

# Islam in English Literature: A Timeline

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**Abstract:** Each nation, and its intellectuals -writers in particular- have an opinion in other nations and people, in terms of their civilization, culture, language, religion and heritage that they entail. This view is reflected in the literature of that nation, as it is the mirror that reflects the feelings of this nation and its relationship with other nations and peoples. English literature is one of those manners that reflected the reality of the West's attitude towards Islam and Muslims, since this literature became a real reality in the life of the English as a nation. This paper examines remarkable works in the arts of poetry, theatre, and story in English literature on Islam, and the literature of the journeys, journalistic and intellectual articles written in the hands of several English writers and critics. The argument attempted to be purely neutral in responding to the writings and the fabrications of these writers on Islam, and the reasons for these slurs.

**Keywords:** Islam, English literature, Prophet Muhammed, Orientalist, Literary Criticism.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Many authors tried to write about this topic, most notably Byron Smith's book titled "Islam in English literature". Byron Smith was presenting the literary models written about Islam in literary works, without commentary or explanation. Although he sometimes tried to give some justification to the opinions of the English writers and their sayings about Islam, he was commenting on it from an Orientalist or Crusader perspective, not as an objective perspective consistent with the human mind and authentic resources.

In this paper, every age of English literature is singled out revising general history of each age and to hold a comparative picture of the situation of Christians and Muslims during each age, which was initially presented to pave the way for the following presentation of the literary models that dealt with Islam in prose and poetry, etc. Thus, the study continues to investigate what has been written about Islam from the old age to the modern era. The study collected the suspicions and the slander that were raised by the authors through their writings about Islam and sought to refute them and replied to them to give a complete picture of these slander, after excerpts of these writings were quoted as poetry and prose. Needless to say, the picture that most people in the West hold about Muslims is built on this huge amount of false charges pasted with the origins of our religion and its foundations by the European upper class.

What the reader notes clearly is that these writers have interacted in their work on Islam and Muslims with the events of their age, such as the Crusades, the conquest of Andalusia, the conquests of the Ottoman Empire and other momentous events that marked every age of interaction between Europe and the Muslims. It was these precise events that have broadened the consciousness of the English writers, and made them go in a space where many of the images were simulated, and instead of flying in this space to find stars, they placed a mask that prevents them from seeing this imagination and understanding the hidden things, and turned to the words and tales woven around them from fiction what made them Hatred is cultivated in the hearts of the English on Islam and Muslims, and like a man imprisoned in the dark for a long time, when he went out to light he became blind.

The Crusades had huge impact on English literature. It is thought that this crusade emanated from the intellectual, social, economic and religious conditions that prevailed in Western Europe in the eleventh century, dominated by Jewish ideology, and taken from the so-called distress of the east, against Muslims, as a religious slogan to express itself, an expression Practically wide-ranging. The Crusades led to the acquisition by English writers of a new dimension which

they wrote about for a long time, and each writer echoes what others wrote earlier. Orientalist thought had been also a source of English literature. It was the inevitable result of the failure of the Christians in their wars devoted to the Muslim world after the failure of the Crusades.

## II. ENGLISH LITERATURE TIMELINE

### A. *The Ancient Age*

First, we will begin with the ancient English literature, which spanned the period from 560 to 1066 CE and gives an idea of this period of human history in general, and the history of English literature in particular, as this period is known in history as the Dark Ages which Europe was living in, and what prevailed in those eras of barbarism and ignorance, and away from the sources of civilization and light that were pervaded the east. Britain did not know anything about Islam during that period, and therefore the writing about Islam and Muslims and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in this ancient literature was not included and did not have a broad mention in the literature of that time. In the first centuries of Old English literature there weren't any reference to Islam and his Prophet. However, the reference to Islam and Muslims in the Old English literature appears within narrow limits after the spread of religious writings in literature.

