

Identity of Self and Other in *Paradise Lost* by John Milton: An Oriental Study

Samina Yasmin

samina.yasmin@ue.edu.pk

Lecturer in English, University of Education, Lahore, Samanabad, Faisalabad, Pakistan

Mehr-ul-Nisa

mehrulnisa633@gmail.com

University of Education Lahore, Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan

Aqsa Nawaz

aqsanawaz0206@gmail.com

Student, University of Education, Lahore, Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: * Samina Yasmin samina.yasmin@ue.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

This research shows how literature perpetuated dominant power structures and established cultural definitions of identity and otherness across historical contexts. The paper applied Edward Said's theory of Orientalism to study Milton's Paradise Lost (1667) in the context of epic literature displaying new hierarchies of power, civilization, and knowledge parallel to later colonial discourse. To achieve this purpose, this work reinterprets Adam and Eve as the innocent, subservient, and somewhat naïve eastern "Other" as well as, Satan as the rational, ambitious, and dominating western "Self." It shows that Milton's construction of inferiority and superiority take-off the ideological structures critiqued by Said. The analysis refocused on such issues as they prevail against margin dynamic, the binary opposition of civilization against barbarism, and various Western misconceptions of the East, including the depictions of matrimony and gender roles. Such ideologies found in Paradise Lost resonate with Orientalism as justifications for colonial rule, even though this epic was written before Western expansion into the colonies.

Keywords: Orientalism, center-marginalized dynamics, inferiority, Superiority, Western-self, Eastern others

INTRODUCTION

Orientalism is study of how the western perceive eastern. It revolves around developed mentality of accident, particularly European countries, about orients, Asian countries. Edward Said's influential work, Orientalism (1978), highlights the westerns' construction of East as the "Other", depicting it as irrational, inferior, and submissive in contrast to West's perceived superiority, rationality, and self-governance. The term "Other" is characterized by West to show East as irrational, passive, subjugated, inferior, and exotic while the term "Self" features dominance, superiority, and rationality which is mostly related to West. *Paradise Lost* by John Milton is an epic poem illustrating Christian theology, on the parallel run borders the dynamics of power, knowledge, and civilization. It magnificently brought to attention the complex relation and illustrations between Man and God and also shows the hierarchies developed due to differences in power and knowledge. However, if seen through the Oriental lens, it could be stated that Adam and Eve are represented as Eastern "Other" such as inexperienced, dependent, and innocent while Satan is represented as the Western "Self" such as rational, dominant, and self-governing. Implication of Christian theology by Milton arouse further debate between the West and East in supremacy and power dynamics as it deliberately portrays Eastern "Other" as inferior to Western "Self" and showcases the Western's superiority through Satan's rebellion.

This paper analyses themes of inferiority and superiority, the center-margin dynamic, the depiction of civilization vs. barbarism, Western misconceptions of East, and the Eastern marital structures, configuring how the ideological structures found in colonial discourse are reflected in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It also tries to explore the identical basis that can be drawn through the characters of Adam, Eve and Satan.

Statement of the Problem

The study presents a unique dimension of *Paradise Lost* using Edward Said's *Orientalism* as a lens. It shows how Milton's epic develops powerful structures that reflect colonial thinking. The study looks at Adam and Eve as stand-ins for the Eastern "Other" and Satan as the Western "Self." This approach highlights the ideas that boost the West's self-image as logical, powerful, and independent. At the same time, it exposes how the Eastens are portrayed as simple, obedient, and needing guidance.

Significance of the Study

This study's significance comes from its across-discipline method blending both analysis with post-colonial ideas to reveal how Western writing has shaped—and been shaped by—imperial thinking. By taking apart *Paradise Lost* this way, the work adds to wider talks about which we are, who is different, and who has power, is offering fresh views on how the text helped keep cultural ideas going into colonial times.

