

# Unveiling Orientalism: The Mystification, Stereotyping, and Exclusion in Margaret Atwood's "The Man from Mars"

Jie Li<sup>1,2</sup> & Fangyu Zhao<sup>1,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of International Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Harbin Institute of Technology, Harbin, China

<sup>2</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Yunnan University, Kunming, China

<sup>3</sup> School of Foreign Languages, Beijing Forestry University, Beijing, China

Correspondence: Jie Li, School of International Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Harbin Institute of Technology, Harbin, China.

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## Abstract

"The Man from Mars," a short story by Margaret Atwood, is a potent critique of Westerners' common misconceptions and stereotypes about Asians that prompt the exclusion of the Asian hero from Canadian society. Atwood intentionally challenges the deeply ingrained prejudices against individuals from Eastern cultures in Western epistemes by enveloping the unnamed hero in mystery. Drawing on Edward Said's Orientalism, the study debunks recurrent stereotypes concerning the hero's "peculiarities" by analyzing their external triggers and highlighting their universal nature. It promotes a deeper comprehension of the intricate interplays between personal experiences, cultural adaptations, and psychological variables.

**Keywords:** "The Man from Mars", Margaret Atwood, stereotypes, Orientalism

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

Margaret Atwood, a prominent Canadian author, is acclaimed for her diverse literary contributions across novels, poetry, and essays. Her narrative craft and ability to navigate complex socio-cultural complexities have garnered praise from academic circles. Critics praise her mastery in capturing nuanced characters and her insightful explorations of societal issues, solidifying her reputation as a socially conscious author. Her renowned short story, "The Man from Mars" (hereafter referred to as MFM), is nestled within the short story collection *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* (1977), presenting a compelling narrative that invites readers into a complex web of cultural representations and power dynamics. At the heart of the story lies an exploration of Orientalism—an influential framework that has influenced how Asians are perceived and portrayed in Western literature.

### 1.2 Significance of the Study

This research is significant in delving into the Orientalist themes in Margaret Atwood's short stories, exploring how she critically engages with cultural identity, gender, and power relations. It contributes to an expanded comprehension of how Orientalism is utilized in and influences literary works. Moreover, this study endeavors to heighten sensitivity toward ideological representations and power relations in Western literature, fostering an appreciation for the diversity and complexity inherent in literary works.

### 1.3 Methodology

The study closely reads the text and analyzes character interactions, dialogues, and plot developments to reveal Westerners' preconceived notions and misconceptions about the Asian hero. Furthermore, the study evaluates Atwood's criticism of the prejudice against Asians and her characterization following Said's theory of Orientalism. Through this dual approach of textual analysis and theoretical application, the study aims to uncover the nuanced interplays between character dynamics and the overarching Orientalist discourse within Atwood's narrative.

## 2. Literature Review

Since its first publication in 1977, the academic circle has widely considered and highly praised MFM. However, the relative studies about the short story have been limited over the past five decades. Murray (2010) set Margaret Atwood's *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* (1977) as the text to explore the theme of anxiety through images of violence, victimization, and Gothic elements in the postmodern era illustrated by relations between men and women in the 60s and 70s. Yuan (2019) studies Atwood's "Dancing Girls" from ecological feminism through the heroines' gloomy marital lives and sufferings of women, men, and nature in a patriarchal society while advocating the way of establishing a harmonious relationship among the three. Atayurt-Fenge (2022) offers an interpretation of MFM from body politics and embodied subjectivity through a critical exploration of the heroine's identity in her experience of the body in different social contexts and the acculturation of bodily consciousness and idealized body images in shaping one's sense of security and cultural tolerance. In general, present studies about MFM mainly concern the Canadian heroine's mental and physical state in building her feminine identity or the alienation of human relationships in the postmodern years. However, no systematic analysis exists to unveil the identity-fashioning of the unnamed Asian hero whom Atwood intentionally carves as a representative Oriental figure. This article examines MFM through Orientalism, pioneered by Edward Said, confronting the West's mystifications, stereotyping, and spiteful speculations against Asians.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Orientalism, as first articulated by Edward Said in his influential work *Orientalism* (1979), is "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (p. 2), referring to the Western constructions and biased representations of the East. Said focuses on criticizing Orientalism and cultural imperialism, a form of cultural domination exercised by the West over the East, encompassing a range of cultural, historical, and political perceptions that perpetuate stereotypes, otherness, and subordination of the Orient. He also defines the scope of the East, including Asia, the Near East, the Middle East, the Far East, Russia, and the original Eastern Roman Empire. About Canada's positioning in the West, Szatanik (2014), however, poses two questions that are frequently deliberated within academic circles: "whether or not Canada is a postcolonial country, and whether or not Atwood is a postcolonial writer" (p. 168).

