We have already seen in the last chapter how certain full length works of the Romantic period dealt with the theme of India. This chapter uses the specific references to India as a starting point from which to focus on the concept of Empire in general in the works of the canonical "major" Romantic poets—Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. The quantitative aspect of their references to India vary from elaborate usage in Shelley and Coleridge to minimal symbolic presence in Blake. However, in this chapter, which seeks to specifically articulate the theoretical conclusions foreshadowed earlier, the focal point is on India as "Empire symbol" rather than as concrete entity.

A considerable amount of textual interpretation with regard to individual poems is undertaken here. However, emphasis is also laid on these writers not just as poets, but as individual actors/actants in a particular social and political set up wherein Imperialism was a prime component of social structuring. From this perspective, prose works including political treatises, biographical/autobiographical accounts, letters, journals and notebooks are taken up for study, with the concept of Empire as the connecting thread.

¹ The reference is to "role-playing" in its historical sense, but there is a sense of "acted on" by history also involved.
In the works of William Blake, it is North America which primarily illustrates the spatial concept of Empire. Still, India does figure in his corpus often enough to justify us in postulating a hypothesis of symbolic awareness at the very least.

The specific references to India/Hindostan in Blake are easily enumerated. In his "Milton" we come across the lines:

And all nations wept in affliction, Family by Family
Germany wept towards France, Italy, England wept and trembled
Towards America, India rose up from his golden bed
As one awakened in the night.

(1912:519)

It has to be indicated in passing that both "golden" bed and the suggestion of sleep are almost perfect objective correlatives for an "opulent and indolent" portrayal of India in contemporary parlance. However, at least the usual connotation of femininity is absent here, the pronoun clearly shows India as masculine! In another poem "Jerusalem" Blake describes “Urizen’s temple which spans the globe” as follows:

Within is Asia and Greece, ornamented with exquisite art
Persia and Medea are his halls, his inmost Hall is Great Tartary
China and India and Siberia are his temples for entertainment

(690)

The globalising vision here blithely telescopes historical enemities and geographical hurdles into a total vision of integration—Greece, the archetypal Occident, and her pre-historical Oriental rival Persia are yoked together here. In the same poem however, we find India, China and Japan (along with Sodom and Gomorrah) figuring as the areas (major ones, though Greece and Italy are mentioned) where "the polypus of generation" spreads its tentacles. The disgust with which sexual generation is opposed to spiritual regeneration is a significant aspect in certain parts of Blake's thought. One is led to
ponder on the possible associations of Oriental fecundity and uncurbed passion (which also characterised the Biblical "Cities of Sin") with the given description.

In Book I of "Milton" Hindostan is viewed as part of the mythical body of a symbolic Albion; which also includes Tartary, China, and Great America as well as Italy, Greece and Egypt. It is tempting to consider an assimilative tendency towards the East as operating in this context. However, two European countries are also included among the Asiatic names and in Blake's symbolic system Albion does stand for much more than just geographical England. It is very unlikely that Blake is suggesting that the countries mentioned were (or should be) integral parts of Britain, the suggestion is far more likely to be that these representatives of distant climes all participate in a global project of rejuvenation which is symbolised by a youthful and (largely) non localized Albion. But (as we will have to insist on many occasions in this chapter) whatever else Albion may be symbolic of, it is also England—and contemporary England was Imperial.

In Book II of "Milton" we have a reference to "Euphrates & Hindu to the Nile" (575) where "Hindu" obviously indicates the "Indus". In Jerusalem Hindostan is one among the thirty two privileged nations which are to dwell in a Utopian "Jerusalem's Gates" (712). Again, in the same poem, Hindostan figures as one of the nations to be "created" (born anew) by "the looms of Enitharmon and Los" (725). On the whole such references are mainly useful only to convey an idea of geographical inclusiveness and vastness. Yet, the importance of this very function should not be under estimated. As Thomas Richards points out in The Imperial Archive:

Romanticism contributed a great deal to imagining the Empire as a concordant whole. The impulse towards the universal in Shelley, the project of a complete knowledge of the world in Coleridge, the ability of Blake’s visions to span the globe, the sense of a fully surveyed landscape in Wordsworth: these differing but exhaustive projects were carried forward in the literature of Empire.

(my emphasis; Richards 1993: 7)

As Raymond Schwab has demonstrated, it was after the "Oriental Renaissance" that "the world became truly round, half the intellectual map no longer a blank" (Schwab 1984:
16). Even passing reference to India/Hindostan/East have in this context a significance as indicators of a new world view which could now expand and aspire to inclusiveness.

Another reference to India in Blake occurs in "The Song of Los." Discussing the distribution of Philosophy, Law, Mathematics et al among the Nations, Blake writes: "Rintrah gave Abstract Philosophy to Brahma in the East" (1972: 245). There is an obvious echo here of the tradition which associated abstract metaphysical and theological speculation with ancient India.

A significant indication of both Blake's awareness of India and Indian affairs as well as the considerable contemporary vogue of the Indian motif is to be found in his "Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures" painted by him in water colours. The "Index" indicates that picture X was titled "The Brahmins—A Drawing." The elaboration in the body of the "Catalogue" reads:

The subject is Mr. Wilkins translating the Geeta, an ideal design suggested by the first publication of that part of the Hindoo scriptures translated by Mr. Wilkins. I understand that my costume is incorrect, but in this I plead the authority of the ancients, who often deviated from the Habits to preserve the manners.

(Blake 1972:583)

John Drew draws attention to this item and also points out that John Flaxman, Blake’s contemporary painter, friend and correspondent did "a monumental drawing of Jones collecting information from the Pandits for his digest of Hindu and Mohammedan laws" (Drew 1987: 78). Obviously the Indian themes were of sufficient contemporary significance both to inspire the artists and to enable them to hope for enough public interest to create the chances of a sale.

It is also possible (purely as a speculative exercise) to trace relations between Blake's thought and traditional Hindu philosophy, though not always relations of equivalence. Schwab remarks:

\[2\] Records indicate that this painting by Blake is lost now.
With Blake, a solitary visionary, we again encounter affinities between occultism, Neo-Platonism, and pantheism, extending towards fellowship with animals and objects as well as towards the annihilation of the self. I have not seen any definite contacts with Hindu texts pointed out, yet the accumulation of coincidences among the intellectual fashions which promoted Boheme, Schelling and the Upanishads simultaneously is striking.

(Drew 1984: 197)

Drew further points out that "Neo-Platonism is not only the philosophical scheme which has been used most frequently to explicate the nature of imaginative literature, it is also the philosophical scheme which has been used most frequently to explicate the nature of Indian culture" (14). The Neo-Platonic system has been described as:

A combination of Greek Philosophy and Oriental religion; it is theistic in teaching a transcendent God, pantheistic in conceiving everything down to the lowest matter as an emanation of God.

(Thilly 1993:31)

To the extent of conceiving all existence as an emanation and representation of the One, Blake can indeed be said to partake of both Indian and Neo-Platonic thought. However, the synthesis of this concept in Blake with Boheme’s³ notion of contraries is too significant to be ignored. Blake can by no means be fitted into an Advaitist category, with all that implies philosophically and poetically.

Apart from the concept of the fellowship of life and transcendence of the Self as pointed out by Schwab, the theory of Action and the concept of the body as garment⁴ are all areas where Blake displays affinities with Indian thought. In his "Annotations to Lavater" Blake remarks that "Active Evil is better than passive good" (1972: 77) and also that "Accident is the omission of the Act in self and the hindering of act in another; This is vice, but all Act is virtue" (88). In his "Annotations to Bacon" Blake further elaborates

³ "Everywhere in reality, Boheme finds oppositions and contradictions. There is no good without evil, no light without darkness, no quality without its difference ... Significant in Boheme's world view are the teachings that the universe is a union of contradictions, that life and progress imply opposition" (Thilly 1993: 249).

⁴
the concept of Action with the remark "Thought is Act" (400). Perhaps a simpler version of the action idea *(at least in a state of innocence)* can be seen in the closing lines of "The Chimney Sweeper" "so if all do their duty, they need not fear harm" (118).

In the "Ninth Night" of the *Four Zoas*, Blake emphasizes the non-significance of the body:

> Terrified at non-existence  
> For such they deemed the death of the body.  
> (357)

In "King Edward the Third", the body is referred to as "the prison house" the soul must escape from if it is to reach the bliss of heaven. In the epilogue to "The Gates of Paradise" the soul/body—essence/garment distinction is made:

> Truly, my Satan, thou art but a Dunce  
> And dost not know the garment from the Man.  
> (771)

Similarities of thought could of course occur independent of influence and this is more so for differences. Still one particular marked divergence in Blake from a cardinal Indian "method" has to be mentioned, mainly because the opposite trait in Shelley has been discussed in detail by Drew. The reference here is to "defining" God or the Supreme Force. The Indian scriptures often adopt the way of negatives, the "Neti-Neti" strategy to "define" the undefinable and "name" what is unnameable. As Damrosch points out "There is nothing in Blake of the via negativa, the detachment from all phenomena in search of an unnameable God of infinite negation" (1980: 47-48). Blake's God whether as Nobodaddy or Christ is eminently nameable and closely linked to concrete presence.

So, points of similarity as well as occasions where Blake's thought seems to define itself "against" Eastern/Indian thought can be traced. However, it is important to keep in mind that Blake's poems or correspondence do not indicate, unlike in the case of Coleridge or Shelley, any specific perusal of Indian sources.

---

4 As mentioned later on, a reference to this concept in more jocular vein can be found in Byron's *Don Juan* also.
With regard to the specific question of Blake's relation to Empire, the initial picture at least that emerges is one of a staunch anti-imperialist. "Empire is no more! And now the lion and wolf shall cease" (1972: 100) is the climactic cry with which Blake's "Song of Liberty" concludes. The line is later repeated verbatim in "America" where Blake equates Empire with slavery. David Erdman in *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* has examined Blake's staunch opposition to a policy of imperial expansion. He points out that "from first to last, Blake set the Republic of Art above the Empire of the Sword and pits Joy against the pride of Kings" (Erdman 1977: 45) and that his prophecy of the disappearance of Empire is "applied retrospectively to America and prophetically to the Spanish and papal empires, to the commercial importance of London's free trade and London's God Urizen" (192). Does India figure by implication? The question is debatable and any answer provocative. The possible interpretations of this silence will be examined later.

It is possible to look on Blake's works especially the Prophetic Books as an "endless monologue of fantasy about a Biblical hereafter" (Brownowski 1972: 10). To leave it at that, however, would amount to leaving a considerable and forceful part of Blake's conceptual range unconfronted. Blake had strong radical views on the historical actualities and social phenomena of his time. The revolutions were welcomed and tyranny condemned by Blake who, despite his pervasive use of esoteric symbols to mask the real force of his radicalism, remained a revolutionary by temperament till the end of his days, unlike Southey or Wordsworth who faced the charge of being political renegades.

Empire/Imperialism in Blake's works obviously meant more than just territorial expansion. All confining practices—political, commercial, religious or cultural—were viewed by Blake as being one with the imperialistic world view and condemned accordingly. As Brownowski remarks:

This is the prophetic power of Blake, that he felt the coming disasters of War, Empire and Industry in his bloodstream long before politicians and economists shivered at their shadows.

(1972: 16)
It is possible to consider Imperialism in Blake as a collective term for all discursive systems which perpetuated hegemonic practices.

Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* quotes Blake to emphasise his own formulation of Empire:

The process of Imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions and—by predisposition, by the authoritatively recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature and the visual and musical arts—were manifested at another level, that of the national culture, which we have tended to sanitize as a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments free from worldly affiliations. William Blake is quite unrestrained on this point. "The foundation of Empire" he says in his Annotations to Reynold's *Discourses" is Art and Science, Remove them or Degrade them and the Empire is no more. Empire follows Art and not vice versa as Englishmen suppose"

(Said 1993: 12-13)

In his "Public Address" Blake further remarks that "let it no more be said that Empire encourages Arts, for it is Arts that encourages Empires. Let us teach Buonoparte [sic] and whomsoever else it may concern that it is not Arts that follow and attend upon Empire, but Empire that follows and attends upon the Arts" (1972: 597). Blake is evidently aware of the complex relationship between culture and imperialism and he does not regard the cultural/artistic realm as profiting as a result of this relation. If anything, the flow is in the opposite direction.

Francis Bacon, in his *Essays: Moral, Economical and Political* sets out the commercial justification for Empire:

It is likely to be remembered that for as much as the increase of any estate must be upon the foreigner—(for whatsoever is somewhere got is somewhere lost).

(quoted in Blake 1972: 402)

Blake annotates this as follows: "The increase of a state as of a Man is from Internal Improvement or Intellectual Acquisition. *States are not Improved at the expense of
foreigners.\textsuperscript{5} Man is not improved by the hurt of another. Bacon has no notion of am but Mammon" (my emphasis; Blake 1972: 402). This conception strikes right at the foundation of Empire. Again, in his annotations to Bishop Watson's \textit{An Apology for the Bible}, Blake insists that "God never makes one man murder another nor one nation ... to Exterminate a nation by means of another nation is as wicked as to destroy an individual by means of another individual which God considers as murder and commands that it shall not be done" (1972: 388).

In Erdman's words, "If military glory was one side of the false coin of Empire, the other side was the love of commercial prosperity" (1977: 329). Blake ridicules the latter as the worship of Mammon and on several occasions, debunks the romantically glorified conception of war and military glory. In his fragmented play "King Edward the Third" the war mongering rhetoric of the King and his nobles is presented with an overdose of bombast so that it ends up ridiculing itself. In the "Ninth Night" of \textit{Vala or the Four Zoas} Blake refers to war as "Energy Enslav'd" and to the fighting man as the "slave in extremity" (1972: 362).\textsuperscript{6} This image of slavery is further emphasized in \textit{Jerusalem} where conscripted soldiers (whom we may imagine, had to fight for Empire as well) are allowed to speak for themselves:

\begin{quote}
We were carried away in thousands from London and in tens
Of thousands from Westminster and Marybone, in ships clos'd up
Chain'd hand and foot, compell'd to fight under the iron whips
Of our captains, fearing our officers more than the enemy.
\end{quote}

(1972: 700)

Even trade and commerce, on which Britain laid hold as the foundations of her prosperity are fiercely indicted by Blake as being directly responsible for Empire and through it for corruption and slavery. Urizen in "Night the Seventh(b)" of \textit{The Four Zoas} states in clear terms his intention to build up an oppressive Empire primarily through commerce:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{5} The statement gains enormously in significance given the contemporary urgings of colonialism as the natural and legitimate means of national advancement. The Torrens Comment quoted in the Conclusion is a case in point.
\textsuperscript{6} The view of the professional soldier as the most subjugated form of humanity is echoed by Shelley in \textit{A Philosophical View of Reform} (1953: 232).
First Trades and Commerce ships and armed vessels he built laborious
To swim the deep, and on the land children are sold to trades
Of dire necessity . . .
Rattling with clanking chains, the universal Empire groans

(1972:333)

Empire evidently is not an isolated phenomenon for Blake, but a pervasive
malaise, a collective term for the aggregate of all oppressive practices. The sinister
relation between trade and Empire (oppression) is expressed in a more complex fashion
in "Night the Second" of the Four Zoas, where Blake accuses the daughters of Albion of
"stripping Jerusalem's curtains from mild demons of the hills" for their "needlework" and
of "binding Jerusalem's children to Babylon" while they "go across Europe and Asia, to
China and Japan like lightning" (1972: 281). In Erdman's effective paraphrase, "the
British textile industry strips wool from sheep, binds children to factory labour and leads
imperial armies as far as China in search of markets" (Erdman 1977: 332). Industrial
tyrranny and imperialism are seen by Blake as necessary concomitants of each other.

