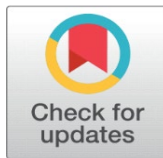
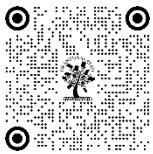


# INDOCTRINATED IDEOLOGY AND NARRATIVES IN YOUTH FICTION: EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN HONOR AND SANTA CLAUS IN BAGHDAD BY ELSA MARSTON

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## ABSTRACT

Bravely being communicated as innocent literature, Children literature holds power to amuse young minds and efficiently propagate polluted narratives. Investigating literature directed and intended towards children needs, should be handled more carefully as these are the fertile landscapes for propagating and manufacturing ideology and feeding the binaries created by Eurocentric narratives. Elsa Marston's attempt to write sympathetically about the lives of Arab children but the attempt is covertly an expression of the lens created by the Occident for Orient. Employment of affective narrative that builds on the support of emotions and sympathy are questioning ideological manners which are conditioning young and innocent minds to support and reinforce cultural hierarchies. The deliberate narratives weaved by Marston in Santa Claus in Baghdad and Honor are strategically employing emotions to seduce children to incline towards the idea of West being the saviour and safe heaven. Through incorporation of internal conflict of emotions, pride, culture, individuality and hope into the narrative technique, Marston produces a lasting and corrupted ideological impact through her work. The critical investigation of Elsa's work would highlight the condition of seemingly innocent text are not didactic or rich text but are powerful ideological texts that are driven or infested with Eurocentric agenda.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature, perceived and relegated to the realm of innocent and simplistic amusement, is, in fact, a potent medium through which early ideological frameworks are established and perpetuated. The construction of images, universe, and stories in juvenile literature are magnificently powerful and efficient. The narratives disseminated to young readers are rarely innocent; rather, they function as vehicles of affective persuasion that shape cultural identity and embed hierarchical distinctions within the minds of the vulnerable (Nodelman, 2008, p. 83). Interrogating various ways that are actively incorporated to affectively propagate narratives in youth fiction which contribute to ideological indoctrination. During the course of the paper, two short stories by Elsa Marston will be focused – *Santa Claus in Baghdad*

and *Honor*. By critically analysing these texts, this paper reveals how emotional engagement is mobilised to reinforce Orientalist and Eurocentric binaries, thereby conditioning young readers to internalise fixed cultural hierarchies.

Agency that shapes and build a perception and narrative lies in its capacity to bypass the reader's critical senses and manner of acceptance of a literature as truth, creating an immediate and lasting emotional imprint. Edward Said perfectly encapsulated the idea of creation of identities, "the Orient... is not only defined by what is there, but also by the absence of certain qualities" (Said, 1978, p. 45) underscores the active construction of difference through omission and selective representation. Elsa Marston, an American author deploys a rich array of symbolic images in *Santa Claus in Baghdad*, ranging from the hopeful anticipation of gift-giving to the somber realities of an urban school setting to evoke a spectrum of emotions. Though these elements and negligible cues perceived merely decorative but serve a critical function in delineating the modern from the traditional and the urban from the rural. As one may observe, the narrative's interplay of humour, melancholy, and nostalgia operates as a subtle mechanism that privileges Western modernity over Eastern tradition, thus reproducing a cultural hierarchy that renders the "Other" perpetually inferior. Harnessing affective narrative technique in "Honor" to construct a moral battleground wherein the concept of honor is elevated as a marker of cultural legitimacy, Marston plays with the idea of honor. In the story, the affective force is palpable; a character's assertion that "There is honor in being true to our ways" (Marston, 2008, p. 112) encapsulates a complex valorisation of traditional values while simultaneously insinuating that deviation from these norms represents a failure of progress. The emotional tension embedded within "Honor" becomes an instrument through which readers are subtly coerced into accepting a rigid dichotomy between the "civilized" and the "uncivilized." Such creation of binary opposition—framing the conservative as inherently virtuous and the progressive as lacking authenticity—mirrors broader Orientalist discourses that valorise the West as the epitome of rationality and advancement while relegating the East to a state of perpetual deficiency (Spivak, 1988, p. 92).