Hence, it is imperative to delve into these two matters. Canada, despite its history and ties to colonialism, can be viewed as a postcolonial country. According to Tolan (2005), Canada is in a special state, being "caught between two opposing power positions" (p. 453). On one hand, it is the ex-colonial nation, seen as the colonial other to Britain's colonizing self. On the other hand, Canada is undeniably a First World nation, enjoying privileges and powers in the global context, thus becoming the First World self to the Third World other. Therefore, Canada has undergone decolonization and emerged as an independent nation, which aligns with the postcolonial narratives. As for Margaret Atwood, categorizing her as a postcolonial writer is debatable, but her writings do contribute to the discussions on colonial legacies and their impacts on contemporary society. As Atwood herself underscores in her works, the "fractured" and "schizophrenic" identity of Canadian subjects, who are both subjected to imperial power and "agent of that power" (Bennett, 1994, p. 175, qtd. in Fiamengo, 1999, p. 152). Her astute storytelling and nuanced characterization provide an avenue for dissecting the Orientalist perspective in the text, as it explores the hierarchical relationship between the Occidental Self and the Oriental Other.

With a keen eye for dissecting societal norms and challenging prevailing ideologies, Atwood delves into the complexities of Orientalism in this renowned short story. This article embarks on a journey to unravel the layers of mystifications, stereotyping, and malicious speculations deeply ingrained in Western perceptions of Eastern cultures. By critically analyzing the peculiarities of the hero and examining the underlying motivations behind his actions, the paper aims to dismantle the Orientalist lens through which he is often viewed. A deeper understanding can be obtained by dispelling misconceptions, unearthing the complexities beneath the surface, and cultivating empathy toward diverse cultural identities.

## 4. An Orientalist Reading of "The Man from Mars"

### 4.1 Oriental Mystifications: Heterogeneity, Otherness, and Inferiority

In Margaret Atwood's MFM, the unnamed hero is deliberately kept anonymous, leaving Western characters perplexed as to his nationality, place of origin, and indiscernible Vietnamese name. Atwood deftly unearths the innate prejudices and a sense of mysteriousness toward Asians, thus revealing the prevailing Western mentality that views Asians in a position of heterogeneity, otherness, and inferiority.

The portrayal of Asians as mysterious and enigmatic is central to Orientalist discourse. The mystifying of Asians is one of the critical mechanisms of Orientalism, which involves creating an aura of mystery, fascination, and

otherness around individuals from Eastern cultures. “So far as the Orient is concerned, standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of ‘the mysterious Orient’” (Said, 1979, p. 26). Westerners, who often lack knowledge of Eastern cultures, tend to perceive Asians through a lens of exoticism and mystique. They are considered mysterious, difficult to comprehend, and fundamentally different from Western norms. By mystifying Asians, Orientalism reinforces that the East is an exotic and impenetrable realm. It requires the Western gaze to interpret and understand it, positioning the Oriental Other as an object of quest, fascination, or horror. This mystification reinforces the power dynamics between the West and the East, maintaining the sense of Western superiority. Atwood captures this Western mentality through Christine and her mother, who grapples with the mystery of the hero’s nationality, origin, and unpredictable name. Readers are prompted to critically evaluate their prejudices and presumptions about non-Western cultures by the portrayal of Christine’s difficulty in discerning these details, which reflects the prevailing Western attitudes at the time.