All institutions come under Blake's scourge for what he see as their inherent
hypocrisy. In the "Seventh Night" of the Four Zoas he presents the subtle way in which
so called Righteousness and Morality (conversion and civilising missions in the imperial
context) exploit the public and expect to get thanked for doing so:

... when a man looks pale
with labour and abstinence, say he looks healthy and happy;
and when his children sicken, let them die, there are enough
Born, even too many and our Earth will be overrun
Without these arts. If you would make the poor live with temper
With pomp give every crust of bread you give.
With gracious cunning, magnify small gifts.
REDUCE THE MAN TO WANT A GIFT and then give with pomp

(my emphasis; 1972: 323)

Here, we have a clear exposure and furious indictment of the discriminatory and
Malthusian practices of the ruling group—the rich or the imperialists, wherein the "breeding" of

7 The echoes in colonial discourse of this idea are patently obvious. The concept of "free trade" where
subject nations were educated into new "wants" and then made to obtain them at high prices is distinctly
foreshadowed.
the poor or the natives alone seemed to constitute a threat of overrunning the Earth. Blake's argument can be aptly applied to a colonial context where the colony's past is sought to be forcibly excised, the natives' very biological and reproductive rights questioned and then gratitude expected for the new "culture" bestowed on them.

Imperial attempts to erase differences and impose homogeneity are also criticized by Blake. His "later imperialist" Urizen attempts such a regimentation with

One command, one joy, one desire
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law

(1972:224)

and later admits the defeat of his project because "no flesh and blood could keep his iron laws one moment" (235). Politically motivated global reform movements initiated by imperialism inspired no trust in Blake and he rejected them in favour of reform from the inside. In a speech of the democratic Orleans in Blake's "The French Revolution" we find a warning for both conservative law givers and reformist theorists, asking them to doubt the infallibility of their projects.

But go, merciless man! Enter into the infinite labyrinth
of another's brain
Of another's high, flaming, rich bosom and return unconsum’d
and write laws.
If thou canst not do this, doubt thy theories.

(1972: 142-43)

The incapacity of forced "reform" to overcome inherent difference and the tyranny implicitly present in the attempt itself are emphasised here.

These parts of Blake's world view, where he examines the question of a universal Humanism versus a belief in the necessary presence of difference is significant in this context. He has asserted on occasion that human nature, despite different external trappings, is essentially the same. In "The Little Black Boy" both White and Black skin are pronounced to be clouds, equally opaque and cumbersome" (1972: 125). At the same

---

8 The phrase "later imperialist" in relation to Urizen is borrowed from Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1977:52).
time, the only occasion when Blake bestows an "Excellent" on his despised rival Reynolds is when the latter writes:

If an European, when he has cut off his beard or bound up his own natural hair in regular hard knots as unlike nature as he can make it...meets a Cherokee Indian who has laid on with equal care and attention his yellow and red ochre...who ever of these two despises the other for this attention to the fashion of his country is the barbarian.

(quoted in Blake 1972: 476)

Blake's comment indicates his leaning towards cultural relativism and tolerance alongside and underlying his belief in an essential similarity.

The ‘Other’ for Blake is mainly the female. To quote Damrosch, "whatever Blake cannot reconcile himself to in the phenomenological world—bodies, matter, nature, physical space is symbolised as Female" (1980: 188). There is a constant fear of this female Other draining the power of the Self. However, "female" in this context is more of a symbol for divisive tendencies from the One than a biological category. Damrosch indeed goes so far as to assert that Blake desired a negation of the very category of the Other:

If, in the end, Blake's myth is in some sense solipsistic it is also an act of faith that strives mightily to overcome the mode of thinking that accepts otherness as a fact of existence.

(1980: 150)

In other words, the question of adjustment to the Other can be transcended by denying Otherness and solipsism is not just justified, but positively heroic since the Self then encompasses the All. 9

This, however, is too sweeping a conceptualisation, for Blake has clearly stated his belief in necessary diversity. In "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" he remarks: "These two classes of men (the Prolific and the Devourers) are always upon earth and

Is it possible to see a connection with Keats' notion of "negative capability"?
they should be **enemies**, who ever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence" (1972: 155). To rephrase this in Blake's own terms: "Without contraries there is no progression" (1972: 149). In the imperial context we could say that Blake does believe in a universal humanist concept where rich and poor, coloniser and colonised can meet as one, but this, as he accepts, is an Edenic vision. In the world as it is, he accepts that the incessant dialectical **struggle—synthesis—struggle** process between contraries has to continue so as to ensure the continuance of existence itself.

It should also be noted that while much of Blake's radicalism developed out of a genuine love of liberty; a certain part was also produced from what Nigel Leask has termed the "Anxiety of Empire". We can trace a continual fear in Blake of the oppressive forces employed by the imperial power **boomeranging/rebounding** upon itself in a worsened form from the colonies. Women drain the powers of ruling men, plague and pestilence as well as corruption flow back from the sites of oppression with an increased vitality. Blake's favourite formulation for this process, often repeated, but first seen in *The Four Zoas* is:

.... Terrified at the shapes enslav'd humanity put on,
he became what he beheld
He became what he was doing, *he was himself transformed*

(my emphasis; 1972: 300)

The fear that the Self would be debased and transformed; that it could not oppress and tyrannize over the Other without degrading itself prominently underlies Blake's bitter aversion to tyranny at home and Empire abroad. Ironically however, the voices of Burke and Blake the arch Conservative and the Radical-merge at this point. For Burke the corrupted Orient may spread its roots, for Blake debased practices essential to Empire may rebound. But though the phrasing may vary, the fear is the **same**—that of the Self being overrun and losing its Selfhood.

Given the fact that we cannot deny Blake's passionate hatred of the concept of Empire and the symbols of oppression he attaches to it, it is worthwhile to consider why Britain's Indian Empire itself is not very often referred to, let alone condemned, in Blake's works. Leask's argument in relation to Shelley; that liberal writers of the period
did not specifically place their radical polemics in India because they could not (Leask 1993: 75) is relevant in this context. The Indian Empire was too close to home for comfort even for a radical like Shelley, general condemnations could not afford to be locale specific. As a harsh indictment in Coleridge, of his own and his compatriots' conspicuous consumption of Empire produced goods indicates, no one was fit to throw the first stone.

This argument may be stretched to incorporate Blake to a certain extent. It could be concluded that the very 'inclusive' nature of Empire in Blake's corpus indicates that even as more than territorial expansion was involved, it was also less, since the actual fact of the geographical terrain involved was not directly confronted.

But the issue merits a pause at this point to consider the compulsions which may have applied to Shelley and not to Blake. As will be elaborated in the discussion on Shelley, his commitment to reform was in itself a compulsion to accept the only too clearly despotic implications of imperialism. One needed a site and subjects (an incredibly appropriate word in both its senses) if one was to experiment with reform. So, in the light of the greater good, uneasy silence had to be maintained with regard to the basic premises of imperialism—despotic control and denial of liberty.

We cannot trace such handicapping tendencies towards compulsive reform in Blake. His suggestions are both immediate and total—there has to be total change in all systems everywhere if there is to be progress. If not, piecemeal, oppressive, cross-culture reform schemes with their mechanised regularity are best left alone. It does not seem therefore that India being too close is the main reason for Blake's seeming silence. The 'inclusivity' we see in Blake has certain parallels with what (for want of a better term) I call a 'naivete' in Keats (to be discussed later in this chapter). Though coming from two very opposite directions these qualities make the attitudes of these two—the earliest and the youngest of the canonical Romantics comparatively more "open-ended" towards the question of Empire than Shelley's radicalism, Coleridge's philosophy, Byron's "fellowship" or Wordsworth's benevolent paternalism. Empire, for Blake is more than Britain in India. Maybe he is open to the charge of evading the specific issue. But at least
his condemnation of his concept of Empire is consistent and he does not end up unwittingly making excuses for imperialism, a trap into which Shelley for example was too prone to fall into.

B

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who is primarily remembered today as a poet and literary critic, exerted a seminal influence on the ideological currents of his age. His writings encompassed poetry, philosophy, religion, politics and science. J.S. Mill has paid tribute to Coleridge as being "one of the two seminal minds of the England of their age," the other being Jeremy Bentham (quoted in Reardon, 1971: 60). Even more than in the other Romantics, we have to look beyond poetry to judge any dimension of Coleridge's thought including the Indian element.

A comparison with Burke made by D.P. Calleo in Coleridge and the Idea of the Modern State is noteworthy in the context of Coleridge's positions on India:

Coleridge's later political philosophy is an important moment in the creation of a dynamic conservative tradition in English political thought. For it is Coleridge even more than Burke who is the true philosopher of that tradition.

(quoted in Cooke 1979: 153)

This argument is borne out to a large extent by the evident Conservatism of the later Coleridge. However, it would appear that he had never managed to quite comfortably discard all of his earlier radical opinions. This, on occasion leads to an impasse in Coleridge's opinions on many sensitive subjects, including those of colonialism and imperialism.

We see in the early writings of Coleridge, a considerable respect for Indian philosophy which later jostle with his role as a committed Christian apologist. Several vehement pronouncements against hegemony and slavery in the abstract co-exist with
comparatively scanty reference to actual political events. (In any case, West Indian slavery is far more often directly referred to than East Indian affairs.) When forced to comment directly on imperial affairs, Coleridge's Conservatism manifests itself as a gentlemanly pragmatism which deplores the many flaws in the status quo but is not going to consider any reform more radical than an increasingly benevolent paternalism. Certain anxieties regarding the morally and mentally weakening effects colonial/Oriental contacts (concepts which Leask has examined in detail with regard to Byron and Shelley) could have on the British psyche make their presence felt in Coleridge's writings.

The specifically Indian dimension in Coleridge includes certain imaginative concepts in his poems. These images lead directly enough to India. However, the importance of these at best scattered references to India should not be overestimated, except to insist on their gesturing towards India as a usable and available signifier. John Drew in *India and the Romantic Imagination* undertakes a rather fanciful exercise in which an "Indian reading" of "Kubla Khan" is presented on the basis of an imaginative congruence between Coleridge's conceptions and the actual figures in Indian mythology. A Indian reading of "Kubla Khan" is indeed possible and as relevant as any other reading. But we should not carry this trend so far that we reach a stage where—to quote Coleridge himself on the writer of an article in an Encyclopaedia—"India—India—India—the writer can see nothing but India from Arctic to Antarctic, from Chile to China" (Coleridge 1971: 191). Drew refers more to an "ideal image of India" (Drew 1987: ix) than to the political, social or even geographical entity called India which was under British rule. This analysis takes the philosophical dimensions into account, but also depends on specific references to India and to imperialism in general.

Coleridge, more often than not, was regarded, at least during his youth, as a traitor to the glorious cause of Britain by many of his countrymen. A review by Alexander Hamilton (Sanskrit scholar and East India Company army officer) in the *British Critic* June 1799 is representative in its concerns. He quotes the following lines from Coleridge's "Fears in Solitude"

10 The plural is used advisedly, Coleridge's vacillations are almost paranoid.
From East to West
A groan of accusation pierces heaven
The wretched plead against us, multitudes
Countless and vehement.

Hamilton then proceeds to comment:

We, by no means deny this writer the praise of sensibility and poetic taste and on this account we the more sincerely lament his absurd and preposterous prejudices against his country. We would seriously ask Mr. Coleridge where Englishmen have been so tyrannous as to justify his exclamation which we deny.

(Jackson 1970:48)

Most of Coleridge's statements on liberty and abolition of slavery were vehement enough to justify Hamilton's anxiety in any context including an East Indian one. However, they were mainly more specifically related to the West Indian slave trade and to his early opinions on the French Revolution.

In Coleridge's poetic corpus India figures most prominently as the identifiable source of one repeated image—that of the God asleep on the lotus leaf. Apart from this, Coleridge in a Note Book entry (dtd. 1974) refers to the finding out of a desert city in Asia as a subject for a Romance, and to the mythical conquest of India by Bacchus as source (dtd. 7-9 November 1803) for a poem to be composed in Hexameters. [The Note Books are unpaginated.] These schemes, as we know, did not materialise. We also have a brief reference to "Golconda's jewels" in a poem composed during 1834 entitled "Honour" (1970 I: 272).

A piece of "evidence" linking "Kubla Khan" to India is to be found in an entry by Coleridge in the Gutch Memorandum Note Book (undated)

In a cave in the mountains of Cashimere, an image of ice which makes its appearance thus two days before the new moon; there appears a bubble of Ice which increases in size everyday till the fifteenth day at which it is an ell or more in height then as the moon decreases, the image does also till it vanishes. Read the whole 107 page [sic] of Maurice's Indostan.
The Collected Poetical Works edited by E.H. Coleridge includes this entry in its notes to "Kubla Khan." Coleridge also wrote in a Note Book (dated November 1802) "Kubla Khan ordered letters to be invented for his people" a sentence taken verbatim from William Jones "Essay on the Tartars." John Drew has also traced similarities between Jones’ landscape descriptions (content and style) in this essay and the imaginary landscape described by Coleridge in "Kubla Khan" (Drew 1987: 197-98). These are the basic (and maybe the only ones outside of pure speculation) foundations on which an Indian reading of "Kubla Khan" can be constructed.

Another poem, titled "A Lover's Complaint to his Mistress" is subtitled "who deserted him in quest of a more wealthy husband in the East Indies" (perhaps a quite common incident during the period!). At any rate, Coleridge does not seem to have too good an opinion of the famed British explorers and travellers, as these lines from 'The Delinquent Travellers' indicate:

Of all the children of John Bull  
With empty heads and bellies full  
Who ramble East, West, North and South  
With leaky purse and open mouth  
In search of varieties exotic.

(Coleridge 1970: 447)

An elaborate description of the Banyan tree can be found in Coleridge's Poetical Fragments dated 1806-7. Now, the Banyan tree has been described by many English poets including Milton and Southey. But Coleridge's work here is notable for the way it combines description with a religious horror of idolatry, typical of his later philosophy:

As some vast tropic tree, itself a wood  
That crests its head with clouds beneath the flood  
Feeds its deep roots and with the bulging flank  
Of its wide base controls the fronting bank  
[By the slant current's pressure scooped away  
The fronting bank becomes a foam filled bay]  
High in the fork the uncouth idol knits  
His channeled brow, low murmurs stir by fits  
And dark below, the horrid Faquir sits  
And horror from its broad head's branching wreaths  
Broods o'er the rude idolatry beneath.

(1970: 1498)
This picture subscribes neatly to the Orientalist stereotypes of a benighted, superstition ridden India, which aroused Christian horror. A similar, contemporary image of the Upas tree, poisonous and destructive is also to be found in a note book entry dated 7-9 November 1803.

The image of the God asleep on the lotus leaf deserves greater elaboration because of its recurring nature (in the letters as well). In the "Night Scene", (a dramatic fragment published in 1813, salvaged from an incomplete play *The Triumph of Loyalty*). We find the image being introduced in a conversation:

Earl Henry: "Oh there is joy above
the name of pleasure
Deep self possession, an intense repose."

Sandoval: (with a sarcastic smile):
"No other than as eastern sages paint
The God who floats on a lotus leaf
Dreams for a thousand ages; then awakening
Creates a world and smiling at the
Bubble; Relapses into bliss."

Earl Henry: "Ah! Was that bliss
Feared as alien and too
Vast for man?"

(1970:422)

In the existing first draft of the *Triumph of Loyalty* (1801) the entire speech is attributed to Earl Henry, without Sandoval's intervention. By 1813 obviously, Coleridge entertained no comparably favourable attitude to the image, which may explain why it was rendered vulnerable to Sandoval's sarcasm. The effects produced by the two presentations are quite different in nature.

An earlier version of this image can be found in a letter from Coleridge to Thelwall dated October 14, 1797:

It is but seldom that I raise and spiritualize my intellect to this height. At other times, I adopt the Brahman Creed and say—it is better to sit than stand, it is better to lie than sit, it is better to sleep than to wake—but Death is the best of all. I should much wish like the Indian Vishna [sic] to float
along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the lotus
and wake once in a million years for a few minutes—just to
know that I was going to sleep for a million years more.