*Santa Claus in Baghdad* and *Honor* exemplify how affective narrative strategies are deployed in children's literature to facilitate ideological indoctrination. In *Santa Claus in Baghdad*, the affective appeal is derived from a poignant portrayal of everyday life in an Iraqi urban context. Marston's narrative interweaves elements of humor, despair, and a wistful longing for a bygone era, thereby creating a complex emotional landscape that reinforces a hierarchy between the modern and the traditional. For instance, the act of gift-giving, a recurring motif in the story, is imbued with both hopeful expectation and a sense of inevitable loss, reflecting the precarious balance between aspiration and resignation (Nodelman, 2008, p. 78). The text, therefore, does not merely recount a festive tale but actively constructs an emotional framework that privileges a Westernised ideal of modernity. In contrast, "Honor" intensifies the affective experience by foregrounding the ethical and cultural dilemmas associated with the concept of honor. The narrative tension in "Honor" arises from the conflicting imperatives of cultural preservation and the pressures of modernisation. "There is honor in being true to our ways" (Marston, 2008, p. 112) poignantly remarked by the character in the story. The story invokes a moral code that appears at once timeless and static. Yet, by framing honor as a virtue exclusive to a conservative, traditional way of life, the text implicitly suggests that modernity is contingent upon the abandonment of these enduring values. Creation of such problematic dichotomy is emblematic and allegorical manner for a broader cultural narrative in which the progressive is devalued and the traditional is idealised—an orientation that echoes the Orientalist binary of the superior West versus the inferior East (Bhabha, 1994, p. 87).

The emotional immediacy of Marston's narratives ensures that the ideological messages—whether overt or subliminal—are indelibly etched into the reader's psyche. Affective strategies employed in both texts work to lower the critical resistance of young readers, rendering them more amenable to internalising hierarchical cultural values. As Nodelman (2008) asserts, "children are not blank slates; they are active agents who absorb and internalise the values presented to them in literature" (p. 83). This process of emotional conditioning is particularly insidious in the realm of children's literature, where the boundary between formative narrative engagement and ideological indoctrination is often blurred. The broader implications of such affective indoctrination are significant. Early exposure to emotionally charged narratives that valorise certain cultural ideals over others can have a lasting impact on how young readers perceive themselves and their communities. The internalisation of inferiority is not solely a product of overt oppression but is also cultivated through subtle, everyday interactions with cultural texts (Fanon, 1967, p. 59). The affective dimensions of narrative served in Marston's work is to reinforce a vision of the East that is both devalued and in perpetual need of Western intervention, a vision that perpetuates a hierarchical social order from a very young age.

How do affective narrative strategies in *Santa Claus in Baghdad* and *Honor* reproduce and reinforce cultural hierarchies? In what ways do these strategies reflect and perpetuate Orientalist and Eurocentric ideologies? And how

does the emotional engagement elicited by these texts predispose young readers to accept these hierarchical values as natural and immutable? Addressing these questions requires an integrated analytical approach that weaves together textual analysis with insights from postcolonial theory and affect theory. As Spivak and Bhabha have noted, the process of cultural representation is deeply political, with affect serving as a pivotal conduit for the transmission of ideology (Spivak, 1988, p. 102; Bhabha, 1994, p. 87).

In situating this inquiry within the broader field of postcolonial studies, it is imperative to recognise that affect is not a mere by-product of narrative technique but a deliberate and powerful instrument of ideological persuasion. Marston's texts offer a compelling case study in how affect can be mobilised to foster an internalised acceptance of cultural hierarchies. The affective narratives in these texts are thus instrumental in shaping the ideological landscape of youth fiction. They operate as discursive practices that not only reflect existing cultural hierarchies but also actively contribute to their reproduction. By engaging with these narratives, this study contends that we can better understand the mechanisms through which early literary experiences inform the ideological dispositions of future generations.

