

Orientalism in Children’s Literature: Representations of Egyptian and Jordanian Families in Elsa Marston’s Stories

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Abstract

Children’s literature plays a significant role in people’s lives. For children and young adults, a story is a discursive space where they find answers, solutions, and ideas. Contrastingly, to adult writers, it is a space dedicated to promoting ideological beliefs and values to young readers. Thus, this study attempts to investigate the problematic representation of Arab city and village families found in two children stories written by American author Elsa Marston (1933-2017). She classifies families into two opposing extremes; the civilized city families and the poor, conservative village families. Using Edward Said’s Orientalist discourse analysis, alongside David Spurr’s rhetorical trope of Classification, the researcher explores how and why Jordanian and Egyptian families are classified with disregard to cultural differences. The analysis reveals that Arab families, both Jordanian and Egyptian, are equally classified based on education, social class, and culture. City families are viewed as developed due to their interaction with the west, whereas village families are portrayed as ignorant and uncivilized for their lack of communication with the west. The analysis also detects the author’s negative attitude towards village families.

Keywords: children’s literature, colonial enterprise, Egyptian families, Elsa Marston, Jordanian families, orientalism, representation

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