Additionally, this work shows how Eastern-focused talk was important in early modern writing pointing out how Milton's picture of knowledge, culture, and power lines up with later European reasons for ruling colonies. By using Said's ideas to look at *Paradise Lost*, this study not only helps us grasp Milton's work better but also shows how stories in books keep having an impact on world power relationships.

In the end, this research calls for a different perspective on classic texts using critical theory. It questions standard readings and pushes for a more open and less colonial approach to studying literature.

Research questions

1. How does the *Paradise Lost* by depict the Westerns' concept of Eastern Others?
2. How do the characters such as Adam, Eve, and Satan reflect the hierarchical boundaries based on power and knowledge found in Edward Said's Oriental discourse?
3. How does The *Paradise Lost* construct the identity of Other and Self by using the oriental themes of superiority and inferiority, exotic and civilized nation, and inexperience and rationality?

Research objectives

1. To highlight that John Milton's *Paradise Lost* employs *Orientalism* to depict Westerns' concept of Eastern others.
2. To showcase the construction of hierarchal boundaries through Adam, Eve and Satan's Character.
3. To advocate the development of the identity of Self and Other through oriental themes of superiority and inferiority, exotic and civilized nation. And inexperience and rationality.

Delimitation

This research is confined to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, epic poem. All the ideas and references are limited to epic poem which are further analyzed through the lens of *Orientalism*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is well-known for its theological importance, how it depicts the Fall of Man and the ways of God to Men. It has piqued consequential literary curiosity, coaxing various literary researchers to further analyze its essence as an epic, narrative and thematic importance, and also the depth of theological illustrations employed by John Milton. Below is a general survey of the meaningful research conducted by numerous scholars on this widely recognized epic.

Kumar (2021) explained the resistance in *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, identifying Satan as a representation of both defiance and cautionary figure and further associating it to colonial discourse. He creates link between the Milton's Satan and the historical stories of rebellion and expanding it to anti-colonial struggles and digital resistance against surveillance capitalism. The intersection between literature,

power, and identity gives a new way to think about the construction of self and otherness in a text. The oriental analysis of Satan as colonizer instead of a revolutionary corresponds with the critiques of Western imperialism and re-establishes that identity in *Paradise Lost* in contextualized or linked to power and subjugation in *Paradise Lost*.

Mumtaz (2023) interprets the way *Paradise Lost* is viewed and perceived by British South-Asian Muslim women, particularly the impact of their personal identity, social dynamics, and educational environments on their perception of *Paradise Lost*. She put forth the concept of “reader prints” to examine the effect of intersectional identity on literary interpretation, highlighting the innovative teaching approaches in UK higher education.

Balinchenko (2022) analyzed scenario-making by using linguistic accessibility and moral duties, stressing the change from human power to vulnerability in building future prospects. He provides a three-dimensional model for examining intergenerational and intragenerational futures, by considering the past as *Paradise Lost*, the present as *Paradise Found*, and the future as *Paradise Conceptually postponed*. His views further provide practical implementation in migration policy and sustainability studies.

Mohammed Amjad (2021) through his paper explores Milton's lexical choices from The Bible and The Quran in his poem *Paradise Lost* to convey religious and historical references. He analyzes that how these different stylistic features enhance meaning of text and make it a great work. Milton's use of this type of flexible lexical elements gives different meaning from the different context like global south and global North

Marandi and Piranajnuddinn (2009) contend that *Paradise Lost* enters into a “complex oriental discourse”, where the East is linked with despotism and evil but simultaneously mirrors Milton's religious, political, and artistic concerns. According to their work, there exists a “latent Orientalism” where Milton projects modern problems onto the Orient, producing a contradictory yet ideologically loaded portrayal.

Currell and Gleyzon (2015) analyze the worldwide response of Milton's works specifically in Arab and Muslim worlds. They emphasize the role of Arabic translation of *Paradise Lost* in intercultural discussion. They advocate for a more dialogic approach to intercultural exchange in early modern studies, suggesting a shift beyond Said's *Orientalism* to understand Milton's significance in both historical and modern contexts.