## 2. EMOTIONAL PERSUASION AND CULTURAL HIERARCHIES: UNPACKING SANTA CLAUS IN BAGHDAD

Meticulous orchestration of narrative elements designed to evoke a complex array of emotions is what lies at the heart of *Santa Claus in Baghdad Said* (1978) argues that the West constructs the East not only through what is present but also through what is systematically omitted. Marston's affective narrative is deeply imbued with elements that echo Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. *Santa Claus in Baghdad* serves as a vivid exemplar of affective narrative strategies that operate to subtly reinforce cultural hierarchies and ideological binaries. A deliberately layered narrative structure, one that interweaves moments of levity with an underlying current of melancholy and resignation is what strengthens the Eurocentric manner in the text. The employment & recurrent motif of gift-giving is not portrayed merely as an act of generosity but as a symbolic ritual that encapsulates – hope and despair. “The anticipation of a gift, like a brief candle in a dark room, held both the promise of joy and the inevitability of disappointment” (Marston, 2008, p. 23). Careful and tactical use of rich imagery and nuanced tonal shifts, bewitches readers invest into the emotional landscape that deals with the internal struggles of the characters along with interacting with the external markers of modernity and tradition. Hope intertwined with sorrow, this double helix construction mirrors the broader binary between the modern, progressive self and the traditional, static other. The stark contrast between the opulent expectations of gift-giving and the palpable deprivation of everyday life constructed in *Santa Claus in Baghdad*, intended focus on certain emotional and material details implicitly reinforces a dichotomy wherein Western modernity is positioned as the benchmark of progress. The urban backdrop of Baghdad is rendered in a manner that emphasises decay and the erosion of cultural vibrancy. The schoolyard, described in vivid, almost tactile detail—“the ground was littered with remnants of shattered dreams and the faded echoes of laughter” (Marston, 2008, p. 15)—serves as a microcosm for a society caught between the allure of modernity and the clutches of a stifling past. This portrayal, while ostensibly grounded in the reality of urban life, is charged with an affective power that privileges Western modernity that casts the Eastern experience as deficient, in need of the redemptive promise of the West.

Marston's use of emotive adjectives and metaphorical language align the reader with the Eurocentric ideology and perspective. The sketching of the urban landscape – “a labyrinth of lost promises and worn-out aspirations” (Marston, 2008, p. 29)—ensures the invoking of an empathetic engagement with the characters. This empathetic engagement, seemingly foster a superficial compassion for the character but is intended to function as a conduit for the internalisation of a binary worldview. As Nodelman (2008) contends, “the affective dimensions of narrative are not merely aesthetic choices but are deeply implicated in the transmission of ideological values” (p. 83). Here, the reader's emotional investment in the plight of the characters, invokes an unavoidable and unknowing acceptance of a cultural hierarchy that privileges certain forms of modernity over others. Moments of exuberant hope and profound despair, unravelling of emotions and harsh conditions, constant flux of such elements reinforces ideological binaries through its pacing and juxtaposition of contrasting scenes, creating a rhythmic tension that mirrors the conflict between modernity and tradition. In one passage, the joyous anticipation of a gift is abruptly undercut by a somber reflection on loss: “The laughter of children, momentarily bright as a flickering flame, was quickly swallowed by the shadows of unmet expectations” (Marston, 2008, p. 37). This play between emotions of hope and disillusionment is not accidental; it is a deliberate strategy employed in narrative to seduce and bind the reader into accepting the inevitability of cultural decline unless remedied by Western intervention, propagating the Orientalistic interception of Arab.

Evaluating the exemplary character sketching deepens the discourse as how it empowers the biased narrative by heavy reliance on character archetypes that embody the dichotomies central to Orientalist discourse. A hopeful dreamer and a resigned realist, the two primary characteristics of the protagonist, embodying the tension between potentiality and inevitability. "In the promise of every gift lay a silent lament for what was lost; a quiet, persistent yearning for a world that might have been" (Marston, 2008, p. 42). The internal monologue of the protagonist is laden with wistful reminiscences and bitter acknowledgments. These are essentially serving as a microcosm of the broader cultural struggle, which later form the accepted manner of looking at one culture and its followers. This internal conflict is emblematic of the ideological indoctrination at work, wherein the individual's emotional responses are subsumed under a collective narrative that valorises Western modernity while denigrating the past. It is also crucial to appreciate and condemn, how Marston's narrative techniques interact with the reader's affective sensibilities to produce a lasting ideological impact. The emotional immediacy of the text—its capacity to evoke empathy, sorrow, and even a sense of catharsis—ensures that the ideological messages are not merely perceived at an intellectual level but are deeply felt. Rose (1992) argue, "affect serves as a vehicle for the transmission of ideology, operating at the level of the heart as much as the mind" (p.105). In *Santa Claus in Baghdad*, the affective charge of the narrative creates a cognitive imprint that predisposes the reader to accept the hierarchies and binaries it portrays. This process of emotional conditioning, subtle yet insidious, underscores the broader implications of affective indoctrination in children's literature.