From the beginning of MFM, the hero’s nationality is a source of speculations and ambiguities. Descriptions such as “Oriental without a doubt, though perhaps not Chinese” (Atwood, 1978, p. 14) underscore Christine’s uncertainty in discerning his origin, emphasizing her people’s tendency to lump individuals from China, Japan, Vietnam, and other countries altogether without recognizing their distinct identities. The mention of being vaguely acquainted with people from “other cultures, Britain mostly” (Atwood, 1978, p. 19) stresses that Christine places British culture in a category closer to her Canadian identity while still perceiving the hero as distinctly different. Besides, the remark “a person from another culture” (Atwood, 1978, p. 19), used by Christine’s mother to describe the hero, emphasizes the sense of otherness attached to individuals from cultures outside their own. The ignorance and misperceptions add to the confusion, ambiguity, and mystery when interacting with Asians. The limited understanding is further exemplified when the hero’s accent makes Christine’s mother mistake him for a French, showcasing the tendency to impose familiar references onto unfamiliar individuals. The hero’s French accent confirms the historical trace of the French colonization of Vietnam, verifying Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of the cultural “hybridity” between colonists and the colonized (Sheng, 2011, pp. 113–114). The mother’s prompt about the hero studying Philosophy in Montreal and sounding French reveals her inclination to associate him with a French identity. Thus, she orders a cake for him from “The Patisserie” (Atwood, 1978, p. 21), a French bakery. However, Christine’s response of “I don’t think he’s French, exactly” (Atwood, 1978, p. 19) indicates her awareness that the hero’s background may not align with the assumed French identity. The mother’s dropped jaw and subsequent disappointment suggest her false expectation of the hero being a foreign potentate, a figure of higher status and exoticism. It reveals the inherent racial hierarchy embedded in their perceptions, where certain cultures are regarded as more prestigious or desirable than others.

Toward the end of the story, Atwood includes the Vietnam War as the backdrop, further enhancing the othering of Asians. During the 1960s, the Vietnam War was a highly significant and influential event in global affairs. The war, which lasted from 1961 to 1975, brought a heightened focus on Vietnam and the surrounding regions. Along with armed conflicts, it also entails geopolitical maneuvering and ideological conflicts. The war receives extensive media coverage, and Western societies are bombarded with images, news reports, and narratives that negatively portray the Eastern individuals involved in the war as enemies or threats to Western interests. In their work, Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns notably record H. R. Haldeman, a veteran who once participated in the war, captures the harsh reality of the situation in his diary, conveying the mercilessness of the Vietnamese army in their attacks while emphasizing the utter defenselessness of his side (2017). The portrayal of Asians as adversaries in the war deepens the divide between “us” (the West) and “them” (the East), fostering a sense of cultural and ideological separation. The war, thus, becomes a prism through which Asians are perceived, which adds to their alienation and mystique. By situating the story within the historical context, Atwood emphasizes the significance of ongoing exposure to the war and its representations in the media, significantly impacting Western impressions of Eastern people.

Ideological disputes restrict the comprehension of Eastern cultures, further marginalizing Asians. In MFM, the hero’s homeland is depicted as “such a minor place” (Atwood, 1978, p. 36) that fails to make a lasting impression on the Western mind. The White girl, Christine, struggles to remember the hero’s country and city, emphasizing the peripheral status and insignificance accorded to non-Western nations in the Western consciousness. Her uncertain speculation of the hero’s origin—whether he was from the North or South of Vietnam—demonstrates Westerners’ limited understanding of the specific geographical details of his background. The hero’s country and city thus remain enigmatic and inaccessible, symbolizing the cultural and geographical divide between the Western self and the Oriental other. Furthermore, the hero’s name adds to the mystique

surrounding his identity. The “odd assemblage of Gs, Ys, and Ns” (Atwood, 1978, p. 15) that makes up his name, which Christine finds challenging to read, highlights the linguistic and cultural barriers that prevent Westerners from understanding non-Western cultures. Common Vietnamese names such as Nguyen Van and Phan Thị Ngọc Diễm do not conform to English pronunciation habits, making them unfamiliar and challenging for Anglophone Canadians to recognize. This portrayal aligns with the Orientalist perspective, which tends to exoticize and marginalize non-Western cultures. By presenting the hero’s name as a perplexing combination of letters and contrasting it with familiar Western naming conventions, Atwood demonstrates how the Western gaze contributes to the mystifications and otherness of the Oriental figure.

