



Oriental Shadows: The Presence of the East in Early American Literature (Transoceanic Series)

Jim Egan

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Through the use of several iconic early American authors (Anne Bradstreet, James Kirkpatrick, Benjamin Franklin, and Edgar Allan Poe), Jim Egan's *Oriental Shadows: The Presence of the East in Early American Literature* explores the presence of "the East" in American writing.

The specter of the East haunted the literature of colonial British America and the new United States, from the earliest promotional pamphlets to the most aesthetically sophisticated works of art of the American Renaissance. Figures of Persia, China, Arabia, and other Oriental people, places, and things played crucial roles in many British American literary works, serving as key images in early American writers' efforts to demonstrate that early American culture could match—and perhaps even surpass—European standards of refinement. These writers offered the East as a solution to America's perceived inferior civilized status by suggesting that America become more civilized not by becoming more European but instead by adopting aesthetic styles and standards long associated with an East cast as superior aesthetically to both America and Europe.

In bringing to light this largely overlooked archive of images within the American literary canon, *Oriental Shadows* suggests that the East played a key role in the emergence of a distinctively American literary tradition and, further, that early American identity was born as much from figures of the East as it was from the colonists' encounters with the frontier.

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