*Santa Claus in Baghdad* exemplifies how affective narrative strategies are meticulously employed to reproduce and reinforce cultural hierarchies and innocently condition young readers into accepting a hierarchically structured cultural order. Through its symbolic imagery, emotive language, and carefully structured narrative tension, the text constructs a binary opposition between modernity and tradition that is deeply embedded within an Orientalist framework. The reader, drawn into the emotional vortex of the narrative, is gradually conditioned to internalise these ideological distinctions as natural and inevitable. The text not only reflects existing cultural hierarchies but actively participates in their reproduction through the subtle mechanism of affective engagement. This particular short story by Elsa Marston reveals the intricacies of how narrative affect functions as a tool for ideological indoctrination, setting the stage for a broader comparative discourse is essential to understand the prevalent colonial nature of children literature and responsibilities of careful crafting of literature directed to young minds.

### **Affective Control and the Politics of Tradition: Investigation of *Honor***

Exploring different means and manner of colonising young minds through Children literature by evaluating Marston's works, *Santa Claus in Baghdad*, subtly constructs ideological binaries through the interplay of emotions like hope and loss where short story, *Honor*, offers a far more absolute and visceral exploration of cultural hierarchies, positioning tradition and modernity in an overt moral conflict. Though the construction of characters seems to be sympathetic in its approach deeper evaluation hints to reinforcing of dichotomy where the "civilized" and the "progressive" are set against the "traditional" and the "oppressive." Marston's narrative structure in *Honor* is built upon an affective tension that demands an emotional investment from the reader. Infesting and fostering an unknowing internalised acceptance of cultural hierarchies through a well orchestrated and deliberate narrative strategy. With affective intensity, moral framing and characterisation, *Honor* elegantly aligns the Western liberalism ideological framework with abnormal traditional structures of honour. Diving into employment of effective mechanism to construct ideological binary that implicitly shape young reader's perception of cultural legitimacy and social progress. Marston structure the narrative of *Honor* upon an affective tension that centres around the entrapment of a young Arab girl in the rigid honour system. Interplay between individual agency and collective cultural pressure creates protagonist's plight and ground or propagation of Eurocentric ideology. Emotional tension functions as more than a storytelling device; it acts as an ideological tool that conditions the reader to perceive honour as a repressive construct that impedes personal freedom. As Jacqueline Rose (1992) argues, "children's fiction is not an innocent domain; it is where the most fundamental structures of ideology are both rehearsed and challenged" (p. 45). In *Honor*, this ideological framework is rehearsed through an emotionally charged depiction of suffering, coercion, and injustice.

The effective power of immediate emotional resonance that creates a broader ideological function can be presented through – "She looked at her mother, searching for a trace of rebellion, but found only resignation" (Marston, 2008, p. 145). It situates honour as an oppressive structure that extinguishes female agency and reinforces patriarchal dominance. This framing is central to the narrative's moral engineering by foregrounding the protagonist's emotional turmoil, the story ensures that the reader's affective alignment is directed against the traditional system rather than toward a more nuanced understanding of cultural continuity and resistance. This strategic deployment of affective



engagement reflects what Homi K. Bhabha (1994) describes as the “fixation of cultural identity within a binary opposition” (p. 87). The reader is not encouraged to see honour as a complex socio-cultural construct with its own internal negotiations but rather as an archaic remnant that must be transcended. This oversimplification, however, is itself an ideological act—one that aligns with broader Eurocentric discourses that construct the “non-Western” world as perpetually in need of intervention, whether moral, political, or cultural.