### B. *The Norman Era*

In the Norman era, which lasted from 1066 to 1350 CE, the writings on Islam and Muslims expanded, since this period of the history of English literature was characterized as the age of direct contact between Muslims and Christians during the Crusades. The role of the church in provoking the Crusades was manifested in Pope Urban II's speech, which was replete with lies about Muslims, Islam and the situation of Christians in the Muslim countries. After the author shows some of the poetic epics on which Muslims have spoken, he talks about the writers who were exposed to Islam in their writings poetry and prose during this age, such as William Langland in his poem "The vision of the tiller of the vision of Piers" in which a person represents the Prophet. With evil and falsehood, and in which the Muslims of the Jews who had wreaked havoc in Britain were settled during that period, and it was alleged that the Prophet had emigrated to Syria and that the Islamic sharia was all ideas, lies and legends.

### C. *The Middle Ages*

Throughout the Middle Ages (1350-1530 m) the English literature in all its forms celebrated of falsehood and lies against Islam and Muslims, despite the downer features of this period, and the darkness in which Europe lived compared to the situation of Muslims from Progress in science and prosperity in life. The poet Chaucer, the father of English literature, was the first to speak about Islam and Muslims in his book "Canterbury Tales" where he was subjected to the Prophet and to the laws of Islam. It is clear from the writings of this poet about Islam and Muslims the ignorance applied to the Muslims, and his writings are only an expression of a pure hatred of Islam and its people. The truth is that Chaucer was the first to base the writings of those who lived in the same age, or came after him like John Gore, John Light Jett and William Dunbar.

### D. *The Renaissance Age*

The Renaissance Literature (1530-1625), witnessed the beginnings of the Ottoman caliphate. A historic revision of the events of that era, will show the progress which was made in the various aspects of educational and scientific life in Europe and the separation of society from the Church, and the beginning of secularism. This era was marked by the inward writing of poets and the handling of internal topics. Among the writers who winked from the Islam channel in this age, the author of the English writer Sir Francis Bacon in his fabricated story about that the prophet called the mountain, he did not obey and he obeyed the mountain so this became a part of the English: "If the mountain does not come to Muhammad, let Muhammad go to the mountain". As for George Sandys extended in writing about Islam and the prophet, claiming that he was not a prophet, but a revolt against the Roman emperor. Thomas Moore, a banner of secularism, also presented his writings to Islam and Muslims with libel and slander. Sir Walter Raleigh wrote his famous book, "The Life and Death of Mahomet", which contains a lot of contradictions about Islam, once he says that the prophet entered the Madinah forcibly, and once he says that he entered in peace, in addition to a lot of fallacies about Islam and the prophet of Islam.

Concerning the theatre that evolved in this era, several dramatists emerged, including Marlowe, Johnson and Shakespeare. Marlowe, in his play "Tamerlane", which revolves around the Muslim world, but was subjected to Muslims in libel and slander, describing them with stupidity which reflects the latent hatred against the Muslims.

As for William Shakespeare, he had feigned a story about the Prophet. It is that he trained his dove to pick up grains from above his ears, and deceived people it is the Holy Spirit that dictates the revelation of Quran;

*“Was Mahomet inspired with a dove?*

*Thou with an eagle art inspired then.”*

### ***E. The Seventeenth Century***

It is in the seventeenth century (1625-1660) when the Ottoman Empire reached its zenith in the conquests of the reign of Sultan Suleiman, followed by the rivalry between the sultans after his death, while the history was going for the benefit of Europe which was working to eliminate the force of The Islamic State, represented by the Ottoman Empire. In Europe, religious cleavages and civil wars have emerged against the backdrop of religious division, and literature has come to reflect this image and to occupy writers from writing about Islam and Muslims.

Among the most prominent poets who wrote about Islam in this period, the poet John Milton and his most famous poems "Paradise Lost", "Paradise Regained", which were inspired by The Divine Comedy of Dante and the story of the Isra and Maraj and "The message of Forgiveness".

The age of renewal in literature (1660-1740) had prevailed the historical circumstances of that era, such as the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, the entry of Europeans into the Muslim world, its vulnerability, the flourishing of trade between the Islamic Maghreb and England, and the travel of pilgrims to Countries of the Muslim world and also the influence of the Persians on the lives of the kings of the West, especially after their resurgence at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. The most important feature of the literature of this age is that it is the literature of reason with a change in content and shape from the previous era.