Noury (2018) analyses *Paradise Lost* by employing Edward Said's “Latent *Orientalism*” and inspecting Eve's dream, Raphael's visit, and Satan's temptation to signify the reflection of East-West dynamics through Milton's narrative. By reinterpreting Raphael's role beyond conventional views, the study illustrates how Milton's cosmic hierarchies are related to oriental themes, opening up further conversations on theology, colonial discourse, and narrative structure in early modern literature.

Evans (1996) surveys Milton's epic poem by using seventeenth-century colonial discourse which emphasizes the Milton's conflicted viewpoints about imperialism. His research pictures how the poem develops self and other within oriental framework.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is a systematic method to resolve a research problem through data gathering using various techniques, providing an interpretation of data gathered and drawing conclusions about research data. Essentially, a research methodology is the blue print of a research or study (Murthy and Bhojanna, 2009). The current study utilizes the qualitative research methodology which is “analysis and interpretation of comprehensive narrative to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest” (Gay et al., 2012, p. 7). Employing the theory of Orientalism, the study makes full use of Edward Said's Orientalism (1978) to draw theoretical insights from his work, which highlights the Western thinking trends towards Eastern. The study also highlights the concepts showcased by Edward Said, specifically “Othering” in his Orientalism.

"The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be 'Oriental' ... but because it could be—that is, submitted to being—made Oriental." (Said, 1978, p. 5–6). It focuses on providing a detailed textual analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The study makes use of descriptive and qualitative method to discover the construction of identity of self and other in Milton's *Paradise Lost* through the lens of Orientalism. It employs close reading of *Paradise Lost* which focuses on the characterization of Satan, God, Adam, and Eve in the discourse of selfhood and otherness. The primary source of data is John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Secondary sources includes research articles, Edward Said's *Orientalism*, critical essays, literary critiques on the formation of identity in *Paradise Lost* and relevant discussions from postcolonial and identity studies. This study centers entirely on the textual analysis instead of historical and biographical interpretation of Milton. The study is confined to *Paradise Lost* and its relation to Orientalism and identity rather than employing extensive theological discussions.

Theoretical Framework

This is the study where Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has been used in understanding identity construction in *Paradise Lost* (1667) and how Milton portrays Adam, Eve, and Satan alongside the ideologies that would later point toward an understanding of Western colonial discourse. In Said's theory, the West has constructed the East into an inferior "Other", also through binary opposition which justifies the dominancy. According to Edward Said "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal.'" (Said, 1978, p. 40). Similarly, Adam and Eve are indicated as Eastern Other-alienation; submission, naïveté, and dependence; while Satan stands for the rational and ambitious Western Self.

In *Paradise Lost* we observed identity construction within the perspective of *Orientalism*. East is defined as irrational, static, and in need of Western governance. Adam and Eve have that pre-lapsarian ignorance, which fits into the stereotype, putting their characters within this construct of Western superiority. Satan's autonomy and defiance reflect the Western self-interpretation, and it shows him as the "civilized" one, who pours knowledge on the "primitive" Other (Eve). The other evident difference is between a "civilizing missions" - a frame of Western intervention as enlightening but ends with subjugating the other side.

The study also represents Colonial Discourse. "Knowledge of the Orient, because generated out of strength, in a sense creates the Orient, the Oriental, and his world." (Said, 1978, p. 40). Said's dynamic center-margin is clear in Eden's identification like a paradise, but quite removed from other access points and easily affected by outside influence. Satan's intrusion is an allegory for colonial encounter, where the West's ideologies impose on East. Their relationship also symbolizes Orientalist gender roles: submission to patriarchal control as depicted against Eve, like the feminized East, made out to be submissive and subject. Milton creates a distinction between Adam and Eve's innocence and Satan's rationality, which is the very same understanding by the West of its East: stagnant and unthinking.

