19th and 20th century French exoticism: Pierre Loti, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Michel Leiris, and Simone Schwarz-Bart

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Abstract
This study of four 19th and 20th century colonial texts, as well as a later postcolonial novel exposes the cadres exotiques, or exotic frameworks, of literary exoticism. The thesis names and interprets the moods of and reactions to exoticism, including colonial exoticism, antiexoticism, and autoexoticism. Poetic and theoretical interpretations of exoticism, such as Victor Segalen’s Notion du Divers and Edouard Glissant’s Opacité and Poétique de la Relation challenge the prevalent assumptions that the literary practice was only an unfortunate byproduct of colonialism. The first chapter presents literary history and theoretical considerations relating to exoticism: Orientalism, nostalgia, colonial literary history, and a critical literature review. Chapter II explores Le Roman d’un spahi (1881) and Les Trois dames de la Kasbah (1882) by Pierre Loti, two texts dating from France’s high colonial period of the late 19th century. Chapter III studies works and contexts of the 1930s—Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s Voyage au bout de la nuit (1932) and Michel Leiris’s L’Afrique fantôme (1934). These modernist texts appeared with the decline of colonial exoticism’s popularity. Conclude with an analysis of Simone Schwarz-Bart’s Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle (1973), a postcolonial novel about the life of a Creole woman in the former French colony of Guadeloupe.

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The 19th-century Romantic movement brought with it a revival of interest in, and sympathy for, religion and Christian values. French poets displayed a noticeable reverence for the Bible and found inspiration in the Holy Land. Thus, François René de Chateaubriand praised the Bible’s uniqueness and universality in his Génie du Christianisme (1802). He eulogized Isaiah and Ezekiel in William Shakespeare (1864); sought biblical support for his campaign against Napoleon III; and injected some basic knowledge of the Kabbalah (probably gained from his Jewish admirer, Alexandre *Weill) into Les Contemplations (1856).