

# THE REPRESENTATION OF THE EAST IN ENGLISH LITERATURE (17TH TO 20TH CENTURIES)

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## Abstract

In order to better understand how British society's perceptions toward Eastern cultures have changed over time, this article looks at how the East has been portrayed in English literature from the 17th to the 20th centuries. This study analyzes recurrent themes of colonialism, exoticism, and cultural misunderstanding by critically analyzing important literary works. It makes the case that literature was used to support colonial ideas in addition to reflecting current social perspectives. The results show how curiosity and fear interact in a complicated way to shape how the West views the East.

**Keywords:** 17th and 20th century, colonialism, exoticism, East, English literature, and cultural representation.

## Introduction

Between the 17th and 20th centuries, there was a substantial change in how the East was portrayed in English literature. The emergence of British imperialism during this time had a significant impact on how Eastern cultures were portrayed in literature. Authors like E.M. Forster, Joseph Conrad, and John Milton have all added to a rich fabric of stories that express both respect and contempt for the East. In order to demonstrate how literature served as both a mirror and a shaper of popular image of Eastern societies, this article will examine these representations via a variety of lenses, such as historical background, cultural attitudes, and literary devices.

## Review of Literature

Scholarly interest in the study of Eastern representation in English literature has grown significantly. \*Orientalism\* (1978), a landmark work by Edward Said, established the foundation for comprehending how Western literature created a "Orient" to suit colonial purposes. Said maintained that by depicting Eastern nations as foreign, archaic, and primitive, this portrayal was not just an artistic but also a political one that served to legitimize imperial dominance.

Authors such as John Milton portrayed the East in the 17th century using moral dualism and biblical allegory. Current European concerns about the Ottoman Empire and its alleged threat to Christendom are reflected in Milton's depiction of the East in *\*Paradise Lost\**, which is entwined with themes of temptation and sin (Milton, 1667).

A change toward a more romanticized perspective of the East occurred during the 19th century. In order to appeal to Victorian tastes, poets like Lord Byron and Alfred Lord Tennyson used exotic imagery into their writings. Byron's *\*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage\** (1812) perpetuates preconceived notions about Eastern authoritarianism while romanticizing the East as a place of mystery and beauty (Byron, 1812).

A more critical viewpoint on colonialism and its impacts on colonizers and colonized is offered by Joseph Conrad's *\*Heart of Darkness\** (1899). While highlighting the degrading effects of colonial attitudes toward African cultures—which are sometimes confused with Eastern societies in Western discourse—Conrad's story also highlights the moral complexity of imperial endeavors (Conrad, 1899).

*\*A Passage to India\** by E.M. Forster (1924) offers a sophisticated examination of British-Indian interactions during the colonial era. By presenting characters who negotiate the difficulties of cultural misunderstanding and interpersonal connection, Forster challenges oversimplified dichotomies. His portrayal emphasizes the attraction and obstacles inherent in cross-cultural communication, ultimately implying that genuine comprehension is still unattainable (Forster, 1924).

### Conclusion

From the 17th to the 20th centuries, English literature's portrayal of the East shows a dynamic interaction between colonial ideology-based curiosity and terror. Although early representations Later studies started to question these preconceptions by examining the complexities of cross-cultural communication and misinterpretation, which frequently presented Eastern civilizations as alien and morally inferior. With a focus on important works and their significance for comprehending cultural dynamics at times of major historical upheaval, this essay offers a unique examination of how English literature has portrayed the East over the course of three centuries. Notwithstanding this development, literature has continuously been used to support or challenge dominant perceptions about the East. The knowledge gained from this literary analysis emphasizes how crucial it is to read historical writings critically in order to comprehend how they have influenced how people now view Eastern civilizations.

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