(Coleridge 1971: 143)

John Drew's remark on this letter bears repetition: "Coleridge regrets that by
contrast to the spiritualised state of intellect, he more frequently falls into a state of
lassitude, where the more supine the posture and the more insensate the consciousness,
the better. At such times, he says, he has become a Brahmin in his attitude. This is of
course, a travesty of traditional yogic teaching" (my emphasis; Drew 1987: 189).

A similar travesty can be seen in a variation of this image found in a speech of the
Moorish woman Alhadra in Coleridge's successful play Remorse. Though the play was
finally enacted in 1813, the primary draft entitled Osorio was complete in 1797. Alhadra
is musing on the strangely softening powers of solitary communion with nature which
renders her temporarily incapable of taking revenge on her husband's murderers:

I need the sympathy of human faces
To beat away this deep contempt for all things
Which quenches my revenge.
Oh! Would to Alla
The raven and the sea mew were appointed
To bring me food or rather that my soul
Could drink in life from the universal air!
It were a lot divine in some small skiff
Along some ocean's boundless solitude
To float for ever with a careless course
And think myself the only being alive

(Coleridge 1970: II 323)

Alhadra has to break free from this apparently soporific image to prosecute her
justified revenge. The association of the Indian image with a lassitude and torpor which
precluded action could well be a (unconscious, perhaps) contribution to the troping of
India as feminine and indolent. It is interesting to note here that Leigh Hunt in The
Examiner (1821) refers to Coleridge himself as "a kind of unascetic Brahmin among us,
one who is always looking inwardly and making experiments on the nature and power of
his soul" (my emphasis; quoted in Jackson 1970: 474). A concept of Brahminism as
peaceful and contemplative could easily modulate into one of inaction and torpor with all "asceticism" elided out of notice.

Coleridge admits to an early fascination with the religion and philosophy of India. But his later reaction against them is vehement. Passages from his "Opus Maximum" manuscript (Muirhead 1930: Appendix III 283-84) indicate the extent of his later eager efforts to discredit any ideal image of India as a model source of philosophy. The Vedic philosophers and their religious writings are uniformly stigmatised as "childish intellects living among gigantic objects, of mean thoughts and huge things, living Lilliputs among inanimate Brobdignags." The concept of "oneness" in the Indian scriptures is dismissed as "the natural result of an imbecile understanding producing indistinction half from indolence and half intentionally by a partial closure of the eyelids, and when all hues and outlines melt into a garish mist, deeming it unity." The Bhagavat Gita is criticized for "passing off bigness for greatness". Orientalists like Jones and Wilkins are condescendingly excused for their "mistake" in judging the merit of Indian works; as they had circumstantial excuses, "which more than acquits the judges, though cannot prevent the reversal of their decision."

Coleridge admits in the same passage that he too had paid "this debt of homage" to the Indian texts when he first perused them. Later, however, he sought to use the antidote of common sense, took a second look and asked himself:

And what then have I seen?
    What are
    These Potentates of inmost Ind?

The answer to these questions did not provide a verdict favourable to India. The whole Brahmin Theosophy was characterised as being "without growth, without production." Coleridge then sums up his argument: "Abstract the enormous shapes and phantasms, the Himala, the Ganges of the fancy and what remains? A baby!" [All quotes from the 'Opus Maximum' fragment are taken from Muirhead 1930: 283-84 (Appendix III)].

"The implicit suggestion was that the potential for growth also was exhausted, raising the need for an "outside" source of inspiration."
In Biographia Literaria India is mentioned as one of four countries (the others being Egypt, Greece and Palestine) where "the analysis of the mind had reached its noon and manhood while experimental research was still in its morn and infancy" (Coleridge 1971(a): 43). In an issue of The Friend (No.3, August 10, 1809) Coleridge refers to "the interesting deformities of ancient Greece and India" (my emphasis; 1970(a): XI 49). Papal and Brahminical superstition are equated with each other in the same issue. Obviously, by this time, not even philosophy was accepted as a successful domain for India. The concept of the "pariah" class and of the destructive procession of "Juggernaut" are employed as similarly evocative symbols:

As if literature formed a caste like that of the Pariahs in Hindostan, who however, maltreated must not dare to dream themselves wronged.12 (1971(a): 112)

Coleridge found himself "bound in conscience to throw the whole force of my intellect in the way of their triumphal car on which the tutelary genius of modern idolatry is borne even at the risk of being crushed under the wheels" (1970(a): IX 47). The reference to "Juggernaut" in this passage from Aids to Reflection is unmistakable. Again in the Statesman’s Manual Coleridge refers to superstition on its "pilgrimages to Loretto, Mecca or the temple of Juggernaut, arm in arm with sensuality on one side and self torture on the other" (1953: 33).

In a significant Note Book entry (dated November 1810) Coleridge uses the image of "the naked savage and the gymnosophist" to indicate a meeting of extreme opposites. The reference to India is clear enough. Later, obviously the naked savage image comes to dominate over that of the gymnosophist. The later Coleridge had no qualms in asserting the superiority of Christianity even at the cost of factual accuracy. A May 1810 entry in the Note Books refers to "the wild or the extravagant traditions which have gathered round the History of all other founders of Religions, except Christ—as Zoroaster, Odin, Brahma, Mahomet, Francis and all the Roman saints." Apart from the fact that there could very well be a dispute over the "non-extravagant" nature of traditions

12 In the 3rd issue of The Friend Coleridge urges his countrymen to count their blessings "by reflecting on the direful effects of caste in Hindostan and then transfer yourself in fancy to an English cottage" (1970: IV 20).
gathered around the figure of Christ, anyone acquainted with Indian mythology, as Coleridge certainly was, should at least have known that "Brahma" was in no way the "founder" of a religion like the other names mentioned.

In the fifth issue of *The Friend* (September 14, 1809) Coleridge remarks:

> It is highly worthy of observation that the inspired writings received by the Christians are distinguished from all other books pretending to inspiration from the scriptures of the Brahmans and even from the Koran in their strong and frequent recommendations of truth.

(1970(a): IX, 87)

The Christian scriptures are accepted as "revealed"; all other texts dismissed strongly as "pretenders to inspiration" with such conviction as to preclude all further discussion. An 1818 Note Book entry indicates quite clearly what Coleridge would have liked to put forward as his theory on comparative religious philosophy:

> And then I saw there is no other religion in the world that can stand in comparison with Christianity. Heathenism and Mahometanism are kept up by tyranny and bestial ignorance and blush to stand at the bar of reason.

Coleridge evidently quite heartily approved of the work of conversion though he deplored the nature of many individuals concerned. However, the East Indies furnish an exception even to this reservation. "I have long regretted the too general unfitness of the men chosen as missionaries, with some splendid exceptions in the East Indies", Coleridge writes in a letter to Joseph Hughes, 14th January 1831 (1971: 92). However, when on rare occasions they give some credit to the natives, Coleridge is not willing to accept the testimony of even the "splendid exceptions", witness a Note Book entry dated April-June 1809:

> A common error of religious persons—missionaries among the Hindostanee for instance is to wish that the true rational religionists possessed and showed the same zeal and fervour for the truth that these show for superstition and detestable idols—forgetting that thoughtlessness and
Holiday Revelry are the causes and effects of this superstition and that it belongs to degraded man.

Since the objects of the natives' zeal are from the Christian apologist's perspective misplaced it is seen as an error to commend even the natives' zeal in itself. "Self Torture" among the natives taken as an indication of zeal comes in for severe criticism in a Note Book entry, April-May 1809:

O! if Folly were no easier than wisdom being so very much more painful and pleasureless, what might not a legislator have brought these men to? But alas, to swing with Rocks through the back, to walk in shoes with nails of iron turned in upon the feet—all this is so much less difficult, tho’ so much more painful, than to think.

Indeed the native's inability to "think" even though they can undergo great physical torture is further emphasized in another Note Book entry of the same period as almost a sign of essential racial difference. He records the comments of certain missionaries with full approval:

Examine the journals of our humane and zealous missionaries in Hindostan. How often and how feelingly do they describe the difficulty of making the simplest chain of reasoning intelligible to the ordinary natives, the rapid exhaustion of their whole power of attention and with what pain and distressful effort it is exerted while it lasts. Yet it is among this class that the hideous practice of self torture chiefly indeed almost exclusively prevails.

The "worst" (from the European perspective) of native practices are presented in focus and the stereotype of the unthinking (the emotion/reason dichotomy) native is uncritically perpetuated.

Coleridge's interest in Indian affairs should not be viewed from the perspectives of religion or philosophy alone. He was perfectly well aware of the political and economical ground realities of the imperial relationship. A 22 November 1803 Note Book entry indicates an clear grasp of the commercial foundation of Empire: "The prodigious effect of the love of spices of the human race—the cause of the East Indian voyage—viz of Columbus." A June-July 1810 entry in the Note Books makes it very
clear that Coleridge was not a visionary unaware of the often brutal imperatives of imperialism:

The famous apostle of the Indies, Xavier, once said 'that missionaries without muskets did never make converts to any purpose.' At all events, I call upon the opponents to show any other way which has pleased Providence to appoint for the extended civilisation of the human race. Can they mention any one savage country, Christianized even by the Apostles, even in the miraculous ages of the Church before the Roman Arms and colours had preceded them?

Imperialism is quite clearly presented here as a civilising mission with Christianity as its necessary concomitant and even naked, brute military force as a means is perfectly justifiable since the end is the glorious one of "civilising the human race."

In the sixth of his 1795 Lectures on Politics and Religion Coleridge discusses the economic underpinnings of the imperial enterprise and the moral dimension involved:

If he be a commercial man, can he always be sincere? Let him look around his shop. Does nothing in it come from the desolate plains of Indostan? From what motives did Lord Clive murder his millions and justify it to all but his own conscience... it has been openly asserted that our commercial intercourse with the East Indies has been the occasion of the loss of 8 million lives, in return for which most foul and heart rending guilt, we receive gold, diamonds, silks, muslins and Calicoes for fine ladies and prostitutes. Not one thing necessary or even useful do we receive in return for the horrible guilt in which we have involved ourselves.

(1970(a): I 225-26)

There is a clearly articulated and undeniable concern here with the devastation of India. However, the sub-text which rises into prominence is the guilt incurred by the Britons, which is not even adequately compensated for. The confessional is uncomfortably abutting on the ledger here. The morally sapping nature of imperialism; it is regretted, is not made up for by the material benefits received. On balance, therefore, it is not absolutely certain whether the Empire is a good bargain or not. James Mill had the
same doubts regarding finances, but at least he had a reform mission to urge. Coleridge's conscience does not seem to allow him either alternative.

The anxiety is manifested on occasion as a purely physical fear. In a letter to H.N. Coleridge, dated Tuesday 28 August 1832, cholera is referred to as "this travelling Nabob from the swamps and jungles of Hindustan" (1970(a): V 923). This anxiety is further elaborated in a letter to J.H. Green, 25 April 1833: "In its long journey of the vast steppes, the enormous moonholes and Dead Seas of Tartary and Asia, the East wind has been freighted with contraband waves" (1970(a): V 937).

This physical exposition is translated into more psychological terms in this extract from the "Opus Maximum" manuscript:

Every epidemic disease, every epidemic or endemic should awaken us to the deep interest which every man and every country has in the wellbeing of all men and in the consequent progressive humanization of the surface and with it of the atmosphere of the planet itself. As man, so the world he inhabits. It is his business and duty to possess it and rule it and assimilate it to his own higher nature. If instead he allows himself to be possessed, ruled and assimilated by it, he becomes an animal like the African Negro or the South American savage and is a mischief to man even by the neglect of his function as a man. The neglected earth steams up vapours that travel.

(original emphasis)

The trope of progressive humanisation indicates that before the imperial civilising enterprise the natives were not really "human" at all. Anxiety—both of disease and of a loss of vitality—is here linked to the continuation of imperialism. If civilisation is not spread, then the diseased vapours will "travel" and so it is almost self defence to embark on an imperial mission to ensure that the vapours do not emanate. The exclusive definition of "man" together with the fear of noxious corruption/infection from the Other add up to a strong defence of imperialism.

An entry under "On the Power of Turkey" while justifying imperial aggression makes a hair splitting distinction: "we seem to have forgotten that the Turks and their
Asiatic neighbours are semi-Barbarians and not savages" \(1970(a): \text{III 163}\). To this can be added Coleridge's approving quote from Crawford's *History of the Indian Archipelago*: "wherever agriculture is the principal pursuit, there it may certainly be reckoned, the people will be under an absolute government" \(1970(a): \text{III 578}\). Semi-barbarianism, mixed with absolute despotism serves to indicate that Asia was indeed ripe for the western civilising mission. In an 1810 Note Book entry, Coleridge indulges in a spectacular piece of special pleading, to actually list reasons to prove that the good behaviour of colonists *has* to be in an inverse proportion\(^{13}\) to the freedom and virtue of the Mother country. Hence, the better Britain becomes, the worse her colonists' behaviour will necessarily become.

A very clear and concise formulation of Coleridge's attitude to the question of imperialism may be derived from the following Note Book entry: June-July 1810. Indeed, it has a ring of finality. Though the specific reference is not to India, the underlying assumptions can easily be adapted to fit the Indian issue:

I do affirm that if it be an absurdity to affirm that 2 or 3 hundred naked savages\(^{14}\) have not by the accident of preoccupation a fair right of property in the whole of that immense island continent, then it must likewise be absurd to observe that the colonists of a civilized nation have not the same right to serve themselves and the rightful objects of their colonization, thro' coercion of those savages or even compelling them into a form of civilisation were necessary, provided that in truth of conscience, the moral good and personal happiness of the savages were part of the end and that the means be appropriate both *morally and* 

---

These reasons are as follows:

a) The happier and freer the mother country, the more reluctant the better son of people will be to leave it. Only the refuse therefore, will go to the colonies.

b) The love of money is greater in free countries because wealth gives more advantages in such an atmosphere.

c) In base minds, the possession of freedom intensifies the lust of power over others.

d) The laws of property are more secure in free countries and hence humane regulations are more difficult to enforce as interfering with property.

e) The influence of men of property which furnishes a strong motive to get rich by any means is strongest in free countries.

\(^{14}\) A note of later addition adds: 1 have said savages—not natives with what we may deem less perfect forms of government and civil and religions institutions than our own." Obviously, as long as the choice lies with the imperialist, this qualification is not much of a safeguard.
prudentially. If this be denied, I do not see how we can justify the coercion of children and lunatics.

(my emphasis)

"Accident of preoccupation," savagery versus civilisation, conscience as arbitrator, moral upliftment, a comparison of natives with children and lunatics—these arguments of a Romantic philosopher poet have a strangely contemporary ring. It is possible to speculate endlessly on the "ideal image" of India and its influence on the Romantic psyche. The 'ideal' as well as the 'romantic' are after all concepts which admit of great elaboration and interpretation. But when individual cases such as Coleridge are considered in the light of available evidence, a commitment (subtle or tenuous perhaps, but definitely existent) to the further expansion and consolidation of imperialism becomes evident under the Romantic imagery. The Indian images, however evocative, are mainly adaptable symbols in Coleridge's poetic corpus. The geographical reality of India was equally if not more significant for him as both source of anxiety and valued possession. The contradictions, which as we have seen, this engenders between Romantic ideal and practical statement can be pointed out as the chinks, the exploitable gaps in his Romantic edifice. Or else, perhaps more realistically, they could be seen as the necessary constituents of the imperial edifice—a structure which thrives on contradictions.

C

There is a comparative scarcity of specific references to Eastern sources, or locales in Wordsworth's poetry, prose or even correspondence. Also, since Wordsworth's philosophy is mainly incorporated in the poetry, we have no stock of explicit comparative discussions of philosophical systems to draw upon as in the case of Coleridge. Indeed, apart from the meager scattered Indian references in his poetry all we have to guide us in tracing any Indian dimension are a few cryptic clues. I have attempted to piece these together and also draw upon the somewhat more elaborate discussions of Empire as such to illuminate a probable attitude towards imperialism.
Wordsworth's correspondence almost never mentions any direct perusal of Indian philosophy or even "popular" Indian works (unlike almost all the other poets discussed here). It is most probable that the Eastern affinities in his thought were transmitted through classical intermediaries rather than through any first hand Oriental source. Speculations regarding the Indian influence on Wordsworth's philosophical pantheism have their own importance. Raymond Schwab in *The Oriental Renaissance* has examined this aspect (Schwab 1984: 196). More attention is paid, however, in this analysis, to piecing together the direct references to India and to Empire that we do have in Wordsworth and to constructing from these, a reasonably clear picture of Wordsworth and the Oriental Other in an Imperial context.