Of all things, the purposeful obscurity surrounding the nameless hero is an effective means of intensifying the dominant Western mindset and its ingrained prejudices when interacting with people from other cultures. Atwood challenges readers to critically assess their preconceptions and biases by displaying Christine’s inability to determine the hero’s nationality, name, and hometown. The Orientalist viewpoint, the hierarchical placement of cultures, and the linguistic and cultural barriers surrounding the hero and his name all support the Western gaze and the persistence of the Oriental mystique.

#### 4.2 Oriental Stereotypes: Feminized, Indigent, and Irrational

The convoluted web of mystifications surrounding Asians, as detailed in section 4.1, establishes the foundational framework upon which Westerners construct their lopsided and skewed stereotypes of Asians. In MFM, the unnamed hero’s physical appearance—his teeny stature and unkempt appearance—embodies the prejudices and preconceptions ingrained in the Western mindset. These stereotypes sustain malicious speculations surrounding the hero’s “weird” behaviors, further exacerbating the social exclusion experienced by Asians.

The body politics of Orientalism defines Asians as the feminized “Others.” Scholars like Kondo (1990) and Chen (2004) have criticized Western writers’ biased representations of the East in literary works: Asia is “feminine” and the West is masculine (Note 1). One of the typical literary representations of such Eastern women is Cio-Cio San, an Asian girl who “submissively endures her Western lover’s cruel treatment” (Zou, 2023, p. 30) in the world-famous opera *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini. At the same time, the hero in MFM is precisely the epitome of Eastern weak males who horrify White women and wait for White men’s correction. Said elucidates that the common practice of Orientalism is “separating Occident from Orient” (1985, p. 90). The hero’s short physique and dark hair mark the way Westerners attribute Asians as exotic, mysterious, and inferior to Westerners. Initially mistaking him for a young boy due to his short stature, Christine’s realization that he is simply of shorter height and labeling him as “a person from another culture” (Atwood, 1978, p. 14) reinforces the Western perceptions of physical weakness and femininity of Eastern individuals in contrast to the robustness of Occidentals. When the hero tracks Christine at lunch, her friends “learned to spot him from a distance [...] they would whisper, helping her collect her belongings for the sprint” (Atwood, 1978, p. 28), viewing him as a wicked curse and ineffable apparition that one can only escape rather than refute. The game of “pursuit and flight” (Atwood, 1978, p. 27) between the hero and heroine is symbolic, with the hero being denoted as a sign of decaying and backwardness, whom White women try desperately to avoid. Western observers simplify and reduce his pursuit to the image of “a lumbering elephant stampeded by a smiling, emaciated mouse” (Atwood, 1978, p. 27). This depiction accents the stark contrast in physical appearance and demeanor between the hero and heroine, further emphasizing the incongruity and imbalance of their relationship.

