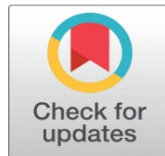
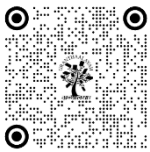


# RISE OF THE ORIENT IN ENGLISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the stories rooted in authentic Eastern themes in early English Romantic literature, focusing on their role in creating an extraordinary Eastern world and associated motifs. By analyzing these historically significant works, we clarify how the concept of Orientalism emerged in English literature. The article is grounded in the historical context of the formation of Eastern stories and highlights features such as the genuine Oriental settings and the ancient Oriental works that captivated foreign scholars and diplomats in the late eighteenth century. Oriental literature during this time reflected a broader shift in taste from neoclassicism to romanticism. In the first half of the century, writers of Oriental fiction and poetry often used Eastern material to moralize or satirize the shortcomings of their own culture.

**Keywords:** Eastern Fiction, Orientalism, English Literature, Western Philosophy, Eastern Philosophy, Classical Literature

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1770s, a major intellectual movement began in Europe, aiming to free Western nations from the long-held belief that Greco-Roman culture was the sole source of enlightenment and knowledge. Many English writers felt that the classical mythology and themes, which had dominated art since the Renaissance, needed to be supplemented with new imagery, subjects, and models. The study of the Orient took two forms: scholarly research into Eastern languages and literature, and the detailed accounts of the East written by travelers and diplomats after their visits to Eastern countries. During the eighteenth century, English interest in the East grew significantly. Orientalism became recognized as a cultural phenomenon that influenced architecture, gardening, art, and literature. For poets and writers, the Eastern setting provided a unique mood and new forms of expression, inspiring them to create works with Eastern themes. Orientalism's main contribution to English literature was shifting the focus of poets from outdated ideas and offering them fresh perspectives. In the first half of the century, authors used Oriental motifs to satirize the manners of their own culture, highlighting the flaws in society. Drama during this time often featured plots emphasizing the punishment of sinners and the grotesque. However, in the latter half of the century, poets began to focus more on the exotic and mysterious aspects of the East. This shift called for the introduction of new forms, styles, and imagery. The growing popularity of pantomimes and melodramas reflected this trend, and in English Romantic literature, stage productions featured elaborate costumes and imaginative decorations.

## 2. ORIENTAL SCHOLARSHIP

By the end of the 18th century, the English book market was flooded with travel literature. Among the most popular works was a collection of letters written by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu during her time in Constantinople in 1716. As the wife of the British Ambassador, her letters offered detailed descriptions of Turkey and other Mediterranean countries, significantly contributing to the exchange of ideas between Turkey and Europe. In addition to Montagu, several other scholars and diplomats in the late 18th century were fascinated by the East, including Sir William Ouseley, Sir Gore Ouseley, James Justinian Morier, Sir John Malcolm, Edward Backhouse Eastwick, and others. However, the most important figure in Oriental studies in England was Sir William Jones (1746–1794), who is considered the founder of Oriental scholarship in the country. In 1768, Jones was the only person in England with enough knowledge of Persian to translate *The Life of Nadir Shah* for the King of Denmark. This intellectual climate paved the way for writers of Oriental fiction. Prior to this, French translations had served as models for English writers, but with the rise of new scholarly discoveries and travel narratives, these writers began incorporating accurate Eastern details into their stories, supported by extensive notes to demonstrate their familiarity with the authentic East.

One of the early attempts to portray a genuine Eastern environment was *The History of Charoba*, published in 1785. While not a romance, the work was written by Clara Reeve, who adapted a narrative from Murtada Ibn al-Khafif's *Egyptian History*, originally published in Arabic in 1672. Reeve's version toned down exaggerations, eliminated unnecessary characters, and clarified contradictions, creating a more suitable story for English readers, especially women. As Reeve stated in her *Progress of Romance*, the purpose of such fairy tales was to foster a more accurate understanding of human nature and life's duties. The tale was also a direct influence on Landor's poem *Gebir* (1798). Although *Vatek* did not gain immediate popularity, the Eastern prose genre continued to develop. Subsequent works, like Isaac Disraeli's *Mejnoun and Leila* (1797), were inspired by or adapted from *Arabian Nights* and other Islamic sources. Disraeli's novel, which tells of a man driven mad by unrequited love, included extensive footnotes referencing famous Eastern scholars and *Vatek's* text. Another significant work, Thomas Moore's *The Epicurean* (c. 1820), described the spiritual transformation of a Greek philosopher in the Egyptian pyramids, with footnotes reflecting Moore's broad scholarship. This overview of English Eastern fiction in the early 19th century illustrates how direct experiences of the East influenced the growth of realism in literature.

## 3. ORIGINS AND MYTHS

Creation myths and views of the universe from various cultures attempt to make sense of the world in human terms. Greek cosmogonies and cosmologies, compared to those of other ancient societies, were more systematic and specific, yet their artistic nature sometimes complicates interpretation. Greek myths, enhanced with elements of folktale and fiction for entertainment, can be difficult to analyze fully. For example, *Anastatius* or *Memoirs of a Greek* aims to challenge Western misconceptions and prejudice against the East by exposing the ignorance that often fueled hostility. The protagonist, Hope Anastasia, is portrayed as a fearless, curious, cunning, and brave figure, who, after converting to Islam, embarks on an adventurous journey through the Ottoman Empire as Selim. This character contrasts with earlier depictions of villains in Eastern literature, offering a more nuanced and morally aware antagonist. Despite the darker aspects of the narrative, the book was well-received, though its appeal was mainly due to the local cultural details it provided. Over time, however, such elements, including the Turkish political system, customs, and the ongoing Russian-Turkish wars, lost their fascination for readers. The story follows Anastasius/Selim across a variety of experiences, from infiltrating Wahhabi groups to battling the Mamluks and enduring shipwrecks. His adventures are punctuated with romantic entanglements and betrayals, culminating in a deeply emotional conclusion.

The book, published in 1819, was widely celebrated for its compelling storytelling, rich description, and academic interest, making a significant impact in both England and abroad. The second edition sold out almost immediately, and its success was further cemented by subsequent foreign translations. A new edition of the book, accompanied by extensive academic analysis, has recently been released, with royalties supporting the National Portrait Gallery. The release of *Anastasius* in 1819 opened a previously unexplored part of the world to readers, offering a unique blend of travel, love, and war while highlighting the enduring connections between East and West. Similarly, James Justinian Morier's *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* presents an insightful and authentic depiction of Persian life based on Morier's own diplomatic experience in Persia. The novel follows the picaresque adventures of Hajji Baba, a barber from

Ispahan, as he navigates various Middle Eastern locations full of intrigue and romance. Hajji Baba is not a traditional hero but an ordinary man who often finds himself in trouble due to his impulsive decisions. Through these experiences, he learns valuable life lessons, which are reflected in his witty aphorisms. The novel also delves deeply into Persian culture, incorporating references to famous poets like Sadi, Hafiz, and Firdousi, offering a window into Persian social customs and practices, contrasting with the Western fascination with Rumi.

In summary, the Oriental stories written during this period can be regarded as one of the most significant contributions of late eighteenth-century English Romantic poetry to literature. By the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth, Oriental culture had become a prominent feature in English literature. As a result, writers began creating authentic stories that accurately represented the real life of the East. At the same time, works that depicted Eastern customs and traditions through staged performances were also banned.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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