Wordsworth's personal life (like perhaps that of almost every Englishman/woman of the time) was at least indirectly connected to the Indian enterprise. His brother, John Wordsworth "perished in discharge of his duty as Commander of the Honourable East India Company's vessel 'the Earl of Abergavenny' (Wordsworth 1936: 120). The intended recipient of his poem 'Liberty' "accompanied her husband Rev William Fletcher and died of cholera at the age of 32 or 33 on her way from Sholapur to Bombay deeply lamented by who knew her" (1936: 414). The trope of India as a land of "sudden death and strange regrets" must have prevailed alongside the concepts of exotic locale and source of philosophy.

Wordsworth's apparent lack of interest in the contemporary craze for Oriental themes and locales did not go unnoticed. In a letter dated 19 December 1828, Baron Field comments, "Bye the Bye, all your travellers 'step westward'." The letter goes on to say: "you have no Oriental poem. I wish you would write me one as unlike *Lalla Rookh* as possible" (Wordsworth, 1937: III 695n). (Apparently, the feverish enthusiasm for *Lalla Rookh* was not universal.) Wordsworth himself had earlier dismissed *Lalla Rookh* as "Moore's ugly named poem" (1937: II 394). In reply to Field's letter, Wordsworth writes:

I should like to write a short India piece, if you could furnish me with a story—Southey mentioned one to me in Forbes' travels in India ... it is of a Hindoo girl who applied to a Brahmin to recover a faithless lover, an
Englishman. The Brahmin furnished her with an ungent with which she was to anoint his chest while sleeping and the deserter would be won back—if you can find the passage—pray transcribe it for me and let me know whether you think anything can be made of it.

(Wordsworth 1937: III 695-96)

Obviously, nothing came of this idea since we find no hints of such Indian material in Wordsworth's poems. A pity since it would have been interesting to see what the philosopher poet made of this "magic" theme.

In a letter to Basil Montagu dated 20 March 1827, Wordsworth comes up with a rather ingenious explanation for the prevalence of the custom of Sati in India:

Are you aware that the horrid practice of wife sacrifice in India is the result of the polygamous husband's schemes to guard his own life from the attacks of the malcontents among his numerous wives by making it a point of honour that such sacrifice should take place upon his decease? The natural dread of death gives the whole band an interest in prolonging his existence.

(1937: 522)

The custom must have gripped popular imagination considerably when casual correspondence evidences attempts to rationalise it.

A reference in another letter to Sir Beaumont gains some significance because of its suggestions of Oriental "excess" and extravagance as opposed to a well bred British stiff upper lip policy:

The voice of the minister was accompanied and almost interrupted by the slender sobbing of a young person, an Indian by half blood, and by the father's side a niece of the deceased wife of the person we were interring. She hung over the coffin and continued this Oriental lamentation till the service was over. Everybody else except one faithful servant being apparently indifferent.

(1937:231)
The implication is that such indecorous lamentation could only be "Oriental" and if at all a British parallel could be found, it would be among servants.

The direct (and mainly casual) references to India in Wordsworth's poetry can be quickly enumerated. In "A Farewell" he refers to "an Indian shed," (1936: 84) we have an "Indian bower" in "Her eyes are wild", (115) an "Indian Conjurer/quick in feats of art" in "The Kitten and Falling Leaves" (175). In Peter Bell there is a reference to "temples like those among the Hindoos" and the Ganges figures in "Miscellaneous Sonnets" (200). In Sonnet XI, we have an "Indian Citadel" (203) and "Indian isles" in the "Blind Highland Boy" (240). In the "Sonnet to the River Duddon" there is a brief description of the Banyan tree (300) and in the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" we find a commendatory reference to the Prester John legend in the mention of "Christian India" which held "sacred intercourse" with King Alfred. There are also references to "Indian mats" (670), "Indian deserts" (547), "Indian Cabins" (552), "lascars" (540) and the "Indian bird" (657). In The Excursion, the process of imagining the fount of human life is compared to "the Hindoos" drawing "their holy Ganges from a skeyey fount" (617). These few references, scattered as they are over a vast poetic corpus do not function very usefully as aids to interpretation. Apart from an indication that India was present as a source of comparison when something "different" was to be suggested there is not much further scope for analysis here.

There are however, a few slightly more elaborate references remaining, which need to be examined—some of these serve to indicate the concept of the Orient/India as the scene of unimaginable luxury and voluptuousness. In Book X of the Prelude we have:

They—who had come elate as eastern hunters  
Banded beneath the Great Mogul, when he  
Erewhile went forth from Agra or Lahore  
Rajahs and Omrahs in his train intent  
To drive their prey enclosed within a ring  
Wide as a province....  

(1936: 562)

Sonnet XLVI in "Poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty" mentions:

... as the power of light  
was inexhaustibly in precious gems
Fixed on the front of Eastern diadems
So shines our thankfulness for ever bright

(263)

In "The Haunted Tree" we find:

That Eastern Sultan amid flowers enwrought
On silken tissues might diffuse his limbs
In langour

(175)

Voluptuousness, ease, riches,\(^{15}\) splendour, pre-planned langour even in the hunt, the exotic titles—though few in number, these references serve to indicate that the conception of the East/India as the land of \textit{Lux er Volupte} was \textit{flourishing}. Another reference in \textit{The Prelude} to people who stand

With Indian awe and wonder, ignorance pleased
With its own struggles ... 

(533)

adds tinges of the dark night of superstitious slavish ignorance co-existing with the tempting false light of a voluptuous facade. Certain lines from the poem entitled "Suggested by a picture of the Bird of Paradise" need to be quoted at length as they indicate Wordsworth's only excursion into the realms of Indian mythology:

This, this the Bird of Paradise! Disclaim
The daring thought, forget the name;
This the sun's bird, whom Glendoveers might own
As no unworthy partner in their flight
Through seas of ether, where ripping sway
Of nether air's rude billows unknown
Whom sylphs, if e'er for casual pastime they
Through India's spicy regions wing their way
Might bow to their Lord.

(184)

"Glendoveer's" on the authority of Southey's \textit{Curse of Kehama} seems to have been a general version for Indian "Gandharvas." Since Wordsworth leaves no record of direct

\(^{15}\) \textbf{Britain's} commercial prosperity due to her global trade is referred to in Book VIII of \textit{The Excursion}:

Hence is the wide sea \textit{peopled—hence} the shores
Of Britain are resorted to by ships
Freighted from every climate of the world
With the worlds choicest produce.

(Wordsworth 1936: 683)
Indian sources and does mention perusal of Southey's poem, it is reasonably safe to assume a debt to Southey here. The "Glendoveers" are native to India and form a contrast to the more classical "sylphs" who may merely fly over India for "casual" pastime.

In the notes to "The Egyptian Maid or The Romance of the Water Lily" we read: "The lotos with the bust of the Goddess appearing to rise out of the full blown flower..." (293). This, together with the reference in the poem to the "two mute swans" (293) who accompany the "lotos lady" seems, without laying too much emphasis on it to accord closely with the traditional Indian depiction of the Goddess Saraswathi, a parallel which indicates some awareness of Indian iconography.

In "Ruth" we have a reworking of an *Othello* motif linked to an image of India. The youth who first seduces and then deserts the British heroine Ruth, is suspected to be of Indian birth. Though this is finally smoothed over with a feeble assertion that "he spoke the English tongue" (153) the suggestion of strangeness and Otherness remains. As Othello had won Desdemona's heart through narration of his adventures, so does this youth proceed to win Ruth by his accounts:

```
Among the Indians he had fought,
And with him many tales he brought
Of pleasure and of fear
Such tales as told to any maid
By such a youth in the green shade
Were perilous to hear
```

(153)

Obviously, the suggestion of the exotic, the Not-Same is what holds the dangerous, even fatal allure. The English victim succumbs and pays the price for doing so, in being abandoned and left to die a mad woman.

Wordsworth has not specifically referred to his approval or otherwise of Britain's colonial enterprise in India or in Africa. But he does indicate in a letter to Captain Paley that he did possess a very clear concept of "the White Man's Burden." Not only is colonisation by Britain beneficial to the colonies, it is positively *undesirable* from Britain's own point of view.
As far as concerns ourselves and our security, I do not think that so wide a space of conquered lands is desirable and as a patriot, I have no desire for it. If I desire it, it is not for ourselves directly, but for the benefit of those unhappy nations whom we should rescue and whose prosperity would be reflected back on ourselves.

(1937: II 478)

Imperialism here is presented as a totally altruistic project, where Britain undertakes arduous conquests which do not even benefit her, for the sole purpose of rescuing unhappy nations. The moral dilemma is resolved quite comprehensively through a process which negates its existence—unstinted altruism, especially if undertaken when undesirable from a selfish perspective cannot be morally suspect.

The same concept of Imperial benevolence is elaborated by Wordsworth in the Irish context. As Vincent J. Cheng has amply demonstrated in *Joyce, Race and Empire*, England’s actions in Ireland were more often than not blueprints for those in her far flung colonies. The "asset" of a shared white skin did not save the Irish who were referred to as "white Negroes" and "white Chimpanzees" (Cheng 1995: 19; 33). Chitra Panikkar in discussing Joyce's depiction of Ireland's problems refers to "Ireland’s subjugated identity in the European world which keeps her forever colonised/provincial. The portrayal of Ireland's history in Joyce is shown to "allow vast spaces for the histories of [other] subjugated national identities" (Panikkar: 1996). References to Britain's policies in Ireland can to a great extent legitimately be read as statements on Imperial/Colonial activities in general.

From this perspective Wordsworth's elaborate comments in his letter of 11 June 1875 to Sir Robert Inglis are very revealing:

The condition of Ireland is and long has been wretched; lamentable is it to acknowledge that the mass of her people are so grossly ignorant and from that cause subject to such delusions and passions that they would surely destroy each other were it not for the restraint exercised upon them by

---

16 The *Irish/Oriental* connection motif is stressed by Byron also in his dedication of *The Corsair* to Thomas Moore.
Britain. This restraint it is that protects their existence, in a state which otherwise the course of nature would provide a remedy for, by reducing their numbers through mutual destruction. So that English civilisation may fairly be said to be the shield of Irish barbarism. If then these swarms of degraded people could not exist but through us, how much does this add to the awfulness of responsibility of England... English capital would flow into Ireland, with English persons to manage and apply it, English Arts, manners and aspirations—thus would the groveling peasantry be raised; they would become discontented and ashamed of their nakedness and ruggedness, of their peat bogs and their hovels and the destitution of household accommodation in which they breathe rather than live.

(1937: III 361)

Britain's disinterested responsibility, the animal imagery, poverty ascribed to the people's own "natural" inferiority, mutual destruction but for Britain's presence, barbarism as opposed to English civilisation, upliftment of the natives—substitute India or Africa for Ireland and the texture of the argument holds together just as easily.

The early Wordsworth, it must be admitted, was sometimes critical of British imperial policies; sometimes, (but very rarely) an echo of these criticisms can be traced in the later works also. In "Humanity" Wordsworth especially criticizes the legal double standards for home and abroad:

Shame that our laws at a distance still protect
Enormities which they at home reject!

(1936:393)

Book V|V| of The Excursion indulges in considerable criticism of the state of England's domestic affairs. The lack of true liberty and the extremely inequitable distribution of material and intellectual property were among the chief targets of attack. These often very bitter criticisms can justifiably give rise to the question—'How is an England who manages her own internal affairs so badly in any way qualified to rule and guide other countries?'

This question seems to have been anticipated and poetically answered by Wordsworth in his Sonnet XXI from "Poems dedicated to National Independence and
Liberty." The argument here is that British rule may not be an unmixed blessing, but despite all her faults, she is still the best choice since her enemies are so much worse:

England! The time is come when thou shouldst wean
Thy heart from its emasculating food
The truth should now be better understood;
Old things have been unsettled, we have seen
Fair seed time, better havest might have been
But for thy trespasses and at this day
If for Greece, Egypt, India and Africa
Aught good were destined, thou wouldst step between
England! All nations in this charge agree:
But worse, more ignorant in love and hate
Far, far more abject is thine enemy:
Therefore the wise pray for thee, though the freight
Of thy offences be a heavy weight.
Of grief, that Earth 's best hopes rest all with thee!

(my emphasis; 1936: 245)

England’s rule may even prevent good for Africa and India, but still she is the best available hope. Imperialism’s doublespeak or is the issue more complex? British Control, bad as it is, is so much better than that of the other European powers could be that it is to be tolerated. Of course, Europe has to figure, India, Africa et al (and in Europe, poor outdated Greece) cannot be dreamt of as managing on their own. Wordsworth elsewhere refers to "the flood of British freedom" (1936: 2441) and of liberty as "a refreshing incense from the West" which is to be wafted across to Asia and Africa (260). Liberty and Justice are the generous gifts of the West (here England) to the orient which is passively "willing" to receive them. Wordsworth did think that Britain herself could do with quite a lot of improvement, he still insists that she so much outranks all her competitors in the Imperial sweepstakes to remain the odds on favourite for guiding towards the Light a benighted Orient which could not do without an occidental mentor.

Finally, mention should be made of Wordsworth poem entitled "Address to my Infant Daughter Dora". The poem begins: "Hadst thou been of Indian birth" and goes on

---

17 Homi Bhabha states that many statements apparently dismissable as "imperialism’s double think" are in fact “sheer” desperate acknowledgement of an aporia in the inscription of empire” (1994: 129).
to list in detail the hardships such a birth would have entailed, mainly due to the ravages of nature which civilisation had not tamed. Indian infants are "thy unblest coevals", the English child being fortunate enough to be "warm clad and warmly housed." Indian (Oriental or Amerindian) children suffer in every respect, with even maternal instinct "there" being visualized as a "joyless tie of naked instinct." The poem ends on a note of fervent thanksgiving—"Happier, far happier is thy lot and ours" (1936: 136-37).

This, in plain terms is a celebration of having been fortunate enough to be born in Britain and avoid Indian birth. The Other is mostly an instinctual creature, shut out from the rarefied, rational pleasures which the British/European Self can claim as its birthright. It is doubly ironic that it is Wordsworth, the high priest of Nature, who is here considering a life shaped by natural influences to be so "unblest" in comparison with the more manmade ethos of Europe/England. This perhaps sums up a basic complexity with regard to the Other in an imperial context—despite fascination, temptation, unwilling admiration or fear, and even if it involves one in contradicting one's life-philosophy—the Self rejoices in its Selfhood and thanks its good fortune in not actually being the Other, which at best remains second best.

D

The 'East', by Byron's own testimony was the most valuable source of his poetic inspiration. In a letter to Thomas Moore, dated 17 November 1816 he says: "It is my intention to remain at Venice throughout the winter, as it has always been (next to the East) the greenest island of my imagination (Byron 1804: 136; my emphasis). The same idea is repeated in a letter to Murray, dated November 25, 1815: "Venice pleases me much, as I expected and always haunted me the most—after the East" (my emphasis; 358). This scrupulous privileging of the East over even Venice is of considerable significance. An examination of Byron's poetic references and prose statements with regard to the East do seem to force the admission that however much of an "Orientalist" he was, he cannot be clubbed with thorough going Orientalists such as Moore or Southey.
On the other hand, it would be Utopian to expect any individual to completely transcend the prejudices and stereotypes of his age, so as to come up with a totally "new" version. This paradoxical situation has led to considerably varied views on the Oriental dimension in Byron.