Asians’ fragile physique evolves into the confirmation of their inherited poverty. By drawing a parallel to the prejudices of elite American Southerners toward poor Southern Whites in the 18th century and asserting “class is congenital” (Isenberg, 2016, pp. 135–154), similar prejudices are observed toward Asians by Westerners, suggesting that the poverty experienced by Asians is perceived as an inherent and hereditary trait rather than a consequence of external circumstances. Christine’s subtle disgust upon noticing the hero’s worn-out jacket, frayed at the edges, the nail-bitten fingers, and the bluish tint on his fingers reflects the tendency to negative judgments, deeming his unkempt appearance as a sign of negligence or lower social status. His body odor, “cooked cauliflower and an unfamiliar hair grease” (Atwood, 1978, p. 15), signifies a disregard for personal grooming associated with those from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, his attempt at self-improvement by applying too much hair cream and wearing a flashy orange tie reveals his lack of refined taste. Christine strives to prevent her maid from seeing his orange tie because “already, she knew, her position in the girl’s eyes had suffered” (Atwood, 1978, p. 23), illustrating her disregard for understanding his financial struggles but focusing solely on safeguarding her own social status. Besides, her friends care nothing about the hero’s genuine feelings, reducing him to a gold digger “fond of well-built women” (Atwood, 1978, p. 34). Likewise, the hero’s economic hardship is a past remedy in the eyes of native Canadians. When his rent falls overdue, the landlord covers the arrears, providing him with a train ticket to Montreal, an act of seeming kindness, however, revealing the

take-for-granted inherent depravity of Asians who depend on Westerners' mercy.

Eurocentrism views the East as irrational, pleasure-seeking, and indulgent in contrast to the lawful, reasonable, virtuous West. So, regions outside the West are categorized as existing in "a Kantian state of immaturity," requiring civilization to overcome their backwardness (White, 2023, p. 40). An analogy can be drawn between the category of West and East with Nietzsche's comparison between Apollo and Dionysian. Nietzsche (2009) analyzes the relationship between these two gods. In Greek Mythology, there is a hierarchy between Apollo, the full god, and Dionysian, the half-god; Apollo, the Sun God and the God of Law stands for order, temperance, and reason; Dionysian, the Wine God, stands for indulgence, insanity, and irrationality. In addition, Dionysus's characteristic worshippers are bands of women called Maenads or Bacchae, or "mad women" (Yuan & Jing, 2022, p. 132). From the Orientalist viewpoint, Apollo is the honorable West; Dionysus the East. For instance, in MFM, the Asian hero's smoking habit, depicted through his constant need for cigarettes and the distinct smell of the exotic brand, becomes a focal point of observation. Western society often stigmatizes heavy smoking, associating it with poor health, addiction, and a lack of self-discipline. Besides, his choice of an exotic-smelling cigarette accentuates his symbolic deviation from Western norms, confirming his perceived otherness. Echoing the concept of Epidemic Orientalism delineated by White (2023), which racializes, regionalizes, and orientalizes infectious diseases like COVID-19, the Asian hero also faces a presumption of guilt even though no substantial harm has been done. The hero's deviant habit of stalking women faces judgments from Westerners, for which Christine labels him a "sex maniac" (Atwood, 1978, p. 30). His stalking of the Mother Superior, a representative figure of religious piety and moral authority, becomes the catalyst for his ultimate deportation because "they don't stand for things like that in Quebec" (Atwood, 1978, p. 35). Quebec historically upheld strong Roman Catholic values emphasizing sexual morality and purity before marriage. Westerners foster a climate of mistrust and perpetuate a cycle of discrimination by linking the hero's ethnicity to the possibility of crime and violence that needs correction from the lawful White men. The hero's actions, referred to as "tricks" (Atwood, 1978, p. 35) by the policeman, highlight the Western perspective that views his behavior as morally unacceptable. However, despite his troublesome acts, no effort is made to comprehend his intentions and motivations, even when the hero is deported for an alleged offense. This Western perspective questions the sanity of "people from another culture," convicting them as inherently dangerous: "That kind don't hurt you [...] They just kill you" (Atwood, 1978, p. 32). Such a presumption not only secures negative stereotypes solely based on their ethnicity but also reinforces the notion that Asians are to be feared and regarded with non-rationality, violence, and crime, further contributing to their marginalization and exclusion.

To put it briefly, the deliberate characterization of the unnamed man and the unfolding of events shed light on Westerners' stereotyping of Oriental individuals. Through the hero's physical appearance and strange acts, Atwood skillfully exposes the biases, prejudices, and limited understanding that shape Western perceptions. The hero's depiction lays bare racial discrimination and underscores the intersectionality of cultures, religions, and moralities in shaping these prejudices. Furthermore, the hero's deportation and the Westerners' patronizing acts give prominence to the oppression and exclusion experienced by Oriental individuals in Western societies.