One of the writers who spoke about Islam in this novel Age is Daniel Defoe, whose novel, "Robinson Crusoe", is influenced by the book of Ibn ' al- hay, where he speaks of the east as a place of danger and corruption, especially the countries of Islam and describes Muslims as deceiving. Another writer is Joseph Addison, who wrote several stories, including "Spectator", in which disproved the fact of the ISRA and Miraj because in his beliefs it is impossible in time matters.

In the field of poetry, Samuel Butler was the most famous poet who wrote about Islam. His poem titled "Hudibras" is full of hatred and exposure of Muslims and claiming that the brave Hudibras of the Christian will crush them because they are relatives of Muhammad. Edmund Waller, another poet, in his poem "Attacking and defeating the Turks", called for fighting the bitter enemy Muslims, dropping the crescent and lifting the cross. There are many other poets and writers whose writings have been replete with fabricated stories about Islam.

In contrast to poetry, the theatre did not have a clear contribution to English literature during this period and the theatre writers had little activity because they repeated the previous topics in their writings. However, there are many writers who wrote about Muslims in this age, they even named their plays and poems after Muslims and Islamic countries such as the "Siege of Damascus" and "Muhammad al-Dajjal" by John Hughes.

### ***F. The Eighteenth Century***

We reach the eighteenth century (1740-1800), which represented the beginning of the weakness of Islamic countries, especially as the Ottoman Empire entered a fierce war with Russia, and the activity of the European Movement and their written records of Islam and Muslims increased. The Orientalists also had their role as Joseph White, and his lectures at the University of Oxford on Islam and the Miracles of the Prophet Mohammed, and William Paley, who had redeemed the Prophet to bring up all the acts of ignorance, especially hajj. These writings have been given fertile ground for writing about Islam in English literature, during the eighteenth century and subsequent eras.

In the area of Islam, Dr. Johnson wrote a play titled "Irene" alleging that Muslims do not respect women and they believe that women do not enter paradise. Francis Gentleman wrote a play titled: "Sultan or love and fame" in which he claims that Muslims are swearing with Zamzam water, and that the Prophet called people for an intangible paradise, and he sees

that there is no need to be tired for the sake of the paradise that Muhammad spoke of, and also claimed that women are humiliated in Islam.

In the novel Field: William Beckford wrote the novel "The History of the Caliph Vathek" in which he spoke of the fact of sedition, and about the Vathek Caliph standing beside the solitary. The writer rejoiced at Muslim and said that if Muhammad's religion was true, there would be no such conflicts among Muslims.

In the field of poetry: Elias Erwin wrote his poem "Eastern eclogues" swaggering his sorrow on the shores of Alexandria that this city is under the rule of Muslims. Thomas Warton, a poet, wrote his poem "The Crusades" in which he spoke of the courage of the Christians, and they are coming to draw Jerusalem from the hands of the enemy Muslims.

As for the theatre, the theatrics built their thoughts on the plays that appeared in the age of renewal, and on the transfer and translation of French writers such as Moliere, Sedan, Voltaire and others. Stories of "One Thousand and One Nights" and Oriental tales influenced the subjects of theatrical literature in this period. One of the plays that spoke of Islam was a sitcom titled: "A Day in Turkey" written by Hannah Cowley in which the Ottoman sultans were portrayed as loving to enslave Russian women and taking them from their husbands on their wedding night.

### **G. The Romantic Age**

The Romantic age (1800-1830) of the 18th century was the starting point for communicating English literature to other world literatures. This period was accompanied by frequent trips to the East, as a result of the growing interest of the West in the East and the Muslim countries, and this was clearly reflected in the fields of poetry and novel. Literary productions in the subjects of Islam, Muslims and the Prophet were abundant and prolific.

Literature has occupied a great deal in the discourse about Islam, Muslims and the Prophet. The most prominent of the writers on Islam in this age, was the banner of Romance; William Wordsworth especially in his collection named: "Celestial", in which he described Muslims as arbitrariness and tyranny, and they believe that the grave of the Prophet is their salvation on the day of Resurrection. On the other hand, he glorified King Richard the lion heart, urging him to rid the Holy House in Jerusalem of the hands of Muslims.