Apart from a few scattered references, the mention of Byron in Edward Said's *Orientalism* is restricted to a remark that: "Romantic writers like Byron and Scott consequently had a political vision of the Near Orient and a very combative awareness of how relations between the Orient and Europe would have to be conducted" (1978: 192). In his *Colonial Transactions*, Harish Trivedi flatly negates Said's statement: "In this unsubstantiated assertion, Said's geography is vague, his chronology is shaky and he has got hold of the wrong man as well" (1993: 112). Both Trivedi and Leask argue that Byron cannot be fitted into the conventional Orientalist paradigm. According to Trivedi:

> Byron does not seem to have 'produced' the orient in Edward Said's formulation... Indeed, Byron does not seem even to have subscribed to the *ineradicable distinction* between Western superiority and Eastern inferiority which is said by Said to be the essence of Orientalism.

(my emphasis; 1993: 116)

Trivedi concentrates on the "authenticity" of Byron's descriptions and the surprises, variations and complexities which attest his power to deconstruct stereotypes, even as he may seem superficially to be subscribing to them. From this perspective, Byron is practically exonerated from the charge of Saidean Orientalising.

Nigel Leask in *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* pursues a somewhat different argument to draw very much the same conclusion. According to Leask, Byron's Oriental poetry could be viewed from two distinct perspectives. In the first place, we see a business venture, a market aimed production strategy. From the second perspective Byron's sympathies were too liberated to allow him to rest content with 'mere Orientalism' and his *Eastern Tales* "finally chose a

---

18 Is the emphasis on "ineradicable" or on "distinction"? If on the former, a suggestion that Byron has managed "eradication" is problematic in itself.
transgressive path which represented a peculiarly contorted escape from their ideological impasse" (Leask, 1993: 16).

Perhaps a statement to the effect that Byron attempted to transgress contemporary stereotypes would be the best compromise, since complete success in such an endeavour is too idealistic to expect. Also, the very fact that Byron was alienated from British society may have led to some amount of negation of the notion of British superiority over the Orient in his works.

Despite the British colonial presence in India, Byron's East was primarily the Near East of Turkey and Asia Minor. It is interesting to note that John Drew's India and the Romantic Imagination which studies Coleridge and Shelley in detail, does not have even an index reference to Byron. Leask also reserves the Indian dimension for exhaustive study in relation to Shelley and confines Byron to the Near East. However, as Trivedi has demonstrated, it is possible to pick up quite a few references to India in Byron's poetic corpus. [Trivedi's list is built upon and enlarged in this analysis.] But apart from exploring the Indian references, considerable importance is given to the Orient as such in Byron's works, so as to tackle questions of Imperialism and the Other per se.

The one deliberate attempt at an "Indian" piece on Byron's part is entitled "Stanzas to a Hindoo Air"—a sentimental performance which has the refrain—"Oh! My lonely-lonely-lonely-pillow!" (Byron 1970: 111). It is hard to see in what specific way these lines were especially Indian, let alone "Hindoo." Trivedi's suggestion is that the poem was intended to be "a palpably exotic and un-English poetic production, so excessively tender so as to convey the impression that Byron sought fully in it to match the reputed sentimentalism and alliterative and iterative wordplay of the (so-called) Hindoo literature itself (1993: 102). The stanzas, at any rate (in a fashion similar to Shelley's "Indian Serenade") give us a picture of the conventional expectations from an image of Indian literature during the time.

There are a few references to India to be found in Byron's correspondence. Sheridan's famous "Begum Speech" is mentioned as the best oration of the time and Alexander's conquest is referred to in a letter to John Murray (1984: 237, 239). We also
learn that Byron's lack of personal contact with India was not due to any disinclination on his part. In a letter to his mother, dated November 2, 1808 Byron writes:

I wish you would enquire of Major Watson (who is an East Indian) what things will be necessary to provide for my voyage... I can easily get letters from Government to the Ambassadors, Consuls and also to the Governors at Calcutta and Madras

(1974: I, 122-23)

Byron further elaborates his plans for a voyage to India in a letter to Hanson (18 November 1808):

In the first place, I wish to study Indian and Asiatic policy and manners. I am determined to take in a wider field than is customary with travellers .... I have written to government for letters and permission to the (East India) Company, so you see I am serious.

(1974 I: 175)

It is interesting to note at this point that both Shelley and Keats had also made attempts to visit India, which were, like Byron's, unsuccessful. Byron's request was turned down by the government and he had to content himself with the Near East. We can only speculate as to what effect the proposed Indian journey would have had on his poetry if it had materialised.

The casual references to India in Byron's poetry are scattered widely over his works. In 'The Blues' a writer's fame is conveyed through the image of his works "reaching to the Ganges" (1970: 154). Both the Ganges and the Indus (160) as well as a "nabob" (166) find place in 'A Vision of Judgement'. The Giaour features "the insect queen of eastern spring / o'er emerald medows of Kashmeer" (256). In a note to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Byron bluntly states: "I do not think the honour of England much advanced by plunder, whether of India or Attica" (878). In Marino Falerio, Doge of Venice, a precious necklace is tellingly referred to as "an India in itself (424) and Venice is addressed as the city which had "opened India's wealth to Europe" (442). In the "Age of Bronze" we have a mention of Jews who 'waft a loan from Indus to the pole' (177).
"Brahmins" make an appearance in The Island as a simile for "gentle hearts" (3561). There are quite a few references to India in Sardanapalus—The Ganges figures twice (456, 457) in relation to Semiramis’ expedition to India. Bacchus' mythical conquest of India is referred to (456) as well as a "mirror" from India (471). "Hindoos" figure among "Greeks, Romans and Yankee Doodles" (624) in Beppo. In Canto III of Don Juan we have "Indian mats and Persian Carpets" (693); a Cashimire shawl figures in Canto V (719) and a maid in Canto VI is described as "dusk as India' (735). There is a mention of Sanskrit in Canto VIII (760) and in Canto IX we find mention of Nadir Shah's invasion of India (773) “Cashimere breeches” (774) and an "East Indian sunrise" (776). Canto XII has a reference to "ships from Inde" (800) and Brahmins appear in Canto XIII (816).

Trivedi also points out that through Cuvier there is a reference to the Indian view of creation in which one world succeeds another (773) and also an allusion to an image in the Bhagavat Geetha in the "mildly ironical" exclamation:

> What a curious way
> The whole thing is of clothing souls in clay

(798)

These references to a large extent may be referred to as "topical smattering" (Trivedi 1993: 104). They serve mainly to indicate the need for exotic images and the availability of India to fill that need. There are, however, a few more references which deserve to be looked at in slightly greater detail.

In the "Monody" on Sheridan's death, he is praised for having upheld the cause of India:

> When the loud cry of trampled Hindustan
> Arose to heaven in her appeal from man
> His was the thunder, his the avenging rod
> The wrath—the delegated voice of God!

(Byron 1970: 96)

There is a suggestion here of sympathy with India and a condemnation of British oppression which justifies an "appeal to heaven". Again, in "The Curse of Minerva", Britain's despoiling of Greece is condemned and as retribution, a rebellion in India is predicted:
Look to the East, where Ganges swarthy race
Shall shake your tyrant empire to its base
Lo! There rebellion rears her ghastly head
And glares the nemesis of native dead
Till Indus rolls a deep pурpereal flood
And claims his long arrears of northern blood
So may ye perish! Pallas, when she gave
Your free born rights, forbade ye to enslave

The suggestion that India and Greece are both wronged and the parallel drawn is instructive. The idea of liberty is paramount here, transcending for the moment, distinctions of race and locale, of East and West.

The Indian word 'Avtar' is used in a peculiarly English sense in the title of a poem—'the Irish Avtar' (109). A reference in Don Juan to 'the glowing India of the soul' confers a metaphysical sense on India, as an ideal image apart from its material reality. In Sardanapalus, there is a mention of Sati. The Ionian slave Myrhha demands:

And dost thou think
A Greek girl dare not do for love that which
An Indian widow braves for custom?

The rite itself seems to be romanticised here, if undertaken freely out of love, the bad part being the role of "custom". Credit is denied to the Indian widow who is the slave of tradition, but the Greek girl's image is enhanced.

At this stage we need to undertake an examination of those statements which may be considered part of Byron's "policy statement" in the East, in conjunction with the tracing of Indian references. There is no doubt that his Oriental settings were part of a well planned market strategy for Byron. He extends his advice on the poetic share market to Moore in a letter of 22 August 1813:

Stick to the East—the oracle De Stael told me it was the only poetical policy. The North, South and West have all been exhausted, but from the East we have nothing but Southey's unsaleables, these he has contrived to spoil... His personages don't interest, yours will. You have no competitor... The little I have done in that way is merely a
"voice in the wilderness" for you and if it has any success, that will also prove that the public are Orientalising and pave the way for you.

(by emphasis; 1974: III 101)

Byron obviously knew what he was talking about; as Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* enjoyed a stupendous contemporary success and earned its author the unprecedentedly vast sum of three thousand guineas.

It is true that Byron later deprecated his contribution to the taste of the day and tried to shrug off his *Eastern Tales* as amateur productions. In an 1812 letter, he condemns his earlier productions as "exaggerated nonsense which has corrupted the public taste" (1974: 161). While criticising those who put up contemporary productions against the classicism of Pope, Byron both inculpates and excuses himself in a simultaneous process:

I shall be told that amongst those, I have been (or it may be, still am) conspicuous—true and I am ashamed of it. I have been amongst the builders of this Babel attended by a confusion of tongues, but never among the envious destroyers of the classic temple of our predecessors.

(quoted in Leask 1993: 63)

Evidently, there is an effect of overkill in these strictures, but even then they should put us on our guard against assuming that Byron had "turned Turk" completely. The same idea, that composing Oriental verse is a facile and ephemeral pastime is reiterated poetically in *Beppo*:

Oh, that I had the art of easy writing,
What should be easy reading!....
Those pretty poems never known to fail
How quickly would I paint (the world delighting)
A Grecian, Syrian or Assyrian Tale,
And sell you, mix’d with western sentimentalism
Some samples of the finest Orientalism!

(1970: 629)

Leask aptly refers to this attitude as Byron's sense of "artistic shame" (1993: 63). Against this, however, must be set the fact that the East remained a positive focal point for Byron
and that except on occasions explicitly polemical, he does not indulge in privileging European or classical perspectives.

In a letter to Murray, 21 February 1820, responding to a suggestion that he write a book on the life and customs of the Italians, Byron says:

I have lived in their houses...and in the heart of their families...and in neither case do I feel myself authorized in making a book of them. Their morals are not your morals, their life is not your life, you will not understand it.

(1984:227)

This refusal to create a spectacle by exoticising or degenerating is occasionally extended to the Orient also. In his Eastern Tales, Oriental customs are detailed painstakingly, (Byron was proud of the authenticating circumstance of his having actually visited his locales, unlike Moore or Southey) but rarely are they coupled with value judgements. Customs which may appear fanatic from a European perspective are even shown to have exact parallels in Christian Europe. The Turkish ruler's murder of a slave girl who was unfaithful to him is revenged by her European lover in The Giaour, but he admits that he would have done the same in like circumstances:

Yet did he but what I had done
Had she been false to more than one.

(1970:261)

In The Corsair the Seyd's intended torture for his European rival Conrad is annotated thus:

Not much could Conrad of his sentence blame
His foe, if vanquished had but shared the same.

(1970:291)

Turks and Christians could both be villains, cruel and exacting, and there is nothing particularly Oriental about those vices. It is also possible to argue, as Trivedi has aptly done that Byron's Oriental descriptions are not overdone; and accounts of sacred objects
are presented without an undercurrent of dismissal, unlike, for example in Southey (Trivedi 1993: 114).

Byron has strongly expressed himself against despotism in all its forms and indicated that he was unlikely to let supposed essential difference serve as a justification for oppression. In his dedication of *The Corsair* to Moore, Byron draws the parallel between oppression in the East and in Ireland quite clearly:

> It is said ... I trust truly, that you are engaged in the composition of a poem whose scene will be laid in the East; none can do those scenes so much justice. *The wrongs of your own country*, the magnificent and fiery spirit of her sons, the beauty and feeling of her daughters may there be found; and Collins when he denominated his Oriental his Irish Eclogues was not aware how true, was a part of this parallel.

(my emphasis; 1970: 277)

The wrongs of oppression are wrongs here, wherever they be perpetrated—at home, nearby or far abroad. It is the idea of liberty which prevails over Byron's thought that renders him capable of drawing such parallels and that too, unlike Wordsworth, without emphasizing only the unsavoury aspects of both Ireland and the East as the essential ground of similarity.

"Freedom" was a pervading *Mantra* of Byron's creed. An unambiguous statement of this position is found in a journal entry; January 16, 1814: "The fact is riches are power and poverty is slavery all over the earth and one sort of an establishment is no better or worse for a people than another" (1984: 96). In *Don Juan*, Canto IX Byron states:

> I wish men to be free
> As much from mobs as kings-- from you and me.

(1970: 722)

" It may appear that Byron is arguing here that any government is as bad as the other and so imperial rule is no better/worse than any other system. But it must be noted that he *does* later concede a slight advantage to the Turks."
Byron condemns even his admired Napoleon for his change from popular leader to despot and in his "Ode from the French" comments:

Then he fell:--so perish all  
Who would men by man enthrall!  

(1970: 84)

In keeping with this concept of an ideal freedom, Britain's "glorious ventures" are deflated with the reference to Englishmen as people who "butchered half the earth and bullied the other" (1970: 788).

We may feel that this concept of freedom is qualified, that there is a tinge of prejudice in the 23 November 1813 Journal entry: "The Asiatics are not qualified to be republicans, but they have the liberty of demolishing despots, which is the next best thing" (1984: 88). But we must remember that Byron held a similar opinion of the Greeks, in whose cause he died fighting. In the Notes to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage Byron clearly indicates this opinion:

The Greeks will never be independent, they will never be sovereigns as heretofore, and God forbid they should! But they may be subjects without being slaves. Our colonies are not independent but they are free and such may Greece be hereafter.  

(my emphasis; 1970:88)

It must be mentioned that there is an almost incredibly facile optimism regarding Britain's colonies here, in sharp contrast to Byron's usual knowing stance.

An accusation of prejudice can be intensified on account of a letter in which Byron credits the persistent stereotype of the Turks as inveterate homosexuals. He writes to his mother: "you know that boys are not safe among the Turks" (1984: 231). As Trivedi points out with reference to Byron's own homosexual proclivity—"it was not only with the Turks that boys were not safe" (Trivedi 1993: 108). However, it must be noted that in his Eastern Tales Byron does not portray his Orientals in keeping with this stereotype and also that statements which testify to human "sameness" and a universal right to freedom are far more characteristic of him.
In a letter to Henry Drury, 3 May 1810, Byron clearly states:

I see not much difference between ourselves and the Turks, save that we have foreskins and they none, that they have long dresses and we short and that we talk much and they talk little. In England the vices in fashion are whoring and drinking and in Turkey sodomy and smoking.

(1984: 36)

Yet another letter to Francis Hogdson in the same vein deflates the rhetoric of Christianity's superior moral claims:

Talk you of Gallilelism? Show me the effects—are you better, wiser, kinder by your precepts? I will bring you ten Mussalmans shall shame you in all-good will towards men, prayer to God and duty to their neighbours. And is there a Talpoin or a Bonze who is not superior to a fox hunting curate?

(1984: 53)

The segregation of men based on religion is indicted in Byron's poetry also. In 'The Prayer of Nature' he asks rhetorically:

Shall each pretend to reach the skies,
Yet doom his brother to expire
Whose soul a different hope supplies
Or doctrines less severe inspires?

(1970: 42)

This concept is further enforced in The Siege of Corinth:

But far away
scattered over the isthmus lay
Christian or Moslem, which be they?
Let their mothers see and say!

(1970: 330)

As Trivedi remarks, "with his blithely sceptical temperament, Byron could not under any circumstances have wished to proselytise...the one thing Byron as an Orientalist is not is a missionary in disguise" (1993: 118).