#### *4.3 Justifications: Challenging Misconceptions and Malicious Speculations*

As elaborated in 4.2, Atwood explores Oriental stereotypes through the Westerners' biases and prejudices towards the hero's unkempt appearance and irrational acts in MFM, including his quirks such as finger-biting/sleeve-biting, heavy smoking, and stalking. By revealing the misconceptions Westerners harbor about the Asian hero, Atwood prompts readers to critically reflect upon the psychological and physical causes of these peculiarities, drawing attention to their external triggers rather than their innate qualities.

Psychological and biological issues trigger the hero's seemingly odd behaviors. The hero's oral mastication can be examined through the lens of psychoanalysis. In MFM, Christine's attention is drawn to the hero's badly bitten fingers, which she finds repulsive. The act of biting his nails and fingers, as described by Christine, is deemed weird and unreasonable, associating such habits with the Orient's lack of self-control or mental instability. However, the hero's characteristic penchant for biting his fingers should be regarded as a ubiquitous phenomenon prevalent among individuals of all races instead of erroneously attributing it to his Asian ethnicity. According to Sigmund Freud (1963), the oral erotism of infants involves satisfying the need for sucking the mother's nipple in the oral stage of infancy. While this propensity gradually wanes with maturation, it may persist into adulthood owing to factors like ingrained childhood habits or an absence of corrective measures. As a result, this oral habit becomes entrenched as spontaneous reactions to emotional distress. Moreover, one should not disregard the physical triggers of this pathological proclivity. Malnutrition, precipitated by poverty or an inability to attend to one's well-being, could contribute to nail deformations and sundry health complications and may engender idiosyncratic behaviors like finger-biting. Considering the effect of psychological and physical

factors on one's behaviors helps avoid unjustly singling out someone based on his ethnicity.

The hero's oral desire vents negative emotions experienced in a foreign country. Engaging further with the psychological dimension, the hero's finger-biting/sleeve-biting behaviors can be seen as potential coping mechanisms for the emotional turmoil he experiences as an expatriate in Canada. Feelings like pressure, fear, and insecurity may cause the hero to bite his fingers or sleeve to find temporary comfort in a foreign country. Such actions can act as outlets for emotional release and may offer him a sense of control or comfort, providing a brief respite from the psychological distress he experiences. Likewise, oral erotism would transform into repetitive oral and swallowing addictions such as tobacco and alcohol abuse, chewing betel nuts, or binge eating. In MFM, it is notable that the hero carries a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and constantly lights new ones. This repetitive action suggests a continuous need for the calming effect that smoking provides. Thus, smoking can also be viewed as a vent for the hero's psychological desires and needs. Lighting and inhaling a cigarette can give a momentary release, offering a brief respite from the weight of his emotions. Despite the potential detrimental health effects associated with smoking, he persists in this behavior, indicating its significance as an emotional soothing mechanism. Thereby, the hero's engagement in smoking results from a complex interplay between his emotional state and the temporary benefits of this habit that alleviates stress and anxiety, and momentarily escapes from the discomfort of his expatriate life. However, it is essential to note that these coping mechanisms are not exclusive to Oriental individuals but are prevalent among people from various cultural backgrounds who face similar emotional struggles.