The protagonist, caught between the expectations of her family and the lure of individual freedom that again reinforces the ground of character construction which strengthen what Spivak terms “the native informant”—a figure positioned to translate the backwardness of their own culture to a presumably enlightened audience (Spivak, 1988, p. 92). The tradition and modernity have always been equated as stark opposites, with honour being the boundary that divided progress from oppression. Portrayal of honour as a rigid, unyielding system is also reflected in the narrative’s depiction of familial relationships. The father figure, often a metonym for cultural continuity in such narratives, is rendered as a symbol of resistance to change that align with the archetype characterisation, what Said critiques in *Orientalist*—the tendency to depict Eastern patriarchs as authoritarian figures incapable of adaptation (Said, 1978, p. 99). When the father asserts, “Our ways are old, but they have kept us safe,” the statement is not merely a defence of tradition but a rhetorical device that cements the ideological contrast between the unchanging past and the liberating force of modernity (Marston, 2008, p. 158). Such a construction of narrative that affectively frame to deject the father’s position and never question the underlying structures of traditional and modern constructs of honor.

The protagonist’s inner turmoil continuously being surfaced through moments of stark emotional intensity, designed to empathy and moral urgency, is the affective manner of charging suffering into the narrative. This is evident in passages where she reflects on the burden of expectation: “She could feel the weight of generations pressing down on her, their voices whispering that she must not fail them” (Marston, 2008, p. 153). The language here is evocative and oppressive, constructing honor not as a lived, negotiated reality but as an insurmountable force that erases individuality. This depiction, while emotionally compelling, simplifies the intricate negotiations that occur within honor-based cultures, reducing them to a monolithic structure that must be dismantled rather than understood. What makes Honor particularly effective in its ideological transmission is its seamless fusion of narrative affect and moral instruction. Unlike didactic texts that explicitly preach moral lessons, Honor relies on affect to make its ideological claims appear self-evident. As Nodelman (2016) notes, “the most powerful ideological texts are those that do not announce their agenda but weave it into the very fabric of the story” (p. 90). Marston achieves this through a careful calibration of narrative voice, pacing, and affective immersion. One of the most striking aspects of this narrative technique is its manipulation of reader identification. By positioning the protagonist as an internal dissenter—someone who questions her own cultural framework—the text invites the reader to adopt a position of moral superiority. This is a classic *Orientalist* strategy, one that aligns with what Fanon (1967) describes as the “psychological burden of the colonised subject”—the constant pressure to either conform to an imposed identity or to resist and be alienated (p. 82).

### 3. CONCLUSION

*Santa Claus in Baghdad* and *Honor* reveals a striking convergence in how these narratives mobilise affective engagement to reinforce cultural hierarchies and ideological binaries through affective structures that create a moral and emotional framework within which readers navigate the cultural conflicts presented in the narratives. Elsa Marston through both the works which differ in their thematic focus and tone are intended to condition young readers to internalise a dichotomy between a progressive, enlightened world, implicitly aligned with Western modernity and a traditional, restrictive world associated with cultural stagnation. The effectiveness of these narratives lies on the ability to invoke strong emotional responses that bypass critical scrutiny and not just in its explicit didacticism. The emotional arc in *Santa Claus in Baghdad* is built upon an oscillation between hope and resignation, reinforcing a sense of loss and decline that is implicitly contrasted with an idealised, progressive alternative whereas *Honor* deploys affect in a more morally charged manner, constructing a rigid opposition between tradition and individual autonomy. The narrative’s affective strategies serve to highlight Relying and manufacturing the narrative on deprivation, positioning Western modernity as a distant yet aspirational force, the affective strategies, Said has critiqued in his *Orientalist* discourse, wherein the East is depicted as trapped in a cycle of despair, always positioned in contrast to the West’s presumed advancement (Said, 1978, p. 99).