In keeping with his main argument, Nigel Leask concentrates on Byron's "Anxiety of Empire," his "regret of imperialism as the harbinger of social and cultural
corruption, the nemesis of social order" (Leask 1993: 16-17). According to Leask, the main anxiety in Byron's Oriental works is the fear of "turning Turk"—this does not really hold when we remember that Byron did not have words bad enough for his own country. He was more likely to regard a disruption of his "identity" at that level as a change for the better. To let a Journal entry speak for itself: "I have seen mankind in various countries and find them equally despicable. If anything, the balance is in favour of the Turks" (1984: 47). One who wrote this may be accused of bitterness or snobbery or misanthropy but surely not of an especial fear of or contempt for the orient.

However, it is not possible to endorse an opinion that at an imaginative level, Byron manages to overcome Orientalist binaries in his poetry. Trivedi quite correctly points out that in The Corsair, the Christian Byronic hero, Conrad "is not allowed to always prevail over all Eastern Muslim antagonists" without "crucial variations" (Trivedi 1993: 116). But when it is pointed out as a positive feature that in The Bride of Abydos in which there are no white characters, the Oriental hero Selim is quite Byronic, one must insist that some emphasis be laid on the fact that there are no white characters, a quite necessary condition for the Byronising of the non-western hero.

Leask argues that Byron often overturns the very paradigms within which he operates. For example, in The Corsair we have a "brown woman saving a white man from brown men" (Leask 1993: 51) and in both The Bride of Abydos and The Corsair the hero is defeated precisely because he is not Oriental enough due to his troublesome absorption of European chivalric codes (Leask 1993). Leask seems to regard this as a thoroughly positive strategy, but this is a stand which invites argument. It is true that the codes of European chivalry are shown to be grandiose and less than useless—when pitted against an Oriental enemy who does not acknowledge these codes. It seems rather farfetched to argue that if non European tactics (removed from the honour ideal) have to be adopted to succeed in a non European Oriental world, which does not acknowledge those ideals, such a depiction is in favour of the Orient. The argument that Oriental methods have to be applied for settling Oriental enemies is surely not so much a deflating of European ideals than an indictment of their unsuitability in an Oriental milieu.
Leask identifies a "Utopian moment" in *The Island* where mutineers find solace on a tribal island. Their arrival on the island is described by Byron in ecstatic terms:

> The white man landed! Need the rest be told?
> The new world stretch'd its dusk hand to the old
> Each was to each a marvel and the tie
> Of wonder warmed to better sympathy.

(my emphasis; 1970: 355)

History would insist that the "rest" does "need to be told" after the "white man lands". We know from sad evidence that such landings are followed by consequences very different from the ideal scenario described by Byron. (The usual sagas of exploitation and appropriation which normally follow the "landing" is brilliantly analysed in *Marvellous Possessions* by Stephen Greenblatt.)

According to Leask, *Lara* in which the Western hero returns from the East thoroughly corrupted and destroyed, sadly represents things as they are; *The Island* "offers a fragile version of hope in terms of the relation between a predatory Europe and its colonial Others ... in a Utopian space where the violent dichotomies of culture, class and gender are briefly suspended" (Leask 1993: 67). To illustrate this, Leask quotes the lines which depict the "hero". Torquil's education by the simple values of the South Sea islanders who:

> Did more than Europe's discipline had done
> And civilised civilisation's son.

(Byron 1970: 355)

and describes this as "a reversal of the moral discourse of colonialism" (Leask 1993: 66).

This can be accepted only if we consider the civilising mission as the sole component of the colonial discourse; a position which is very far removed from the actual state of affairs. The Nature/Culture dichotomy for instance, the need for over civilised, Europe to be revived by "simpler" colonies—these concepts were equally important parts of the imperial discourse. The dichotomies of culture/nature are not transcended in a vision where simple South Sea Islanders "civilise civilisation's son"; in fact, they are reinforced—Europe is civilised, the Orient is closer to nature. It is true that nature is privileged over European civilisation, but (as will be further elaborated in relation to...
changing the locus of power in a binary opposition *does not* force the opposition itself to collapse, it is merely perpetuated with a varying emphasis; difference itself is not reduced, let alone eradicated.

In his 'Ode on Venice' Byron refers to Glory, Empire and Freedom as a "Godlike Triad!" (1970: 105). Empire *if reconciled* with freedom (obviously not possible for the colonised countries) was not to be despised. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the battle of Marathon is used as a symbol for the East-West conflict and the West is quite clearly identified with Freedom and Asia with despotism.20

> The flying Mede, his shaftless broken bow  
> The fiery Greek, his red pursuing spear;  
> .... What sacred trophy marks the hallow'd ground  
> Recording Freedom 's smile and Asia 'stears'?  
> (my emphasis; 1970: 208)

At the same time, the following lines from *Don Juan*, Canto XII seem to emphasize a conscious opposition to racism and the colour bar as also a belief in positive cultural relativism:

> But if I *had been* at Timbuctoo, there  
> No doubt, I should be told that black is fair.  
> It is. I will not swear that black is white.  
> But I suspect in fact that white is black  
> And the whole matter rests upon eyesight.  
> (1970: 807)

This does indicate that Byron was perfectly aware that standards of excellence were constructed and relative. We have also seen that Byron far more often welcomed the embrace of the Orient than he feared it. Yet, even this great degree of self awareness could not render the Orientalist binaries completely redundant in his *poetry—*a tribute indeed to their inbuilt strength.

Byron’s specific comments with regard to India are few, yet he merits discussion by his significant presence in the imperial context *per se*. To reiterate my opening arguments, we are justified in claiming that Byron did *attempt* transcendence and  

---

20 This *does* seem to stand against Trivedi’s assertion in *Colonial Transactions* that the East/West dichotomy *was not* majorly part of Byron’s championing of the Greek cause. Of course, the time gap
transgression of stereotypical binaries. Irrespective of the degree of success or failure, one can give credit to an attempt which itself was rare among contemporaries. Byron does manage to turn many colonial stereotypes upside down, the fact that he cannot demolish them may be more indicative of their strength rather than of his weakness. Yet, we should not lose sight of the fact that to expect complete success in such an attempt is Utopian. However, the degrees of conformity did vary and it is greatly to Byron's credit that he displayed practically the widest range of variations conceivable.

In a letter to T.J. Hogg dated 22 October 1821, Shelley writes:

I have some thoughts, if I could get a respectable appointment of going to India or anywhere where I might be compelled to enter into an entirely new sphere of action. But this, I dare say is a mere dream and I shall have no opportunity of making it a reality, but finish as I have begun.

(Shelley 1964 II 361-62)

As we know, the dream did remain a dream. But it is interesting to note that Shelley considered India both the source of action and inspiration by virtue of its novelty. As in Byron's case, red tapism put an end to what could have been one of the most exciting and productive encounters in the history of Indo-British relationships. Shelley had enquired about Indian employment to his friend Thomas Love Peacock, who worked for the East India Company. He received a reply firmly and completely negating the idea. This put an end to Shelley's material and practical Indian aspirations. Apart from his association with Peacock, Shelley's desire to visit India must have been stirred (as Nigel Leask also points out) by the accounts of his cousin, Thomas Medwin who was employed in India. In a between the Marathon war and Byron's personal knowledge of contemporary Turks cannot be denied its significance.
letter to Peacock, 12 July 1820, Shelley records that he has "read or written nothing lately, having been much occupied by my sufferings and by Medwin who relates wonderful and interesting things of the interior of India" (1964: I 242). Later, Shelley passes commendatory remarks on Medwin's Indian writings and also writes to a publisher recommending them (1964: I 183; 246). It is reasonably safe to assume that Medwin's descriptions contributed their fair share to Shelley's ideas and images of India.

Apart from such personal contacts, Shelley also seems to have read the most significant works related to India in circulation at that time. In his correspondence, we have references to his having read Edward Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1964: I 153); Sir William Jones' *Works* (172); Robertson's *Historical Disquisition* (183); *Lalla Rookh* (191) and Mill's *History* (202). On August 18, 1812, Shelley writes to James Henry Lawrence that "your *Empire of the Nairs* which I read this Spring succeeded in making me a perfect convert to its doctrines" (1964: I 323). He recommends *The Curse of Kehama* to Elizabeth Hitchner (334) and calls it his "favourite poem" (336). Southey's poem obviously had considerable impact on Shelley as we find him quoting from it frequently in his letters. Reference is also made to Sydney Owenson's *The Missionary*, an Indian tale which seems to have impressed Shelley. The work is highly praised in three distinct letters (1964: I 105, 107, 112). In his letters, Shelley also refers to "Brahma" (108) to "Camdeo, the Indian God of mystic love" (123) to "Pariahs" (137) "Hindoos as witnessesses" and Arrian's *Historia Indica* (545-46). In *A Philosophical View of Reform* Shelley uses the idea of caste in India to strengthen his argument:

> Will you render by your torpid endurance this condition of things of permanent as the system of castes in India, by which the same horrible injustice is perpetrated in another form?

(1953:254)

The three specifically 'Indian' poems of Shelley are *Zeinab and Kathema* (which will be analysed in detail later on), 'The Indian Serenade' and 'Fragments of an unfinished Drama'. A few other references to India are scattered over his poetic corpus. 'The Indian Serenade' (1970: 580) seems to share with Byron's 'Lines to a Hindoo Air'
an idea that assonance, use of alliteration, a surfeit of melancholy and melodrama and repetition had something particularly 'Indian' about them. The poem consists of three stanzas culminating in overflowing sentimental melancholy. One is led to remark that if this was considered a fair specimen of Indian literature, then James Mill's condemnation seems excusable enough. The 'Fragments of an Unfinished Drama' (1970: 482-88) feature as dramatis personae an Indian Enchantress, an Indian youth and lady. References are made to Indian topography to create the necessary ambience.

In "Charles the First", Shelley refers to the "azure depth of Indian seas" (1970: 492) an Indian isle "figures in the "Triumph of Life" (519) and "the tube rose which peoples some Indian dell" is mentioned in 'The Woodman and the Nightingale' (562). A fragment entitled 'I would not be a king' contains the lines:

Would he and I were far away  
Keeping flocks on Himalay.

(649)

In 'The Sensitive Plant' we have references to a "basket of Indian woof and scented Indian plants" (562), Brahma figures in Canto X of The Revolt of Islam along with "Buddh" and also "Indian breezes," (131, 137) and "Seeva" makes an appearance in Queen Mab (788). Hellas contains references to an "Indian slave" (452) "Indian gold" (465) and "Indian superstition" (480). Prometheus Unbound is set in "A Vale in the Indian Caucasus" (207) and so there are quite a few references to Indian landscapes. In Alastor also, the poet's dream vision takes place in "the vale of Kashmir" (18). In a Letter to Maria Gisborne there is a reference to Peacock having "turned Hindoo" (360) and in Peter Bell the Third "East Indian Madeira" is referred to (354). A very early untitled fragment describes a deer dying among "Indian rocks" (808). There is a reference to Sati in "Rosalind and Helen" where Rosalind asserts her fidelity to her suspicious husband:

In truth, the Indian on the pyre  
Of her dead husband, half consumed  
As well might there be false, as I  
To those abhor'r'd embraces doomed  
Far worse than the fire's brief agony.

(175)
It is of course, evident that these brief references do not justify Quinet's description of Shelley as "completely Indian" (quoted in Schwab 1984: 63). We are led to conclude that Quinet based his statement on something more abstract than specific references to India; on an "Oriental tone" as Nigel Leask calls it (Leask 1993: 71) in Shelley's poetry. John Drew and Leask have undertaken two erudite though widely varying readings of Shelley's Indian dimension in *India and the Romantic Imagination* and *British Romantic Writers and the East*.

Drew's central theme is that of an "ideal image of India used as an organising principle" around which to speculate about the nature of imaginative literature (1987: ix). In keeping with this Drew argues that "in *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley projects on to a 'vale in the Indian Caucasus' a pattern perfectly identical with that elaborated in the mythology of Kashmir" (1987: 233). He also states:

> The Indian setting of *Prometheus Unbound*, faintly discernible as an ultimate veil, serves to indicate that what might pass for an Indian influence is a recognition within the Imagination of India as an appropriate image for that mystical imageless state for which the Imagination is itself but an image.

(1987:281)

It is necessary to state here itself that this analysis holds that Drew's mystic idealism, is, to put it mildly, somewhat out of place when we consider the historical fact that Britain *did have* a colony in India, something of which Shelley obviously was not unaware, though it is firmly and completely evicted from Drew's scheme of things.

Nigel Leask notes the curious fact that "nowhere" (practically nowhere, *Zeinab and Kathema* which Leask dismisses as "unremarkable" is an exception) in Shelley's vehement tirades for liberty and against tyranny is the Indian empire referred to specifically and constructs his theory around this omission. He sees in Shelley "a liberal fantasy" which "represents a wish fulfillment of rational Universalism exempted from the violence which marks the real ambivalence of colonial discourse" (Leask 1993: 78). In other words, Shelley was speaking about India without actually doing so; his Utopianism temporarily gaining the upper hand over both imperial guilt and anxiety though they
remain and surface on unexpected occasions. Leask’s argument is self consciously political and well documented. His insights inform this analysis in many ways, despite disagreements—mainly regarding the sidelining of *Zeinab and Kathema* and specific interpretations of *Alastor* and *Prometheus Unbound*.

*Zeinab and Kathema* (written in 1811 and included in the *Esdaile Poems; 1966*) is certainly "early". But there is a gap of only 3 years between this work and *Alastor* which Leask analyses in detail. Given the specific Indian content of the poem, this ignoring sets up an uneasy aporia, all the more intensified because it specifically contradicts some of Leask's central assumptions—the lack of direct reference to India and the anxiety of "infection" from India for example.

*Zeinab and Kathema* is specifically set in India and deals directly with the violence of the Imperial enterprise. The narrative concerns the Indian, Kathema, whose lady love Zeinab, along with other women, is carried off to slavery and prostitution in England. After many hardships, Kathema manages to reach England only to be greeted by Zeinab's corpse swinging from the gibbet as a punishment for rebellion. The passionate ire which Shelley directs against the inhuman practices of his countrymen in their colonies as well as the contrasting pictures of England and India; with the balance heavily in India's favour are significant in this poem. The English colonisers are characterised as "Christian murderers".

Yes! they had come with their holy book to bring
Which God's own sons' apostles had compiled
That charity and peace and love might spring
Within a world by Gods' blind ire defied

The Christian murderers overran the plain
Ravaging, burning and polluting all.
Zeinab was reft to grace the robbers' land
Each drop of kindred blood stained the invaders' brand.

(1966:97)

The claims of colonisation contributing to the moral and material upliftment of the colonised people are sharply ridiculed by exposing the depravity and hypocrisy of the colonisers themselves:
But rapine and war and treachery rushed before
Their hosts and murder dyed Kathema's bower red.
(1966: 97)

Shelley also refers to "Christian rapine" and to "gold—the Christian's God"—satisfying his atheistic and reformist tendencies at the same time. It is also interesting to note in passing that India here is obviously fabulously wealthy; Kathema easily and casually hands around "heaps" of gold to gain passage to England.

In his zeal to expose the depravity and hypocrisy of his countrymen colonisers, Shelley idealises his Kashmir in this poem to serve as a contrast even in topographical and climatic terms:

Yet Albion's changeful skies and chilling wind
The change from Cashmire's vale might well denote
There heaven and earth are ever bright and kind
Here blights and storms and damp ever float
While hearts are more ungenial than the zone
Gross, spiritless, alive to no pangs but their own
There, flowers and fruits are for ever fair and ripe
Autumn there mingles with the bloom of spring
And forms unpinched by frost or hunger's gripe
Here woe on all but wealth has set its foot
Famine, disease and crime even wealth proud gates pollute

(my emphasis, 1966: 99)

The balance of climatic conditions and of physical and moral advantages, however, unrealistically seems to be totally in India's favour here. It would be a natural assumption at this point that in Shelley's opinion "infection" was more likely to be blown from England to India and not vice versa.