Samuel Coleridge wrote a poem titled: "Muhammad " claiming that the Prophet spread evil, that he and his followers are the owners of the pagan religion, and that the Prophet is a man of war, who came to spread injustice, iniquity and sin.

One of the poets who wrote exhaustively about Islam in the Romantic Age: Robert Southey. In his writings, he relied on trips books and orientalist books. Southey wrote a poem about the migration of the Prophet and his companion Abu Bakr, accusing the Prophet of escaping from Quraysh because of Khadija's death. He also wrote a poem titled "Roderic: The Last of the Visigoths Kings", describing Muslims as the most heinous. In the same poem, he changes the stereotype in English literature about the tomb of the Prophet; The shrine is suspended in the air in Medina between the land of the mosque and its roof, and the angels bring him the news from the parties of the world.

*"By its miraculous power the body tomb*

*And holds it, at Medina, in the air*

*Buoyant between the temple's floor and roof*

*And There the Angels fly to him with news*

*From East, West, North and South of what befalls*

*His faithful people."*

As for Lord Byron, he wrote many poems about Islam, one example of which is his poem " The Child Harold pilgrimage", in which he wrote his impressions of Islam, describing the Prophet as a juggler, and that his message will end someday. The poet Shelley also wrote much about Islam, and one of his most famous poems " Revolt of Islam" described Muslims as the enemies of Christianity and they are infidels of atheists.

In the field of prose: Landor was best known for writing " The Imaginary Conversations between Certain People of Importance in their Day", including a conversation between the Prophet and Pastor Sergeis, where it appears that both were coveted in fame, and that they consulted together to achieve what they want. Also, we find the writer Walter Scott,

who glorified the Crusades in his novels; "The Betrothed" and "The Talisman", especially in the latter, where he fabricated a lot of stories about encounters between Saladin and Richard the lion heart, and that the latter will try to make Saladin know his mistake by embracing Islam and he will make him embrace Christianity.

The Orientalist Edward Upham wrote several works on the East and Islam, the most important of which is "Karmath: an Arabian tale" describing Islam as cruelty, and that it was spread by the sword, and that the Holy Quran was the innovation of the Prophet and not a revelation.

In theatre: Henry Milner wrote a prose play titled: "Barmecide; or: The Fatal Offspring" in which the writer spoke badly about Harun al-Rasheed, describing him as a lover of bloodshed, alleging the cruelty of Muslims to women. Most of the stories cited by these writers are inspired by the book "One Thousand and One Nights", most of which focuses on the Muslim caliph Harun al-Rasheed.

### ***H. The Victorian Age***

The Victorian era (1830-1880) was a distinctive paradigm shift in literature, principally the treatment of social issues. It witnessed the multiplicity of journeys and history books, especially about the East and its people, many of which have been characterized by attacks on Islam and Muslims. Poetry and novel have surpassed theatre in their treatment of topics about Islam and Muslims.

One of the most important novelists who wrote about Islam was Benjamin Disraeli, whom his first concern was to ignite the sedition between Muslims and Christians in his novel "Tancred or a new C Tancred: or the New Crusade". He denied the universality of the prophecy of Muhammad (PBUH) and called Christians to set the flame of a new crusade against Arabs and Muslims.

In the field of poetry: Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote his poem "Recollections of the Arabian Nights" depicted the life of Harun al-Rasheed and all Muslims as a life of wine, women, fornication and debauchery. In his poem "The Fall of Jerusalem " he says that the followers of the Prophet Muhammad had insulted the dignity and sanctity of the city of Jerusalem, and desecrated its land, churches and silos. Another poet, Matthew Arnold, wrote a poem named "The Divinity " accusing the prophet of lying, and that he came with a new religion in the land of the desert, which did not know monks, priests or churches and temples, and then the religion of Muhammad – according to his claim – will remain trapped in the desert. In his poem titled "East and West" The East images as the source of darkness and misery, compared to the West the source of vitality, light and radiation.

The theatre has had little to do in this era.