Satan propagates knowledge even though ruinous as if the "civilized" discourse on how bringing enlightenment to the "uncivilized" East sounds. Adward remarks that "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages..." (Said, 1978, p. 1) reflects through Satan's statements, "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven," represents a kind of West imperialist vanity to turn around the world to the Western image. Measured with postcolonial criticism, this terrain shows that *Paradise Lost* predicts colonial rhetoric in the same way it mirrors the Western domination. God against Satan, Adam against Eve-the hierarchical constructs indicated by such reflections are justified positions of European imperialism. This analysis adds to the larger discussions on how literary representations enter into shaping colonial discourse, which indeed supplements Said's critique of identity, power, and cultural representation.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Inferiority and Superiority in *Paradise Lost* and *Orientalism*

Both *Paradise Lost* and *Orientalism* stress the forced inferiority of the others. Said claims the West builds the East as powerless and needy, therefore strengthening its own dominance (Said, 1978). In *Paradise Lost*, Milton refers to "eastern winds" in ominous or destructive terms. For example, he writes:

*As when far off at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial winds
Close sailing from Bengala, or the isles
Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring
Their spicy drugs; they on the trading flood,
Through the wide Ethiopian to the Cape,
Ply stemming nightly toward the pole: so seemed
Far off the flying Fiend.* (Milton, 2003, p. 640)

These "equinoctial winds" and other eastern winds are often tempestuous, and metaphorically they evoke foreign, dangerous, or exotic chaos—perfect for hellish settings or infernal journeys. In *Paradise Lost*, Eastern are shown as uncivilized, inexperienced, and in need of direction, this template can be used for Adam and Eve—so reflecting the Western view of the East as an immature, naive civilization. Adam and Eve were living in happy ignorance prior to the fall, much like Western stories portrayed Eastern societies lacking intellectual sophistication. Adam is situated as Eve's superior; therefore still the colonial concept of Eastern cultures being hierarchical and unfit to run it is supported. As Milton in *Paradise Lost* narrates that: "He for God only, she for God in him." (Milton, 2003: 299 p. 103) This is similar to how Western arguments for colonialism go; the East was considered unable of self-government and hence dependent on Western power. Likewise, when Eve is deceived by Satan, her ignorance is emphasized, thus furthering the Orientalist image of the East as naive and easily controlled. Satan, on the other hand, has characteristics that correspond with the Western Self: ambition, logic, and resistance to enforced control. His well-known utterance is: "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." (Milton, 2003: 263 p.19) It echoes the self-perception of the West as the natural ruler of the world, unwilling to bow second to any external power. Satan's wish to remodel Hell into his own domain parallels European imperialist objectives to conquer foreign territories and rebuild them after Western ideas. Milton deepens this allegory in his rich description of Satan's enthronement in Hell:

*High on a throne of royal state, which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
To that bad eminence; and, from despair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue
Vain war with Heaven; and, by success untaught,
His proud imaginations thus displayed* (p. 10)

Milton (2003) presents Satan enthroned in Hell with all the grandeur of an Eastern monarch. His throne is described as more magnificent than the wealth of ancient, exotic lands like Ormus (a trade hub in Persia) and India—regions associated with pearls, gold, and opulence. The "gorgeous East" becomes a symbol of dazzling yet morally empty power. Satan is elevated to this "bad eminence" not through virtue, but by his own dark ambition. Though cast into Hell, he remains defiant and proud, plotting to continue his rebellion against Heaven. Milton's language drips with irony—Satan's grandeur is hollow, his aspirations driven by pride, not wisdom. The wealth and status he assumes mirror those of despots who rule by power alone, detached from righteousness.