The unfounded notion that the hero's Asian ethnicity is to blame for his abnormal behavior of stalking women warrants scrutiny and challenge. Through the psychoanalytic lens, the study provides insight into the underlying psychological motivations that drive such actions. However, it is crucial to clarify that this analysis does not seek to justify or condone stalking behaviors but aims to understand its root cause. In psychoanalysis, the Lacanian concept of "*object a*" or "primordial lack" (Booker, 1996, p. 36) suggests that infants develop a strong desire for the love and affection of their mother. This desire arises from recognizing the symbolic castration, which signifies their inability to possess or fully satisfy their mother's love. This longing for maternal love and nurturing creates a psychological void or lack that may persist into adulthood. For a man who suffers from the pain of "primordial lack," his desire to return to the original intact state may transform into a fixation on stalking women, a substitute or displacement for the unfulfilled desire for maternal love. He may attempt to recreate the nurturing bond he yearns for by seeking and observing women who display kindness or attention toward him. A thorough examination of the potential psychological motivations underlying the hero's actions renders a better understanding of the factors contributing to his abnormal behaviors. Indeed, this psychological interpretation does not excuse or justify the hero's stalking behavior which is a harmful and intrusive act that violates the privacy and autonomy of others. Through a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted determinants that contribute to the hero's behaviors, a deeper understanding of the complex interplays of psychological factors, cultural adaptations, and personal experiences can be unraveled, and the false belief that the hero's ethnic background is accountable for his irrational conducts can be dispelled.

In addition, the hero's means of courtship are disregarded and scrutinized due to his Asian identity. In MFM, the hero's affection for Christine, particularly his pursuit of her, becomes the most striking part of the story. However, Christine herself judges the hero's clumsy displays of affection. In the story, when Christine receives the hero's postcard, she notices it is printed in block letters on a piece of green paper. Block letters or block capitals refer to a style of writing where each letter of a word is capitalized and written separately. This style of writing has become closely associated with "shouting" or attention-seeking behaviors, especially in the context of bulletin board systems, and may be considered rude or intrusive. In the case of the hero, his use of block letters is a good-natured attempt to capture Christine's attention. Furthermore, Christine forms a negative impression of the hero during their first date due to his over-decoration and lousy taste. He applies excessive hair cream, covering his head with "a tight black patent-leather cap" (Atwood, 1978, p. 22). He alters his jacket sleeves by cutting off the threads, and his orange tie is overpoweringly vibrant. Although the hero's excessive adornment may not align with Christine's personal preferences and expectations, his intentions are rooted in a sincere attitude to make a favorable impression on Christine, albeit expressed in an overdone or inappropriate manner. Christine's reactions may be influenced, at least partly, by the hero's Asian ethnicity. Despite the hero's clumsy and sometimes awkward attempts to express his feelings for Christine, his emotions have an underlying sincerity. He struggles to articulate himself effectively, often repeating, "I wish to talk with you" (Atwood, 1978, p. 28). When he calls Christine, he remains silent on the other end of the line, seemingly unable to find the right words. His nervousness becomes apparent in face-to-face encounters, manifesting in "shifting his feet" (Atwood, 1978, p. 28) and perhaps an apologetic smile. The hero's pursuit of Christine may stem from genuineness, but due to his

difficulties with self-expression, his actions are misunderstood and misinterpreted.

In brief, Margaret Atwood's explorations of the Oriental man's idiosyncrasies in MFM are a powerful reminder to reflect critically upon the enduring Oriental stereotypes. The study challenges the prevailing misconceptions and malicious speculations by examining their external triggers rather than inherent qualities. Through a comprehensive analysis of the hero's distinct characteristics, including finger-biting, heavy smoking, and stalking women, the study dismantles the condescending manner and preconceived malicious speculations toward Asians and fosters a non-exclusive perspective.

## 5. Conclusion

In MFM, Atwood skillfully challenges and deconstructs Oriental stereotypes prevalent in Western society. Atwood's intentionally keeping the hero in mystery is a powerful tool for exposing the inherent biases within Western mentality when encountering Eastern individuals. Through the characterization of the unnamed hero and well-designed plot structure, Atwood tells the marginalization of Oriental individuals and challenges ingrained malice by bringing out psychological, physical, and cultural triggers of the hero's deviant acts. Through her powerful storytelling, Atwood opens the door to a more inclusive and empathetic attitude in transcultural communications, prompting readers to break free from the shackles of Oriental stereotypes.

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## Authors' contributions

Li and Zhao were responsible for study design and revising. Li drafted the manuscript and Zhao revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## Notes

Note 1. The word "feminine" here is used according to its traditional sense, which has a derogatory connotation for females but does not represent the authors' stance.

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