The protagonist’s yearning for something beyond his immediate circumstances is not simply personal; it functions as a narrative device that positions modernity as an external force, something to be acquired rather than organically

developed. Staging familial duty as an oppressive force, where honour is framed not as a negotiable social value but as an unyielding structure that subjugates personal agency. The affective immediacy of protagonist's suffering, her silent struggles, and the reader's alignment with her perspective all serve to reinforce the idea that true liberation lies in the rejection of traditional norms. This framing echoes Spivak's critique of the "white men saving brown women from brown men" trope, wherein non-Western cultural structures are apathologized as inherently oppressive, necessitating external intervention (Spivak, 1988, p. 92). The most insidious aspect of these narratives is their ability to make cultural hierarchies appear natural and inevitable. Both texts rely on affect not just to engage readers but to shape their understanding of cultural legitimacy. In *Santa Claus in Baghdad*, the protagonist's emotional journey aligns with a broader narrative of decline, where nostalgia for a lost past coexists with an implicit yearning for a Westernised future. This mirrors what Bhabha describes as the "temporal lag of colonial discourse," in which the non-Western world is always depicted as catching up to a pre-established Western standard (Bhabha, 1994, p. 87). The affective charge of the narrative ensures that this ideological positioning is not perceived as coercive but as an organic realisation, a truth that the reader arrives at through emotional immersion. In *Honor*, the affective dimension works to solidify the perception of tradition as an oppressive structure that must be overcome. The protagonist's internalised conflict, her silent defiance, and the emotional burden of her choices all function to construct an implicit argument against the legitimacy of traditional honour systems. The reader, through affective alignment, is subtly conditioned to view honour not as a complex social construct but as a relic of an outdated world order. This aligns with Fanon's analysis of how colonial narratives structure indigenous identities within a framework of deficiency, presenting Western ideals as the sole path to emancipation (Fanon, 1967, p. 59). In this way, *Honor* does not merely depict a personal struggle; it extends that struggle into an ideological assertion about the necessity of cultural transition—one that privileges Western individualism over collective identity.

If affective narratives play such a crucial role in shaping ideological perceptions, what obligations do authors and educators have in mediating these texts? As Rose contends, children's literature cannot be seen as a neutral space; it is always a battleground where competing ideologies are contested (Rose, 1992, p. 105). In this context, *Santa Claus in Baghdad* and *Honor* must be read not just as stories but as cultural artifacts that participate in the construction of knowledge and power. Their affective strategies, while compelling, must be critically interrogated for the ways in which they contribute to the perpetuation of cultural hierarchies. This highlights the necessity of a more critical engagement with children's literature. If affect can be mobilised to reinforce dominant ideological structures, it can also be harnessed to challenge and disrupt them. The future of children's literature must therefore involve a conscious effort to move beyond simplistic binaries, presenting cultural traditions not as static relics but as dynamic, evolving systems. As Bhabha reminds us, cultural identity is never fixed; it is always in negotiation, always in process (Bhabha, 1994, p. 102). Youth fiction that acknowledges this complexity—rather than reducing it to an affective binary—holds the potential to foster a more critical and nuanced readership.

Affect in youth fiction is not merely an aesthetic or narrative choice but a powerful means of ideological transmission. By examining *Santa Claus in Baghdad* and *Honor*, it has been argued that these texts mobilize affective strategies to reinforce Orientalist and Eurocentric binaries, conditioning young readers to internalize cultural hierarchies. The emotional intensity of these narratives—whether through melancholic nostalgia or moral tension—ensures that their ideological premises are not simply presented but felt, making them more resistant to critique. These texts do not explicitly instruct young readers to accept Western modernity as superior; instead, they construct emotional landscapes that make such an acceptance seem natural, even inevitable. This is the mechanism through which affect operates not just as a narrative tool but as an ideological force. As Nodelman (2008) argues, "children's literature does not merely reflect the values of a culture; it is one of the primary means through which those values are transmitted and solidified" (p. 90). This is the subtlety of ideological indoctrination in affective narratives: by embedding ideological binaries within emotionally compelling stories, these texts make hierarchical worldviews appear self-evident.

In closing, *Santa Claus in Baghdad* and *Honor* exemplify the role of affect in shaping ideological perception, reinforcing the need for continued scrutiny of how children's literature functions as both a mirror and a mold for cultural identity. The affective narratives examined here are not isolated cases but part of a broader literary landscape where ideological indoctrination operates beneath the surface of emotional engagement. By recognizing and interrogating these mechanisms, scholars, educators, and writers alike can work toward a literature that does not merely reflect existing hierarchies but actively challenges and reimagines them.

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## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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