Center and Margin: Power and Periphery

Said (1978) claims that the West places itself in the middle of knowledge and civilization hence showcases its dominance over the marginalized East. "Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West." ^[1]_{SEP}

(Said, 1978, p. 20–21). Similarly, Eden symbolizes in *Paradise Lost* this peripheral area, a tranquil but sensitive to outside influence, somewhat like how the West imagined the East as a pristine paradise in need of oversight—a secluded, closed society. Entering here as the Western Self, Satan disturbs the balance and reflects colonialism contacts where Western actors forced their ideas on Eastern cultures. The way Said portrays the West's definition of Eastern rulers as conniving and manipulative is mirrored in the following verse of *Paradise Lost*: "Into her heart too easy entrance won." (Milton, 2003: 734 p.221)

This mirrors the Western anxiety that the East is unable to protect itself against outside influence. Satan contends he is providing Eve enlightenment—thus mirroring the Western story of "civilizing" the East—just as colonizers justified their rule by asserting to be bringing order to disordered lands.

Concept of Civilization and Barbarism

Said in *Orientalism* criticizes the way the West shows Eastern societies as behind and therefore requiring Western help. This confirms the Western stereotype of the East as uncivilized since in *Paradise Lost* Adam and Eve's starting condition is one of innocence and ignorance. Pre-Fall, they have no independent knowledge and depend entirely on divine power—much exactly how Western colonizers depicted the East as requiring Western rule. Reflecting Western view of itself as the deliverer of enlightenment to the "savage" East, Satan introduces knowledge via deception, showing how the West viewed itself as the rational Western figure: "Knowledge prohibited? / Suspicious reasonless." (Milton, 2003: 734 p.222) This is in line with Said's thesis in 1978 that the West saw Eastern societies as stationary and in want of their own rationality to advance. Still, much like colonial rule often caused devastation rather than enlightenment, Satan's interference finally causes Adam and Eve's fall.

Western Misconceptions of the East

Said reasons that the West constructs the East not based on reality but on stereotypes that benefit Western businesses. *Paradise Lost* also shows Adam and Eve from a superior perspective, free innocent creatures with no capacity of autonomous thinking. Satan's view of Eden parallels perhaps Western impressions of the East as an exotic, quiet sphere existing for Western conquest: "O Earth, how much like to Heaven if not better." (Milton, 1667, 9.99) This shows how European visitors idealized—the East as a utopia to be managed and exploited. Furthermore, Adam and Eve's unawareness of their own vulnerability matches with Western portrayals of the East as ignorant, therefore requiring Western intervention to "rescue" them.

Marriage and the Eastern Concept of Womanhood

Western colonial stories frequently showed Eastern marriage practices as oppressive but neglected comparable patriarchal systems in the West. In its depiction of Eve's acceptance of Adam as natural and required, *Paradise Lost* reflects this Orientalist approach. Their connection follows a rigid order before the

Fall: "To whom thus Eve with perfect beauty adorned: My Author and Disposer, what thou bidst, Unargued I obey." (Milton, 2003: 635– 637 p.111)

This is in line with Said's criticism of how Western stories created Eastern women as submissive and vulnerable. "The Oriental woman is eager to be dominated, and her male counterpart is utterly savage." (Said, 1978, p. 207). But after the Fall, Eve is accused of upsetting this order much as colonial rhetoric depicted Eastern cultures as erratic because of their supposedly nonexistent organized government.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the construction of Western self and Eastern others identities in the *John Milton's Paradise lost* through the lens of *Orientalism*. Through a thorough analysis of characters like Adam, Eve, and Satan this research depicts the westerns misconception of east as marginalized, inexperience and uncivilized "Others". *Paradise Lost* represents Adam and Eve's submissive and dependent nature as a constraint of eastern others which are unable to support themselves and have to rely on western ideology. In contrast, Satan is highlighted as western self due to his rebellious, ambitious and independent nature.

In short, *Paradise Lost* in addition to a biblical narrative serves as a literary basis for identity studies of Western self-hood and Eastern other hood. Milton depiction of central and marginalized community, power dynamics and hierarchy reflects west's justification for colonial rule where they portrayed east as subjugated and dependent on them for guidance. This study demonstrates that even in literary discourse the foundations for Western superiority and Eastern marginalization were being laid, which further shaped later Oriental discourse.

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