orient in epic poetry, but the public is now also interested in Thomas Hope's "Anastatius" (1819) and Morrill's "Haji Baba" (1824) and other real-life stories.

### **Eastern views of the West and Western views of the East**

The concept of Orientalism has been adopted by scholars in East-Central and Eastern Europe, among them Maria Todorova, Attila Melegh, Tomasz Zarycki, and Dariusz Skorczewski as an analytical tool for exploring the images of

East-Central and Eastern European societies in cultural discourses of the West in the 19th century and during the Soviet domination.

The term "re-orientalism" was used by Lisa Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes to refer to how Eastern self-representation is based on western referential points. Re-Orientalism differs from Orientalism in its manner of and reasons for referencing the West: while challenging the metanarratives of Orientalism, re-Orientalism sets up alternative metanarratives of its own in order to articulate eastern identities, simultaneously deconstructing and reinforcing Orientalism.

### **Occidentalism**

The term occidentalism is often used to refer to negative views of the Western world found in Eastern societies, and is founded on the sense of nationalism that spread in reaction to colonialism] (see Pan-Asianism). Edward Said has been accused of Occidentalizing the west in his critique of Orientalism; of being guilty of falsely characterizing the West in the same way that he accuses Western scholars of falsely characterizing the East.] Said made essence the West by creating a homogenous image of the area. Currently, the West consists not only of Europe, but also the United States and Canada, which have become more influential over the years.

In addition, the action of other cultures occurs when groups are labeled as different due to characteristics that distinguish them from the perceived norm. Edward Said, author of the book *Orientalism*, argued that western powers and influential individuals such as social scientists and artists believed "the Orient." The evolution of ideologies is often initially embedded in the language, and continues to ripple through the fabric of society by taking over the culture, economy and political sphere. Much of Said's criticism of Western Orientalism is based on what he describes as particularizing trends. These ideologies are present in Asian works by Indian, Chinese, and Japanese writers and artists, in their views of Western culture and tradition. A particularly significant development is the manner in which Orientalism has taken shape in non-Western cinema, as for instance in Hindi-language cinema.

Moreover, views of the West from the East and the East from the West Orientalism is the copying or portrayal of features of the Eastern world in art history, literature, and cultural studies. Writers, designers, and painters from the Western world are usually the ones that create these depictions. Orientalist painting, which depicted the Middle East in particular], was one of the numerous specialisms of 19th-century academic art, and Western literature had a comparable interest in Oriental themes. Much academic debate has begun to use the term "Orientalism" to refer to a general arrogant Western attitude toward Middle Eastern, Asian, and North African countries since the release of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. In Said's analysis, the West made essence these societies as static and undeveloped—thereby fabricating a view of Oriental culture that can be studied, depicted, and reproduced in the service of imperial power. Implicit in this fabrication, writes Said, is the idea that Western society is developed, rational, flexible, and superior. Besides that, as he said that Orientalism refers to the Orient, in reference and opposition to the Occident; the East and the West, respectively. The word Orient entered the English language as the Middle French orient. The root word Oriens, from the Latin Oriens, has synonymous denotations: The eastern part of the world; the sky whence comes the sun; the east; the rising sun, etc.; yet the denotation changed as a term of geography.

In the "Monk's Tale" (1375), Geoffrey Chaucer wrote: "That they conquered many regnes grete / In the orient, with many a fair citee." The term orient refers to countries east of the Mediterranean Sea and Southern Europe. In place of Fear (1952), Aneurin Bevan used an expanded denotation of the Orient that comprehended East Asia: "the awakening of the Orient under the impact of Western ideas." Edward Said said that Orientalism "enables the political, economic, cultural and social domination of the West, not just during colonial times, but also in the present."

In summation, Said outlined a theory where Orientalism arose out of a need for the West to define itself as the opposite of a counterbalancing entity. Europe found this counterbalancing entity in the crusades to be the Orient. The West found itself in positions of political and military power over what it saw as the Orient and

subsequently used this power to subjugate it. Developing alongside this power, giving legitimacy and traction, was the scholar of the Orient, the Orientalists. Once a tradition of superior values of the West and a static view of the Orient developed, the tradition crystalized. And it was and is nearly impossible to break free for any scholar inside the tradition. However, “[humans] make their own history” and every society is in a constant state of flux and development.

Thus, what is necessary is for each people group to speak for itself and create discourses of its own history. They must share and dialogue with other people groups with the goal of true knowledge of the other and not merely political knowledge.

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