However, Leask argues that "anxiety of Empire" in Shelley manifested itself at the physical level as "the fear of an elephantistic, slave borne disease, returning to infect the masters of space, of the 'external world'" (Leask 1993: 154). Nora Crook and Derek Guiton in Shelley's Venomed Melody indicate that Shelley was influenced by William Jones' conception of Elephantiasis/Syphilis as a disease "peculiar to climates" and so occurring in places like India, Africa and the Caribbean from where it could spread into Europe (Crook 1986: 91). The authors append several instances of Shelley's fear of this
EastAVest Indian disease and its manifestations. This well authenticated physical fear is reworked by Leask into a psychological (psychopathological?) anxiety of Empire. Such an argument seems at odds with the explicit Kashmir—Healthy/Britain—Unhealthy stance of Zeinab and Kathema. If Shelley had any such fear at the time, he masks it very successfully in this poem. Yet, the anxiety can be traced in Shelley's later works. It could be either assumed that the pathology of anxiety developed along with increased reading and awareness or that the contradiction is but another aspect of the essential ambivalence of Shelley's stance vis-à-vis Empire.

Among Shelley's major poetic works, Alastor and Prometheus Unbound share at least a nominal Indian setting. The Revolt of Islam does not have even that. Yet, it is possible, as Leask has demonstrated to read all these texts quite convincingly in the light of the colonial enterprise in India. Edward Said has referred to the Orient as an "imaginative geography" and as "a stage on which the whole East is confined" (Said 1978: 59, 63). Using this concept, Leask argues that "we should be prepared to find a certain interchangeability in Romantic representations of the various Asian cultures" (Leask 1993: 75). With specific reference to Shelley:

The Lebanon of The Assassins, the Istanbul of The Revolt of Islam or the Kashmir of Alastor are easily identifiable one with another, as indeed are terms in which Shelley castigates Islamic, Brahminical (or for that matter, Christian) despotism, superstition and sensuality.

(Leask 1993: 75)

This interchangeability enables us to see the colonial context as informing Shelley's references to the East as such.

In Alastor or the Spirit of Solitude the poet protagonist travelling to India from an obstacle ridden Europe is granted a vision of his female prototype; ideal alter ego; which in the denouement proves to be dangerously indeterminate. Shelley traces in detail the path followed by his protagonist on this "Eastward Ho!" mission:

The poet wandering through Arabic
And Persia and the wide Carmanian waste
And o'er the aerial mountains which pour down
Indus and Oxus from their icy caves
In joy and exultation held his way
Till in the vale of Cashmere, for within
Its loneliest dell, where odorous plants entwine
Beneath the hollow rocks a natural bower
Beside a sparkling rivulet he stretched
His languid limbs.

(Shelley 1970: 18)

It is in this "Vale of Cashmere" that the veiled maid—who indicates both insatiate desire and wish fulfillment—makes her appearance.

Joseph Raban has pointed out that the path traced by Shelley's poet:

closely approximates that of Alexander the Great during the triumphant years between his initial conquests in the Near East and his glorious extension of his empire beyond the borders of the Persian domains.

and also that the other source of Alastor's journey could be the invasion of India by Bacchus/Dionysius (quoted in Leask 1993: 124). The suggestion of penetrating the East, whether in search of a female vision or of territorial expansion, is present in this trajectory. The East, at the very least, is presented as an area open to penetration and exploration. Also, the "vision" provided in India—although temporarily functioning as an ideal—finally leads to the poet's utter disintegration and degeneration.

The presentation of the "vision" as sensuously female is of obvious significance. As Rana Kabbani has pointed out:

The European was led into the East by sexuality, but the embodiment of it in a woman or a young boy. He entered an imaginary harem when entering the metaphor of the Orient, weighed down by inexpressible longings.

(Kabbani 1986: 67)

"Inexpressible longings" are exactly what motivate the Alastor poet. And his attempts to express them result in non-poetic terms only in an "Ouboun" effect—an illustration of what Homi Bhabha calls "the archaic nonsense of colonial cultural articulation" (Bhabha 1994: 131).
The vision the *Alastor* protagonist receives in the Orient is both the female other and the Self—"herself a poet" who was singing "themes" and "thoughts most dear to him" (Shelley 1970: 18)—his mouthpiece as Cythna in *The Revolt of Islam* is Laon's. The gender motif here does complicate the issue of ideological and cultural assimilation to a certain extent. In Leask's argument:

> The question of cultural difference becomes entangled with that of sexual difference and a binary opposition, which is almost a cliche in Orientalist discourse is problematized by Shelley's *manifest feminism*.

(my emphasis; Leask 1993: 120)

Manifest feminism? Surely this is too commendatory a term to bestow on the poetic creation of an unutterably sensuous female figure—who in a psychological explanation repeats the poet's thoughts, in Orientalist terms, represents the light of European sensibility through negation of an Oriental identity, and at the crudest Freudian level could (as Leask himself remarks) be a "wet dream?" One should not underestimate the power of cliches—a critical attempt to acclaim their subversion can easily fall back into cliche itself.

Apart from the debatable claim of "feminism" Leask does argue that Shelley's veiled maid "represents a narcissistic discovery of the Same" (1993: 127). [The question of an inevitable coupling of the Other with the Same and narcissism is discussed in the section on Keats.] However, Shelley in Leask's argument is "rescued" from this narcissistic assimilation through recourse to "ambivalence" (128). There are pitfalls in the valorization of ambivalence. At present, the focus is only on analysing which side of the equation Shelleyan ambivalence ends up in effect.

It is in the context of "manifest feminism" that the *Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound* have to be interpreted; also keeping in view the issue of ambivalence. Leask does admit that in *The Revolt of Islam* "a manifest feminism is undone by the poem's investment in a discourse of latent imperialism" (1993: 131). But in the context of a wish fulfilment fantasy of self-motivated revolt in the East, which would establish European values, the very question of feminism is suspect. Even as she
initiates the revolution Cythna is the mouthpiece of Laon, active only when he is incapacitated. The moment he recovers, she all but regresses into passivity; except for an exhilarating moment where she is again the rescuer. In an almost ludicrous switchover, after the rescue, the two change places and Cythna has to be protected, unable even to find food for herself. Also, her final arrival to burn herself with Laon can definitely be read as a reworking of the Sati motif. Reworkings rarely maintain exact parallels with the original and Leask’s suggestion that Shelley "suppresses the possibility" (1993: 128) of such a reading—presumably by having Laon alive on Cythna's arrival—is no reason to avoid the reading itself. After all, Shelley suppresses the entire Indian dimension (with Zeniab and Kathema being practically the sole exception in his poetic corpus) and all critics who undertake a colonial reading have unanimously ignored this attempt at suppression. The ambivalence of the entire process does indicate implication to a large extent—suppression is rarely the psychological outcome of a clear conscience.

Before proceeding to a brief analysis of this aspect in Prometheus Unbound it is appropriate to consider two prose texts by Shelley—the fragment entitled The Assassins and the tract—A Philosophical View of Reform. There is no specific mention of India whatsoever in the former text and the latter contains what is Shelley’s most explicit and longest comment on India. Yet, the two are connected by the shared feature of ambivalence.

In The Assassins (as figured in Leask’s central argument) the same theme as in The Revolt of Islam can be seen. The Assassins, are Orientals, they are also European revolutionaries. They colonise themselves, breaking away from "human institutions" (Shelley 1951: 160) and find the ideal peace to set up a “colony”—the valley of Bethzatanai which was now empty—“the men of elder days had inhabited this spot” (1951: 162). As Leask brilliantly phrases it: "the valley of the Assassins is conveniently devoid of human habitation, so an egalitarian society can be established without the perennial problem of real colonialism—namely what to do with the natives" (my emphasis; Leask 1993: 76). There is no arguing with the existence of ambivalence here or with the trope of India as "an oxymoronic figure…the site of a revolution which is also a form of imperial domination" (Leask 1993: 79). The problem lies in the final valorization
of Shelley's ambivalence (especially through *Prometheus Unbound*) into special status. After all, (though perhaps not with anything approaching Shelley's level of suppressed guilt) James Mill had been saying very much the same thing—the necessity for imperial domination to pave the way for progressive reform. As the chapter on Mill indicates, his thesis was not lacking in its own brand of ambivalence.

A *Philosophical View of Reform* and *Prometheus Unbound* have to be brought forward before the argument can be carried any further. The lengthy passage in the former text, given its explicit reference to India needs to be quoted in full:

> Revolutions in the political and religious state of the Indian peninsula seem to be accomplishing and it cannot be doubted but the zeal of the missionaries of what is called the Christian faith will produce beneficial innovation there even by the application of dogmas and forms of what is here an outworn incumbrance. The Indians have been enslaved and cramped in the most severe and paralysing forms which were ever devised by man; some of this new enthusiasm ought to be kindled among them to consume it and even if the doctrines of Jesus do not penetrate through the darkness of that which those who profess to be his followers call Christianity, there will yet be a number of social forms modelled upon those European feelings from which it has taken its colour substituted to those according to which they are at present cramped and from which when the time for complete emancipation shall arrive, their disengagement may be less difficult and under which their progress to it may be the less imperceptibly slow. Many native Indians have acquired, it is said a competent knowledge in the arts and philosophy of Europe, and Locke and Hume and Rousseau are familiarly talked of in Brahminical society. *But the thing to be sought is that they should as they would if they were free attain to a system of arts and literature of their own.*

(my emphasis; Shelley 1953: 224-25)

One can hardly ask for a better example of ambivalence. The entire passage is tortured between the awareness that imperialism is domination and the equally strong conviction that the East *has* to be "reformed". Leask sums up the ideological impasse:
But perhaps the most remarkable thing about Shelley's passage is the awkwardness of its last sentence, and in particular the faltering unpunctuated conditional 'as they would if they were free'. The main body of the text has described a 'revolutionary' liberation from the straight-jacket of Brahminism, albeit a gradual one, the last sentence is forced, surreptitiously to admit that the European values which are to free them are also those which enslave them. Phrases like 'complete emancipation' become by this token problematic, emancipation from Brahmins or from the British? What are we to think of a revolution which enslaves rather than liberates or a discourse of revolution which admits that it is also a discourse of domination?

(my emphasis; Leask 1993: 119)

Again, there is no question regarding the ambivalence and the encapsulation of it is sharply focussed. There is an elision here however which has to be noted. Shelley would have had no problem with "a revolution which enslaves rather than liberates". He would have easily have declared it no revolution at all. The problem lay in the fact that from Shelley's European though radical perspective, the colonial process enslaved as it liberated. The process was seen as simultaneous, the dichotomy from that perspective, inbuilt.

At this point, a certain other brief reference in the same A Philosophical View of Reform merits mention. Speaking of the necessity of not postponing reform Shelley writes:

The strongest argument, perhaps for the necessity of Reform is the inoperative and unconscious abjectness to which the purposes of a considerable mass of the people are reduced. They neither know nor care—they are sinking into a resemblance with the Hindoos and the Chinese who were once men as they are.

(Shelley 1953: 257)

Unfortunately, this is clear enough; the defence of ambivalence is inadmissible. "Who were once men"—the question of what the "Hindoos and the Chinese" now are is better left unasked. There is an awareness here of the "truth" of imperialism—a constructed,
unstable, biased "truth" and yet a powerful one—and it is the fight against this "truth" that gives rise to the ambivalence. If one did not believe in this truth—part of which is the inferiority myth—at all, there would be no problem. But since there is belief, however unwilling—there is an almost unavoidable tinge of bad faith in the denials. "As they would if they were free"—Shelley "knows" this is false—if the Indians were free—i.e., from the British—they could not develop their own "system of arts and literature" which would in anyway be comparable to that which could be offered by the enslaving liberation of Empire. As long as this conviction persists, the ambivalence prefigures not guilt but subconscious complicity in hiding/denying what is actually held to be "true".

"And the Celt knew the Indian" runs a powerful line in *Prometheus Unbound*—optimistic and encompassing at first glance. The bad faith, the denial—even this poem which along with Byron's *The Island* Leask singles out for its Utopian moments is not free from them. The stereotypes may be seen to have been reversed—not dismantled—in *Prometheus Unbound*. The male European figure Prometheus has a more "passive" role as opposed to the "active" presence of Asia, especially in the visit to Demogorgon. [Drew points out the resemblance between Shelley's Demogorgon and the Indian Seshnaga and also that Shelley follows the Indian method of "describing" Demogorgon and through him the supreme Being entirely in negatives (1987: 264).]²¹

It is true enough as Leask points out that Prometheus' presence in the East is one of captivity and bondage and not one of conquest (1993: 143). But the whole question of "action" has to be rethought in the context of this poem. Prometheus' revoking of the curse is action, it is the one positive action which can set the chain of events leading to

²¹ Demogorgon is "described" as:

I see a mighty darkness
Filling the seat of power, and rags of gloom
Dart round, as light from the meridian sun
Ungazed upon and shapeless, neither limb
Nor form, nor outline yet we feel it is
A living spirit.

(Shelley 1970: 236)

In answer to Asia's questions on the Supreme Being, Demogorgon replies:

If the abysm
Could vomit forth its secrets
... but a voice

Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless. (my emphasis; 1970: 238).
Jupiter's deposition in motion. Asia's 'action' on the other hand consists primarily of "being educated", of "receiving knowledge." The active/passive dichotomy has so many shades here that it cannot be used to suggest that the female/male; Asia/Europe binaries have been overthrown.

Leask clearly states that Shelley was an advocate of liberal imperialism which he describes as "displaced revolution" (1993: 6). But he still insists that though "much of Shelley's writing is carried by the force of the stereotypical binary oppositions, West/East, male/female, reason/imagination, it is apparent that to reverse the power current in any one pair upsets the general economy of equivalences" (Leask 1993: 121-22). It needs to be insisted on (as has already been done in the case of Byron) that a reversal (that too theoretical) of the structure does not collapse binary oppositions or even "upset" them; it merely re-presents them in a more subtle fashion. If Prometheus Unbound does attempt to carry its argument without resorting to the stereotypical passive female Orient, the attempt is in itself subverted by the ambivalence regarding the very concept of action within the poem. A simple active/passive binary would have been much easier to handle than what we actually have.

It is possible to agree, that Shelley, with his undoubted radicalism was searching for a voice to say what no other contemporary British writer even dreamed of saying. Namely that the colonial encounter need not exhaust the possibilities of the meeting of different cultures" (my emphasis; Leask 1993: 169). But the point is that the search stays at the level of a search, precisely because Shelley was fighting against what he unfortunately "knew"; the unsavoury truth of the need for colonialism. "And the Celt knew the Indian" (Shelley 1970: 238)—the term "know" is invested with a boundless optimism. But the optimism is forced against the clear knowledge that it is hardly justified by any actual scenario which resulted when the West came to "know" the East. The parallel with Byron's "And civilized civilisation's son" (1970: 355) and "The white man landed! Need the rest be told?" (1970: 355) is glaringly obvious.

Prometheus Unbound ends on a highly idealistic note where forgiveness, endurance, love and courage are eulogized by Demogorgon as follows:
This, like thy glory, Titan is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free
This is alone, Life, Joy, *Empire* and Victory.

(my emphasis; Shelley 1970: 268)

Unfortunately, what is described above is *not* Empire, as is well exemplified by Britain's Indian Empire, and as Shelley could not but have known, it could never be Empire and no amount of poetical idealism would suffice to make it so. To transcribe "Empire" so as to subvert its actual effect is also to elide its material reality for the sake of poetical consistency. Shelley's search for an alternative vision can be commended, but it has to be borne in mind that one has to stop short of valorising ambivalence since the *acceptance* of the structural imperatives of the imperial discourse was the factor responsible for self subversion.

When it comes to discussing the effect of political realities on literary production, Keats has often been treated as a special case. Nigel Leask, in this context, qualifies Keats with the term "even". "History is once again on the agenda and the political and ideological concerns of poets like Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and *even* Keats are now read as being constitutive of their poetry than merely background material" (my emphasis; Leask 1991: 11). Of course, the 'even' is justified to a certain extent when we consider that the explicit dismissal of history as distinct from mythology was a significant part of Keats' poetic credo. Whether it is completely justified is a question I will return to at the end of this section.