### ***I. The Modern Age***

The Modern age (1880 to 1950) had been punctuated by major political and historical events in Europe, particularly the emergence of parties, colonialism, the communist revolution, the advancement of industry and technology, and the pursuit of Western countries, especially Britain and France, to eliminate the state Ottoman, to break up its empire into states, to seek the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, and the two World Wars that wiped up everything in the whole world.

The English literature is no longer replete with Muslims in this period after the English colonized most of the Muslim world, but the attack on Muslims moved to other media, and then the battle of offending Muslims occurred between themselves, and among their own fellow people who were made by the colonizers to replace them in defamation of Muslims and their religion. It is noted that the books of Journeys and history were the main source of English literature in writing about Islam during the modern era.

In this period, free poetry emerged, and many literary schools emerged, such as Impressionism, realism, existentialism, the stream of consciousness and surrealism. Writers focused on the need to renounce religion, and to replace it with science. In literature, the direction of art for art was shown by William Peter, and social criticism is not bounded by moral, behavioral or social boundaries. English literature intended to be global.

In writing about Islam in this age in poetry: the poet Rudyard Kipling, who was fascinated by the East, wrote a poem, "Certain Maxims of Hafiz," referring the Muslim poet Hafez al-Shirazi tried to discredit the Muslims, claiming that they treated the slaves with hideous treatment. He also wrote a poem "Akbar's Bridge " and a poem "The Ballad of East and West ", in which he describes a Muslim warlord in Afghanistan as being a representative of tyranny, arbitrariness and

injustice as a result of his adherence to Islam. He is in another story titled: "The Eye of Allah" hates the Astrolabe, because it is made by Muslims and reminds him of the religion of Islam.

One of the poets who were interested in writing about Islam was the poet Yeats, who evenhanded Muslims, and the greatness of the Islamic religion. He wrote a poem titled: "The Gift of Haroon Al-Rasheed" in which he had shown the nobility of this Muslim Caliph. In his poem, "Suleiman to the Queen of Sheba", he draws the story of the prophet Suleiman (peace be upon him) with Balqees (Queen of Sheba) from Islamic sources. It can be said that Yeats had been influenced by Arab thought and Arab creation.

James Elory Flecker was the most important writer on Islam in this age: whether in poetry or prose. As in his poem "Damascus Gates " in which he says: The Eastern gate is key to evil, and the Western gate is key to goodness, and he talked about the Aleppo pilgrims with irony while they are returning from Hajj and even scorned Islamic Salute.

### III. CONCLUSION

Most of previously mentioned English writers had glued falsehood to Islam and Muslims, not based on any knowledge of the Islamic religion, or the morals of its followers, but it was from the sheer imagination of these writers, rose from a latent hatred fueled by many of historical events that occurred between the English and Muslims. The following is a brief summary of the most important axes in which the English literature handled Islam. Many writers spoke of the doctrine of monotheism, which the English writers claimed was taken from other religions by the Prophet (PBUH). The writings were also written in the person of the Prophet (PBUH) and denied his prophecy. The English writers spoke of the Qur'an, and they did not change much of what the Mushriks said about the Qur'an being a collection of legends, and they expressed their hatred for it. They talked about the prophetic Sunnah and the wives of the prophet with a lot of fading. These writers also claimed that Islam was spread by the sword, forgetting their Crusades. They also criticized the pillars of Islam, especially the Hajj, and mocked the cheering of pilgrims, as the barking of dogs! And that it Hajj was a pointless fatigue for Muslims.

The fact is that all the English literary writers of the Islamic religion and its noble Prophet were meant to distract the Europeans from studying the Islamic religion, fearing that they would follow it. They didn't have but to insult and slander, so that they would close their people's minds about considering and entering this religion.

It is obvious the narrative of the poison that was contained in poems, novels and plays of English literature about Islam and its people to realize how much Europe and its authors, and behind them were the Jews, tried to distract people from the true religion of God.

The struggle is still intense, but its methods are numerous, and we have moved to our backyard by our own people, becoming the task of the literary writers of Islam, and their broader responsibilities in defending Islam, through purposeful Islamic literature that transcends the human being to the summit of all virtues and morality built on the foundations of Islam and its anchors.

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