Paul A. Cantor in *Creature and Creator* draws attention to the following lines from *Endymion* as indicating that "Keats was not temperamentally suited to traditional epic themes and he explicitly rejected the subject of war in favour of the more lyric theme of love (Cantor 1985: 166):
Hence, pageant history! Hence gilded cheat!
Swart planet in the universe of deeds!

But wherefore this? What care though owl did fly
About the great Athenian admiral’s mast?
*What care though striding Alexander past*
*The Indus with his Macedonian numbers?*
Though Ulysses tortured from his slumbers
The gutted Cyclops, what care?—Juliet leaning
Amid her window flowers, sighing—weaning
Tenderly her fancy from its maiden snow
Doth more avail than these—the silver flow
Of Hero’s tears, the swoon of Imogen
Fair Pastorella in the bandits den,
Are things to brood on with more ardency
*Then the death day of Empires.*

(my emphasis; Keats 1873: 80)

These lines may also be interpreted as a conscious negation of history and withdrawal from it as a source of poetic creation. In the light of such avowed attitudes and given the fact that mythical and legendary climes beyond 'lived' history framed the basis of most of Keats themes, it is tempting to conclude that the world was not "too much with" him. There is a case to be made out for the school of criticism which argues that history and the political facts of day today life, including Empire and overseas trade did not have much to do with Keats' poetics.

However, a total acceptance of this position would amount to giving too much credit altogether to the intentional fallacy. This is surely one of those contexts where we must go beyond what the author *seems* to say on a subject and base our conclusions on more detailed analysis.

Keats' *Collected Letters* provide a good starting point for an examination of his relationship with the East and India in particular. Of course. Keats' letters do not prove to be the kind of treasure trove of references to India that for example, Coleridge’s Note Books do. There are no references to either Indian philosophy or explicit statements regarding the perusal of any Indian work. But we do find that Keats had considered a far more immediate and intimate relationship with India than the abstruse realms of metaphysics and philosophy could provide.
In a letter dated 31 May 1819, (the despondent period following the reviewers savaging of *Endymion*) Keats write: "I have the choice as it were of two poisons—the one is voyaging to and from India, the other is leading a feverous life alone with poetry" (1970: 257). Further letters of 9 June and 15 July of the same year record the idea of going as a surgeon on an India bound ship and the final rejection of the idea because the poet could not "bear to give up my favourite studies" (1970: 269). These letters, apart from a couple of references to Hinduism, Vishnu and elephants form the sum total of Keats' epistolary references to India. But the fact that Keats was seriously considering India related employment does justify us in at least assuming that he was not unaware of the economic and semiotic associations attached to India.

When we examine Keats' poetic corpus from this perspective, we find that India had indeed made her contribution to his muse. *Endymion* with which Keats practically started his poetic career as well as the fragmented 'The Cap and the Bells' which ended it contain references of varied length and significance to India. References to India/Asia can also be found in *Isabella, Hyperion* some of the sonnets and *The Fall of Hyperion*. Besides these, the sonnet 'To the Nile' as well as the doggerel 'Song to Myself help us in figuring out Keat's way of adjusting to the concept of the Other, partly Oriental in its manifestations.

Rana Kabbani in *Imperial Fictions* remarks:

The Orient provided the Romantics with a set of hazy images, a florid landscape through which their heroes could more. Shelley's heroes visit ruins, voyage up the valley of the Nile, pass through Persia and Arabia, climb the Himalayas, arrive at the most solitary valley in Kashmir—illustrating the master theme of the major Romantic poems—the theme of travel.

(1986:30)

This theme is indicated by Keats also in a wistful remark in the 'Sonnet to J.H. Reynolds'

O to arrive each Monday morning from Ind
To land each Tuesday from the rich Levant.

(1973: 367)
The motif is further elaborated in a letter dated 16 December 1818 where **travel** is presented as predominantly an exotic imaginative activity:

My thoughts are very frequently in a foreign country. I live more out of England than in it—the mountains of Tartary are a favourite lounge if I happen to miss the Alleghany ridge or have no whim for Savoy.

(1970:179)

With the exceptions of **Endymion**, **Hyperion** and 'The Cap and the Bells' the use of Indian images in Keats' poetry can be seen largely as casual borrowings from the storehouse of contemporary poetic imagery. In **Isabella** we have references to a body "embalm'd in warm Indian clove" and a maiden who "withers like a palm/cut by an Indian for its juicy balm (Keats 1973: 193). A poignant image in the same poem indicates an awareness of economic ground realities. Discussing the far reaching money grubbing activities of Isabella's brothers, Keats adds:

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath  
And went all naked to the hungry shark  
For them his ears gushed blood.

(1973:182)

There are also a **few** references in other poems to the Lama, to Asian poppy and to missionary Churches in India. These are scattered and isolated instances which add nothing more than a little numerical strength to any sustained study.

The situation is different in **Endymion**, **Hyperion** and 'The Cap and the Bells'. First, however, it is worthwhile to examine Keats sonnet 'To the Nile' as a microcosm of his attitude to the image of the Other provided by imperial exploration. Though the setting is specifically Egyptian, the reference to

Such men ... who worn with toil  
Rest for a space 'twist Cairo and Deccan

(1973: 380)

clearly justify us in bringing the Indian aspect into consideration. Keats rejects the narrow Orientalising which he characterises here as the "ignorance that makes a barren waste of all beyond itself." He extends the acceptance of similarity to the Other represented by the Nile:
... thou dost bedew
Green rushes like our rivers and dost taste
The pleasant sunrise, green isles has thou too
And to the sea as happily dost haste.

(1973:380)

Such a "homogenising transformation" of the other into the same is seen in Keats most sustained references to India also. The other is "dignified" by being divested of its non-human or exotic trappings, but this "dignity" comes at the cost of its identity.

The figure of the "Indian Maid" in Book IV of Endymion is open to various interpretations. In the first place, the maid is in Greece as a result of the Bauhic/Dionysian invasion of India. The legend of Bacchus' invasion, was, as we have seen, obviously of great interest to the Romantic poets. Leask remarks that for Shelley, "Dionysius' conquest represented a civilising mission or synonymously a Hellenising mission against which to set for either positive or negative comparison, Britain’s 'revolutionary' impact on India" (1993: 123).

The imperial motif is present in Keats also as far as the basic idea of conquest goes. There is not the slightest sign however of a civilising mission to be traced. The maid has followed Bacchus back from India, but finds that his promises of freedom from woe were false. She is satiated with the sensuality associated with Bacchus and appeals to Endymion—who by rights is dedicated to the divine Phoebe—for protection. It is precisely at the point where Endymion is most distressed with the shadowy and unobtainable nature of his divine mistress that he hears the maids lament:

Ah, woe is me: that I should fondly part
From my dear native land!
    Ah, foolish maid:
Glad was the hour when with thee, myriads bade
Adieu to Ganges and their pleasant fields

Yet I would have, great Gods! But one short hour
Of native air, let me but die at home.

(Keats 1973: 132)

The narrator rebukes Endymion for his interest in the Maid which is presented as a lapse in faithfulness to Phoebe:
See not her charms! Is Phoebe passionless?
Phoebe is fairer far: O gaze no more.

(1973: 133)

But the maid with "curls of glossy jet" and "lively eyes in swimming search" (133) is presented in such a way as to render Endymion’s "transgression" quite understandable. Despite his dedication to the ideal figure of Phoebe, Endymion falls in love at first sight with the Indian maid also. She is ambiguously addressed as:

... young angel, fairest thief
who stolen hast away the wings wherewith
I was to o'ertop the heavens.

(1973: 134)

It is possible to interpret the role of the Indian maid here as the conventional "seductive Orient" stereotype, with Phoebe as the ideal from which the Indian maid is luring Endymion away. However, the discourse of human/real vs ideal/unreal with which Endymion justifies his passion for the maid complicates the issue:

Thou swan of Ganges, let us no more breathe
This murky phantasm!

(1973: 143)

There never lived a mortal man who bent
His appetite beyond his natural sphere
But starv’d and died. My sweetest Indian, here
Here will I kneel, for thou redeemed hast
My life from too thin breathing: gone and past
Are cloudy phantasms.
... My Indian bliss!
My river lily bud! One human kiss!
One sigh of real breath ....

(1973: 148)

The Indian maid is human and real here, a union with her being 'natural'. Phoebe, the Greek Goddess on the other hand is a visionary ideal, a phantasm which cannot be grasped, an unnatural choice for union. This was a bold position to take (if conscious) at a time when racial discourses were crystallising and representations of successful miscegenations studiously avoided by most contemporaries.

India is definitely a conquered land in the context of Endymion. The paraphernalia is arranged behind the description of Bacchus overwhelming conquest:
The Kings of **Inde** their jewel'd sceptres vail
And from their treasures scatter pearled hail
Great Brahma **from** his mystic heaven groans
And all his priesthood moans
Before young Bacchus' eyewink turning pale.

(1973: 138)

The maid is representatively feminine and submissive, seeking protection, unlike the powerful, protective Phoebe. But a union with the maid is presented as possible, while Phoebe is a "phantasm". The affair takes an unexpected turn with the maid's presence leading Endymion to a self-examination and a final (though temporary) spiritualisation—a most appropriate role for a representative of mystical/spiritual India! Once Endymion achieves this spiritualisation and vows himself to celibacy, the Indian maid undergoes what Leask describes as a "racial transformation into a blonde Greek Goddess" (1993: 125). The process:

At which that dark eyed stranger stood elate
And said in a new voice, but sweet as love
To Endymion's amaze...
And as she spake, into her face there came
Light as reflected from a silver flame
Her long black hair swell'd ampler, in display
Full golden, in her eyes a brighter day
Davvn'd blue and full of love. Aye, he beheld
Phoebe, his passion!

(1973: 156-57)

Apparently, the union with the Goddess was not possible unless the human was thus spiritualised. The Indian maid merges into the Greek Goddess, a fit disguise, a not improper mate. She suffers no actual *loss of dignity*; but no longer retains the distinct identity which was earlier attributed to her.

Concentrating on this transformative aspect, Leask is abruptly dismissive of Keats' use of India: "For Keats' poem unlike Shelley's Orientalism is primarily a question of style, an imperial heraldry uncomplicated by the anxiety of Empire. India is merely an appendage to classical Greece; the exotic imagery on a Corinthian column (Leask 1993: 125). This is too swift a judgement. The choice of India as the locale for a
figure which combined both allure and an impulse to "spiritualisation" cannot be dismissed as incidental or insignificant.

Leask himself has suggested that when "the other strikes fear into the heart of metropolitan culture, therapeutical or assimilative agencies struggle to restore homeostasis, the healthful ease of the same" (1993: 8). The literal inch-by-inch transformation of the Indian stranger into the traditional Goddess figure deserves to be seriously considered as a homeostatic transformation, one of Leask's assimilative devices.

In *Hyperion* Asia is one among the fallen Titans. She is like the others insofar as she too is a Titan at present dispossessed by the Olympians. She is however, unlike them in that while they bewail their fate, she looks ahead with a prophetic vision to future glory:

... Nearest him  
Asia, born of most enormous Caf  
... ... ... ... ...  
More thought than woe was in her dusky face  
For she was prophecying of her glory;  
And in her wide imagination stood  
Palm shaded temples and high rival fanes  
By Oxus or in Ganges sacred isles.  
Even as Hope upon her anchor leans  
So leant she, not so fair, upon a tusk  
Shed from the broadest of her elephants

(1973:231)

There is distinction here; Asia's "dusky face" and the fact that she is "not so fair" as Hope are mentioned. But there is also integration. The temples of Oxus and Ganges are traced back to a Titanic ancestor, sharing their origins with relics of classical antiquity. The anxiety of India's past stretching beyond that of Empire is overcome by accommodating Asia into a common mythical heritage. Asia is accepted, *with dignity*, as one, indeed a prominent one among Titans like Saturn and Hyperion. But this acceptance is at the cost of her distinct identity as a presence extrinsic to Europe's classical past. The "disturbing" Orient is transformed into the same for Europe.
A vignette from "The Cap and the Bells"; Keats' final verse production (in the mock heroic style) encapsulates this transformational tendency successfully. The Indian girl in this context is literally a changeling. The Fairy Emperor, Elfinan is in love with a human female, Bertha. He is compelled to marry a fairy princess, but plans to be with Bertha somehow. For this, he seeks the help of an old soothsayer called Hum, who informs him that the improbably fair haired Bertha is actually a changeling of Indian birth:

Good! Good! Cried Hum, I've known her from a child.  
She is a changeling of my management  
She was born at midnight on an Indian wild;  
Her mother's screams with the striped tiger's blent  
While the torch bearing slaves a halloo sent  
Into the jungle; and her palanquin  
Rested amidst the deserts dreariment  
Shook with her agony, till fair were seen  
The little Bertha's eyes opened on the stars serene

(1973: 327)

The transformational process is complete here. The Indian girl born in such stereotypically Oriental circumstances is an unsuspected changeling, a full human being, a desirable and fit mate for the Fairy King.

Differences are elided in Keats' transformations of the Oriental Other into the Same. Of course, it is possible to connect this with the anxiety of Empire, with the assimilationist processes of the Indologists, with what Leask calls the "narcissistic discovery of the Same" (1993: 126).

But there are differences to be noted between the homogenisations of Keats and Shelley, or Keats and Jones for that matter. In the first place, anxiety is not a pervasive issue, so far as we can judge, in Keats' conception of the Other. Keats does not seem to be remarkably disturbed. Is this due to a lack of awareness? Indifference? Absorption in a mythical universe? These questions are of course speculative. But the fact does remain that anxiety if extant, is considerably muted in Keats. So the bizarre, frenetic necessity for homogenisation which spurs Shelley does not drive Keats, his transformations are more in keeping with poetic demands and with a more assured (though unproblematised) acceptance of similarity.
More important, for better or worse, Keats was not a reformist. That also meant that he was not a civilisation spreader—he obviously was quite content to take the Orient poetically, grants its difference, underline his concept of essential oneness and let the matter rest. His transformations are based on the conception of oneness, pre-existent, not to be created by the reforms of imperialism which had to negotiate between the Scylla and Charybdis of radicalism and domination. We may accuse Keats of political apathy, of indifference, but we have to admit the relative lack of "ambivalence" in its overburdened, over valorised, over positivised sense. Empire for Blake in his universal condemnation of System is more, theoretically (if less, materially) than what actually is—but he is consistent in condemnation of 'his' Empire; free from the bad faith which pursues other radical attempts fated to end in equivocation. At perhaps the opposite end of the spectrum, with perhaps considerable naivete, Keats maintains the same consistency in an openness towards oneness which is comparatively untouched by the planned machinations of assimilation. This is not meant to valorise Blake or Keats—it is perhaps matter for regret that only in a symbolic universe or in a stance of poetic withdrawal can there be some freedom from the insistent, pervasive, insinuating, inculpating bad faith of Imperialism. The idea is only to point out the possibility of "different" positions, which if in one sense they signal a withdrawal from the arena, in another perhaps indicate valuable "freedom" for the imagination without the suspect adjunct of ambivalence.

To conclude, I would wish to indicate the possibility that there may be a kernel of awareness in the "naive" doggerel "Song to Myself" by Keats:

There was a naughty boy
And a naughty boy was he
He ran away to Scotland
The people there to see.
Then he found
That the ground
Was as hard
That a yard
Was as long
That a song
Was as merry
That a cherry
Was as red
That lead
Was as weighty
That four score
Was as Eighty
That a door
Was as wooden
As in England
So he stood in his shoes
*And he wondered*
*He wondered*
He stood in His
Shoes and *he wondered.*

(my emphasis; 1973: 258)

To link "theory" to "naivete", perhaps, just perhaps "the discovery of wonder that is latent in our own practices, a wonder that has become flattened by familiarity" could lead to the "realization that what is most unattainably marvellous, most desirable, is what you almost already have, what you could have—if you could only strip away the banality and corruption of the *everyday*—at home" and lead to the ownership "by virtue of a refusal of possession, as if *wonder could be prolonged* into an ebb and flow of delight" (my emphasis; Greenblatt 1991: 25).